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The Perennial Quest: Working Towards Equitable Assessment With Student-Centric Learning Contracts

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THE PERENNIAL QUEST: WORKING TOWARDS EQUITABLE ASSESSMENT WITH

STUDENT-CENTRIC LEARNING CONTRACTS

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This dissertation examines the role of writing assessment in college composition courses, and how issues including learning aversion, access to technology, and white-language supremacy can harm our assessment practices and pedagogy. Writing assessment is one of the most important aspects of teaching and is a significant factor in shaping students' attitudes about their abilities as writers. While writing assessment is of tremendous importance, effectively and equitably assessing student writing can be difficult, especially when teaching diverse student populations. In an effort improve the quality of writing assessment, this dissertation focused on developing Student-Centric Learning Contracts (SCLCs) as a more effective alternative to conventional forms of assessment. SCLCs are a hybrid of labor and learning contracts, that aim to provide students with increased agency in the assessment process. In SCLCs, students and instructors work collaboratively to outline what a student wants to learn, how they will learn it, and what kinds of language will help them reach their audience.

KEYWORDS: writing assessment, contract grading, anti-racism, expansive learning, labor contracts, learning contracts

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"The journey begins with curiosity. And evolves into soul-felt questions. On the stones that we walk, and choose to make our path. Sometimes never knowing – other times, knowing too much"

-Chuck Schuldiner

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

For composition instructors assessing student writing is a critical component of effective pedagogy as everything we do in the classroom[1] will ultimately end with our assessment of student writing. All of this is done in an effort to help students learn new composition techniques so they can grow as writers and meet the challenges they will face in academia and beyond. Asao Inoue (2015) underscores the intersection of assessment and pedagogy when he notes that "thinking through one's assessment comes before (or at least simultaneously with) thinking through one's pedagogy and curriculum," (p. 283) but while we would like to assume that our lessons and assessment practices intuitively work together to facilitate learning, that is not always the case.

While writing assessment is an important part of pedagogy, the history of the field is littered with problematic practices that persist to this day. Writing assessment can be a significant contributor to learning aversion and student apathy (Booth, 1963; Taylor, 1971; Brooke, 1987; Litterio, 2016). Writing assessment can punish students that lack access to or experience with technology (Losh, 2009; Daer & Potts, 2014; Anderson and Perrin, 2018; Gierdowski, 2020). Finally, writing assessment can act as a tool of oppression, marginalizing voices while reaffirming racist language ideologies (Anson 2012; Behm & Miller, 2012; Inoue 2015, 2019; Kendi, 2019; Wood, 2019). These pervasive problems can not only sabotage our writing courses, but also inflict untold damage on our students, causing them to question their abilities, as well as the value of their own languages and life experiences. These complex problems eschew simple solutions, but it is important to take the difficult steps necessary to improve writing assessment practices. As such, this dissertation argues for a change in the way we assess student writing. Specifically, I will advocate for the use of a new form of contract grading – student-centric learning contracts (SCLCs).

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[1] Including but not limited to lessons we teach, units we design, and assignments we create.

In this introduction I will first flesh out the foundation of my project by outlining the exigency and research questions at the heart of my work. After contextualizing this project, I will then define they key terms and concepts central to my dissertation. Finally, this introduction will conclude with abstracts of the forthcoming chapters of this dissertation.

Exigency and Research Questions

The topic of this dissertation is one of immense importance to me. As an academic I identify first and foremost as a teacher. My academic career started as an adjunct, where teaching anywhere from five to seven writing-intensive classes, with upwards of 150 students, at three different institutions was the norm. While this may seem excessive, this grueling schedule is shared by many adjunct and non-tenure track instructors. Having such a heavy teaching load helped shaped my priorities as an educator and a researcher. Given my schedule my primary, and often only concern was my teaching. What was I doing to teach my students? What was I doing to help them learn over a semester? What could I do to better facilitate learning? This experience compelled me to focus on pragmatic projects that can help instructors improve the day-to-day aspects of teaching at the classroom level. As such, the primary question driving my dissertation is this: What can we do to help our students learn? Learning is the most important aspect of any class, and when I say learning I do not mean just learning the material necessary for a student to pass a course, but learning about their writing process, and learning how they can apply these skills throughout their lives. With these questions in mind my dissertation examines how instructors can better facilitate learning through writing assessment.

Exigency

In addition to being perhaps the most labor-intensive part of teaching, writing assessment is also one of the most significant factors in shaping students' attitudes about their own abilities as writers. Reading and responding to students with meaningful commentary takes considerable time,

but all this effort may not necessarily lead to positive outcomes for students or learning. This is evident in the issues of learning aversion, access to technology, and racist language ideologies mentioned in the introduction[2]. These pervasive problems can sabotage our writing courses and prevent students from learning the valuable lessons they need to find success both inside and out of our classrooms. These problems, and the inequality they can create, are the driving focus of this project. Through discussing, crafting, and teaching with SCLCs I worked to build a new form of assessment, one that deliberately takes up anti-racist and social justice approaches to facilitate learning, and address some of the major problems created by writing assessment practices.

In addition to working towards a more equitable and accessible form of writing assessment, there is also a general need for more scholarship on assessment and grading contracts. As Inoue (2015) states the "relatively few articles that were published on grading contracts in college classrooms come mostly in the 1970s, '90s, and early 2000s, sprinkled here and there" (p. 65). Though Inoue's work has sparked revived interest in contract grading, additional scholarship is still necessary for myriad reasons. Inoue has started important conversations, and inspired others to research the role of race and writing assessment, but grading contracts also offer fertile ground to examine learning aversion, student motivation, and the intersection of technology, new media, and writing assessment.

Inoue (2015) is not alone in his call for additional research on contract grading. While there is a need for new scholarship focused on the theoretical applications of assessment, we must also study how contract grading works in praxis. This need is outlined by Cowan (2020) as she notes that the field of writing assessment

> is ready for more empirical inquiry into the efficacy of grading contracts, but student-
> centered studies are often complicated by strict institutional review board (IRB) policies that

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[2] These issues will be more fully fleshed out in the literature review found in chapter 2.

limit research on university students. Interinstitutional cooperation may be necessary to take grading contract research to another level in a way that will not jeopardize students' classroom experience or violate IRB policy, (n.p.).

This project will, in part, answer these calls. A majority of the scholarship available on contract grading tends to gloss over integrating and discussing contracts with students (Fedeli, Giampaolo, & Coryell, 2013; Frank & Scharff, 2013; Medina & Walker, 2018; Wood, 2019). Scholarship on contract grading needs to devote more time and care to the practice of introducing and discussing contracts, how they work, and students' role in said contracts. Students are accustomed to more conventional forms of assessment, where an instructor outlines how they will be assessed without any input from the students. Contract grading, and its deviation from conventional assessment, can be a shocking experience for students, and more work needs to be done to address how to effectively introduce and integrate contract grading into writing courses. My dissertation chapters[3] work to address these issues and provide much needed research on the praxis of using contracts.

Key Terms

Now that I have outlined the exigency and goals of this dissertation, I will shift the attention of this introduction to defining and outlining key terms that will be used in this project. In this section I will define writing, learning, expansive learning, and conventional assessment.

Writing

To begin my definitions, I first want to highlight writing. This project examines the ways we assess student writing, but what is writing, and what does writing look like? Writing is the act of communicating ideas with an audience. Our exigencies or methods for communication are infinite, and this is increasingly obvious with the influx of new technologies and tools available for

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[3] Chapters 5 and 6 are explicitly focused on building and teaching with SCLC.

communication. We can no longer view writing in the narrow purview of handwritten or typed documents making use of alpha-numeric characters. While these kinds of documents are still valuable, and unequivocally examples of writing, there are many other ways to communicate with an audience. Writing is a form of communication, and I contend that any act where we communicate ideas with an audience constitutes writing. Projects such as podcasts, where we communicate through audio, or videos where we use combinations of images and audio are writing. Though these digital examples may look quite different from a more conventional Word document, they are unequivocally acts of writing as they aim to communicate ideas with an audience.

Expanding the definition of writing to include multimodal and digital projects is necessary, as these kinds of projects are no longer a niche facet of our pedagogy, rather they represent a fundamental skill our students will need to find success in the modern world (Losh, 2009; Hawisher & Selfe, 2011; Lutkewitte, 2014; Thibaut & Curwood, 2018; Khadka & Lee 2019). Ferruci & DeRosa (2019) argue for the necessity of multimodal and digital writing as they content that "students are better prepared to address complex rhetorical situations when they make use of multiple modes and their affordances" (p. 201). Modern exigencies often go beyond the capabilities of a word processor, as students will be expected to have the ability to compose with multiple modes and media. These new approaches to composition are critical for our students' success, and we cannot ignore their influence on our pedagogy or our assessment practices.

Learning

A focal point of this project is that learning is a critical component of any successful course, but learning is an abstract concept that will first need defining. To help conceptualize learning Engstrom (2001), Ambrose et al. (2010), and Berkley University of California (2020) provide useful definitions of learning that share some common traits. First, learning is not a singular act, but a process that occurs over time. Learning is also a human endeavor, situated in the real world, building

on our life experiences, while helping us better understand the world around us. Learning must also be based in pragmatic contexts so students can see the practical value of what they are trying to learn. Finally, learning changes the way we look at the world; when we learn we not only gain new information, but new perspectives on reality.

Learning allows us to more effectively articulate questions, ideas, and solutions with those around us. Learning is something deeper than the mechanical mastery of using a comma, memorizing births and deaths, PowerPoint, or Photoshop. While mechanical learning has value, our classes should strive for something deeper – what is more important is why. Why are we using commas? Why are we animating slides? Why are we communicating with a website? As instructors we should aim for a higher, more dynamic form of learning: expansive learning.

Expansive Learning

Engstrom & Sannino (2010) define expansive learning as "learning in which the learners are involved in constructing and implementing a radically new, wider and more complex object and concept for their activity" (p. 2). This definition builds off of the previous discussion of learning as it again conceptualizes learning as a human activity that aims for deeper understanding of what and why we are learning. Learning occurs by exploring and experimenting with the affordances and limitations created by our world, our audience, our technologies, and our exigences. Expansive learning is ideal for situations where people attempt to understand something new, something that is not yet clearly defined.

In an expansive learning environment, learners do not take a passive role in learning, instead, they are active and engaged in learning something that has direct application to their lives. As Engstrom and Sannino (2010) note, the "theory of expansive learning cannot be reduced to the learning of abstract organizations without concrete human subjects" (p. 6). Expansive learning isn't

focused on applying abstract templates to theoretical situations, rather it is focused on creating new knowledge and new understanding of real-world experiences.

For example, if students are learning to compose in a new medium, say websites for a marketing class, expansive learning would task them with questioning what a good web site looks like. Students might investigate this further and make use of techniques such as rhetorical genre studies (RGS)[4] to examine a range of websites to begin to formulate ideas of what effective web design looks like. This RGS approach will help them to create their own models for understanding new genres. After creating their models, students would then analyze the effectiveness of their site. After completing this cycle of learning, students would then reflect on what they have learned, and start again with a new foundation of knowledge. This process allows for students to constantly build, rebuild, and expand on what they know. As I reference learning throughout this project, this is the definition and the kind of learning that I will be advocating for throughout my dissertation.

Conventional Assessment

In this project I argue that conventional approaches to assessment are ineffective, and often harmful to students' ability to learn. However, conventional assessment, much like learning, can be a somewhat nebulous term that needs to be fleshed out. When I discuss conventional assessment, I am referring to practices where students are provided summative assessment on a singular artifact due at the end of a unit. The assessment is based on criteria created entirely by an instructor, and often rewards students for being academically literate. Being academically literate refers to a diverse set of *skills* such as the ability to compile sources, regurgitate multiple sources in a book report fashion, or simply mimic an existing master model (Fernando, 2018); instructors often assess their students on their ability to achieve these tasks, tasks that only scratch the surface of effective

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[4] The importance of RGS will be examined in more detail in chapter 5.

researching and writing. With this kind of assessment there is a right way to complete a project, similar to first-wave writing assessment and its focus on objective testing (Yancey, 1999).

Conventional assessment brings with it many problems that can cause harm to our students and our pedagogy. Cowan (2020) outlines some of the major issues caused by conventional assessment as she notes that this form of assessment

tends to incentivize the least productive kinds of work—bare-minimum, by-the-book writing—and discourage experimentation, increase anxiety, and demotivate writers (Kohn, 2013; Lederman & Warwick, 2018; Tchudi, 1997). This demotivating effect is particularly troublesome for students who make significant progress but still do not meet the White academic standard (Blackstock & Norris Exton, 2014; Massa, 1997). Moreover, traditional grading can unfairly penalize students from non-dominant discourse communities (Inoue, 2012a; Poe & Inoue, 2016) and reinforce teacher-student power dynamics that discourage creativity and questioning (Elbow, 1983; Potts, 2010; Rosenfeld, 2014) (n.p.).

Elbow & Belanoff (2009) continue this theme by noting conventional assessment sends "the wrong message about the writing process" (p. 97). Furthermore, Brooke (1987) notes that students facing conventional assessment "just go along with the teacher's advice" (p. 255) and in doing so "they don't do their own rhetorical thinking…" and implement instructor feedback without considering its merits. This kind of thinking is problematic for many reasons. Under these circumstances, conventional assessment can limit the kind of learning that can take place. Instructors create a master model, and students do their best to recreate said model. This can work to eliminate deeper rhetorical thinking and limit the potential for expansive learning.

Conclusion and Chapter Abstracts

Throughout this introduction I have outlined my exigency and key terms. As this project continues each of my chapters will further develop and discuss how SCLCs can be used in writing

courses to combat problems of learning aversion, access to technology, and white language supremacy while improving the quality of writing assessment for students. The final section of this introduction will provide a brief abstract of these forthcoming chapters.

Chapter II: Literature Review

This second chapter of this dissertation will take the form of a literature review. In this chapter I will analyze the available scholarship on several critical issues facing writing assessment. These issues including learning aversion, access to technology, and white language supremacy. Throughout this chapter I will examine how these issues manifest in writing courses and discuss how and why these issues are problematic to writing pedagogy. After providing details on the problems facing writing assessment, this chapter will shift focus and discuss SCLCs. These sections will provide an overview on what SCLCs are, what theory went in to building the initial version of these contracts, and how they can be useful tools to help ameliorate some of the problems present in modern writing assessment.

Chapter III: Methodology

The third chapter of my dissertation will focus on an institutional review board (IRB) approved research study designed to evaluate the efficacy of SCLCs. In this chapter I will discuss the research questions, methodological themes, and data collection process I used to collected data from two sections of English 145.13 – Writing in Business and Government Organizations. In this chapter I will provide a nuanced discussion of how the methodological themes of feminism, social justice, and sociocultural theory have informed the design of my research, and data collection process.

Chapter IV: Data Analysis

Conducting, coding, sorting, and analyzing research is a complex task that requires thorough consideration on behalf of the researcher. For my project, I ended up collecting hundreds of pieces

of unique data from students across my two sections of English 145.13. As there were hundreds of pages worth of data to analyze, I utilized open and a priori coding techniques to code the work I collected for this project. Throughout this chapter I will discuss my data, my coding strategies, and how my coding strategies worked to help me make sense of the data I collected.

Chapter V: Praxis

An important aspect of my methodology is focused on putting work into practice. As such, chapter 5 will focus on praxis. The data collected and analyzed from chapters 3 and 4 provided insight on how students viewed SCLCs. While student responses showed a lot of potential for SCLCs, their responses were not universally positive. In this chapter I will discuss some of the structural problems with my initial SCLC course and discuss the steps I am taking to correct these issues in future iterations of SCLC courses. In this chapter I will cover how I revised my learning goals and added a new pre-unit to improve the quality of SCLC courses. In addition to these structural changes, I will also discuss new pedagogical straggles including utilizing flipped classroom design and taking a more holistic approach to assessing student work in SCLC courses.

Chapter VI: Praxis

Throughout chapter 6 I will continue the practical themes introduced in chapter 5. Chapter 6 will provide advice on how to build key course documents including course syllabi. As SCLCs are a new approach to writing assessment it is important for our syllabi to actively work to help students understand how these contracts function, and what will be expected of them throughout a semester. In addition to discussing some strategies for building an effective syllabus this chapter will also examine the structure of the actual contract used for SCLC courses. These course documents can be easy to overlook in the course-building process but can be incredibly useful for effective SCLC instruction.

CHAPTER II: THE PROBLEMS WITH ASSESSMENT

To improve the quality of writing assessment it is first necessary to understand the complex problems facing the field. Taking the time to build a solid theoretical foundation is necessary for any research endeavor and the second chapter of this dissertation will be dedicated to an in-depth review of the literature on three of the major problems created by conventional writing assessment: learning aversion, access to technology, and white language supremacy. While these are far from the only issues present in writing assessment, the existing literature shows them as a significant barrier to learning, effective pedagogy, and equity in the classroom. As student-centric learning contracts (SCLCs) are designed to help facilitate learning, it is important to thoroughly understanding these issues before attempting to address them. After examining these issues, I will then provide an overview of SCLCs, the theories used to build my initial version of SCLCs, and discuss how SCLCs can be used to improve the quality of writing assessment for students.

Learning Aversion

The first major issue that can be created by conventional assessment is learning aversion. Learning aversion occurs when a student does not need to actively learn or engage in expansive learning to earn high marks in class. Though there are many potential causes for learning aversion, this problem is often created when learning is not valued by our assessment criteria. When our assessment instead focuses on students completing copious amounts of mindless busy work[5], or recreating *perfect* master models, it will be hard for students to learn anything beyond the mechanical process needed to recreate these models. Learning aversion is a serious issue as it stands in direct

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[5] Busy work is described by Fowlin (2021) as assignments "where students perceive that assigned learning activities or assessments are not meaningfully contributing to their learning" (n.p.). These are assignments that fail to connect to pertinent learning goals or have no direct correlation to major projects students are working on. For example, having students complete smaller versions of assignments they've already completed, or assigning quizzes on readings unrelated to their current projects are some examples of what may be perceived as busy work.

contrast to expansive learning. Engstrom (2001) notes that: "the object of expansive learning activity is the entire activity system in which the learners are engaged, (p. 139)" and expansive learning needs engagement. With learning aversion, we see diminished engagement on the part of students. When assessment methods fail to reward learning students may find it more difficulty to engage with course material, learn new skills, or enhance skills they already possess. While conventional assessment is far from the only pedagogical practice to cause learning aversion, it does have significant potential to create situations where learning aversion can thrive.

The desire to earn a high grade above all else can cause tremendous harm to our students and their work. This can be a problem with conventional assessment in general, as students are worried about reaching a standard, and earning points based on matching criteria or master models provided by instructors. Danielewicz & Elbow (2009) find that conventional assessment can fuel learning aversion as students will just use the advice given by instructors instead of doing "their own rhetorical thinking…" (p. 255). Inoue (2012) found similar themes as he notes that the "presence and expectation of grades tend to construct an ill-fitting kind of motivation for the writing classroom, one based on extrinsic rewards that keep students from learning" (p. 79).

Learning aversion can be a dangerous obstacle to an effective pedagogy, as students ultimately want to earn high marks above all else. If learning, or trying new approaches could put their grade at risk why would students attempt to learn? Students cannot be blamed for this mentality either as McDonald (1997) notes that, "grades are everything [to our students]: They can mean scholarships, family financial supports, self-esteem, loans, or grants" (p. 213). This is very much the case, and as college continues to become prohibitively expensive it creates more and more pressure on students to earn high grades at all costs[6]. While we may like to focus on the intrinsic

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[6] This holds true for me personally. I received a Pell Grant in my final year of undergraduate work, and my primary concern was earning high grades to keep said grant.

benefits of our classes, students are ultimately motivated by earning high grades because that is what their economic exigency demands of them.

Learning aversion is not a new phenomenon as scholars have been grappling with this problem for well over a century. For example, in Taylor's 1971 piece he notes that over the past "70 years, criticism of grades have taken many different forms" (p. 311) including the fact that "Grades have…been accused of causing anti-intellectual motivation and disabling anxiety in students." This is not an isolated example either as these sentiments are evident in the work of O'Hagan (1997) as well. O'Hagan (1997) notes that studies from as early as 1912 questioned the validity of conventional assessment; she continues by noting that "Letter and number grading affects student writing by taking away a student's independence and creativity," (p. 8) showing the negative impact grades can have on students, their creativity, and their ability to learn. While these scholars discuss the impact of assessment on learning in a very broad perspective, there are copious examples of instructors discussing these issues at the classroom level as well.

An early example of assessment creating learning aversion can be found in Wayne Booth's (1963) speech at the Conference on College Composition and Communication. In this speech Booth (1963) shared an anecdote where a student discovered he did not need to actually learn anything to earn an A. As Booth (1963) says: "A student once said to me, complaining about a colleague 'I soon learned that all I had to do to get an A was imitate [James] Thurber,'" (p. 144) and here we have a prime example of learning aversion and the anti-intellectualism that grading can create. The student in question realizes that all he had to do was imitate the writing style favored by his instructor, and he would earn the highest marks without learning anything of value. Why would the student challenge themselves in this situation? What would they have to gain by trying something new, experimenting with genre, or trying a unique approach? There is no benefit to taking risks in this

situation, as the student in question knows he can easily earn an A, so why would there be any

motivation to do anything else?

In this situation we can see how assessment hinders learning, as learning has no utility in this

environment. The assessment criteria set by an instructor, and their favorability towards the writing

style of James Thurber, prevents learning from taking place. We have to ask, if our assessment

creates this kind of thinking, what kind of value does it have? If imitating the favored writing style of

a professor is all a student learns, what value does that have across the curriculum? What value does

that have outside of academia, and in the professional world? In this situation there is no benefit for

the student to try to learn or to experiment with different styles. Grades are important, and any

deviation from this style will only result in lower grades for the student, so why take any risks?

While this may seem like an extreme or isolated example of learning aversion limited to a

singular, idiosyncratic professor, there are many more examples to substantiate this phenomenon.

Two decades after Booth's (1963) speech we can turn to Meikle (1983), who echoes the same

problems almost verbatim. Meikle (1983) found that students primarily learn what will earn them an

A and little else. O'Hagan (1997) succinctly summarizes Meikle's (1983) findings and notes that

"According to Robert Meikle, grades affect the process of writing because students want to find out

what is important to the teacher so they can be rewarded with a good grade" (p. 8). Here, the

situation is a bit more explicit, as students are actively trying to figure out what style of writing will

earn them an A, but the end result is the same, as there is no motivation or reason for students to

engage in expansive learning. Students realize that there are specific stylistic steps they can take to

earn an A, and that becomes their goal. In these situations, students are learning, but learning in a

very narrow sense. They are learning what they need to do to appease an instructor, to earn a high

grade, to find success in the confines of a specific course. While this learning has value in the

moment, it is hard to translate this kind learning to other situations across the curriculum, and in the professional world.

While the 60s and the 80s are decades ago, this problem persists, and scholars are still fighting issues of learning aversion created by conventional assessment. In their classes Pulfrey, et al. (2011) found that "the anticipation of a grade for an activity increases pre-task performance-avoidance goals when compared with nongraded comment-based assessment…this result indicates that performance-avoidance goals are a result of graded assessment (p. 690)." Litterio (2016) shares these fears as she found that grading "becomes a deterrent to understanding concepts, taking risks with writing, or challenging oneself in the classroom," (n.p.) and that grading creates the mentality of "'I just want an A,'" which was the root problem of the previously discussed anecdotes (Booth, 1963; Taylor, 1971; Meikle, 1983; O'Hagan, 1997). While our lesson plans, activities, and assignments may start with the best intentions, it is easy for our them to betray the process of learning through our assessment practices.

While the evidence of learning aversion may seem overly anecdotal, there is data to corroborate these anecdotes. For example, while researching the effects of grading in 130 classes, Stan (2012) found that students:

> learn *for grades* (26% of subjects) and because they *must* (35%); they also learn because they
> come to school (6%)…these three categories of responses (67%) can be analyzed together
> because all three show significant uncertainties of students in relation to learning goals, (p.
> 1999).

The attitude of viewing writing as merely a transaction is a problematic feature created by learning aversion. In addition to Stan (2012), Melzer (2012) collected more than 2000 unique assignments from 400 courses across the curriculum. Melzer (2012) found that that 82% of students perceive their writing existing under the pretense of "Student to Examiner, 64%", or "Student to Instructor,

18%" (p. 134). This can be problematic in some contexts, as it can be difficult to engage in meaningful writing and learning when students see their only writing goal is to appease their instructor. The aforementioned statistics reflect the anecdotal evidence provided by Booth (1963), Taylor (1971), Meikle (1983), Pulfrey et al. (2011), Litterio (2016) and others. These examples showcase the dangers of learning aversion, and how students often view learning as more of a transaction or an inconvenience rather than something to be valued.

Conventional assessment and an overemphasis on final deliverables can fail to facilitate learning. Engstrom (2001) states we should always ask "Why do [people] learn, what makes them make the effort?" (p. 133), and students are asking themselves these same questions when they look at assignments, and decide what, if anything, they need to learn to earn a desired grade. Conventional assessment, or any assessment methods that focus on final products, are detrimental to learning, teaching, and pedagogy.

While grades, and the pursuit of grades above all else, can be a major aspect of learning aversion it is far from the only factor. Access, or lack of access to technology, can also promote learning aversion and cause students to fall into similar traps that can sabotage our best pedagogical efforts. If students are unable to access the tools necessary to effectively complete their work this can leave them feeling excluded, and demoralized about their chances for success. In the next section I will discuss access to technology, and how create problems with our assessment methods.

Access to Technology

Access to technology is a complex issue, so as I discuss access throughout this section, I am not just referring to physically having access to various tools and technology, but the space, place, and ability to make effective use of said technology. For example, students may have access to all kinds of technology on a smart phone, but a 6" screen is not an idea tool for reading and annotating a 20-page chapter on democratic socialism, writing a 10-page story for a creative writing class,

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designing a flyer for a marketing course, recording and editing a podcast for a composition course, or countless other assignments. Yes, in these cases many students do *nominally* have access to technology, but access is more than that, as students need to be able to access and use these tools effectively. Much in the same way a bike may technically be a form of transportation, but a bike is no substitute for an airplane or a ship if your goal is to travel from Chicago, Illinois to Dublin, Ireland.

Access to technology is an essential prerequisite to effective teaching as multimodal and digital projects are no longer a niche facet of our pedagogy, rather they represent a fundamental skill our students will need to find success in the modern world. Barriers to access must be addressed, as a lack of access can put students at a disadvantage before learning even has a chance to begin. Elizabeth Losh (2009) highlights the necessity of multimodal and digital composition as she notes that "basic digital rhetorical competence using mobile telephones and personal computers equipped with proprietary software has become critical to our increasingly globalized and technologically mediated society," (p. 64) and though this quote is over a decade old, it is still relevant to the field in the 2020s as the list of scholars discussing the importance of technological efficacy grows (Archer, 2006; Jones, 2010; Ewing, 2013; Lutkewitte, 2014; Khadka and Lee, 2019; Wyosocki, 2019). These scholars all note that the future success of our students is dependent on understanding digital and multimodal approaches to communication, so our assessment methods need to take access into consideration as we build our courses and assessment plans. Modern exigencies often go beyond the capabilities of a word processor, as students will be expected to have the ability to compose with multiple modes and media. These new approaches to composition are critical for our students' success, and we cannot allow technology to act as a gatekeeper to learning.

Though technology may appear to be everywhere, that is simply not the case as there are substantial gaps to access. When discussing the implications of technology and our students Daer &

Potts (2014) note that while "it might be true that younger students never knew a time without the Internet, but we cannot assume that they have equal access to it, consistent participation with it, or homogeneous experiences as a result of exposure to it" (p. 24). Though the years that have passed since this piece's publication is seemingly equivalent to several technologically lifetimes, Daer & Potts' (2014) words hold true to this day. Issues of access are paramount and pervasive in nearly every age group and community we see in our classrooms.

Access by the Numbers

Technology, and access to technology is an integral part of our lives, and a large majority of Americans are privileged enough to have access to technology, but access is far from universal. Teaching at Illinois State University, I was lucky to be placed in some of the few classrooms on campus equipped with computers for student use. While this is a benefit, there are still many students that may not have access outside of the classroom. State Educational Technology Directors Association (SEDTA) (2019) found that 17% of all teenagers did not have reliable access to a device, and Gierdowski (2020) found that nearly 10% of college students lack access to laptop to complete their schoolwork. Additionally, Pew Research Group (2021) found that 28% of U.S. adults aged 18-29 are smartphone dependent, meaning they have access to a smartphone, but do not have internet access at home. While access through a smartphone is better than the alternative, smartphones are far from ideal tools for completing difficult projects, or classes that are entirely online.

In addition to access to devices, it is important to also consider access to the internet. Though there any many kinds of technology, both hardware and software, an internet connection is important because this form of technology can allow us to access nearly anything. While in the past access to software like Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and a host of other platforms were necessary

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for success, the internet offers us a chance to use free[7] alternatives such as Google Docs, Slides, Prezi, and many other applications that now only require internet access and an email for use. Access to the internet, and the tools it can provide are now almost a necessity for student success, and according to the Federal Communications Committee's (FCC) 2021 Broadband Deployment Report 95.6% of all US households have the option to acquire high-speed broadband internet[8]. In addition to the majority of houses having the option to have internet, Pew (2021) found that a large majority of Americans, 77%, do indeed have access to high-speed broadband internet at home; this number has risen steadily over the past 20 years. While this may seem like a boon for access, digging deeper into the numbers shows some troubling trends especially for marginalized students.

While the aforementioned statistics may create the idea that access to technology is ubiquitous, there are still substantial gaps that required our attention. These gaps are most prevalent with marginalized students as poor, rural, and BIPOC populations lag behind in terms of access. It is important to note that access is a privilege, and a privilege that often comes with access to capital. Looking at access through the lens of economics it would come as no surprise that an increase in income correlates to increased access. This is evident as 92% of households that earn over $75,000 a year have internet access, which stands in stark contrast to the mere 57% for homes that earn fewer than $30,000 a year (Pew, 2021).

In addition to economics, living in rural areas also brings with it challenges to access. Revisiting the FEC's 2021 report, the organization finds that 98.8% of urban areas have the necessary infrastructure to support access to high-speed internet; while a gap of 1.2% seems negligible, it again illustrates the perils of assuming universal access. The technological gap grows

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[7] Free in the sense that users do not directly pay for these programs. How *free* this actually is, is a question outside of the scope of this project.

[8] The FEC notes that "fixed terrestrial broadband at speeds of 25/3 Mbps, [are] the Commission's current benchmark for fixed advanced telecommunications capability" (p. 19).

more pronounced when we examine rural communities, as that number dips significantly to 82.7%. Rural areas, however, are not the hardest hit community, as tribal lands come in at 79.9%.

In addition to the economic and urban/rural divide, we must also direct our attention to issues of access for students of color, as they can come into our first-year composition courses without sufficient exposure and access to technology (Banks, 2006; Anderson & Perrin, 2018). By making technological assumptions we can easily fall into traps that subconsciously uphold problematic teaching practices that reward students simply for coming from a privileged background that provided access throughout their lives. Our assessment methods need to account for issues of technological access, because if students lack consistent and easy access to tools and technology, how can they be expected to learn? According to PEW (2021), whereas 80% of White adults have access, this rate drops significantly for Black (71%) and Hispanic (65%) populations. These statistics are important to keep in mind, as even in the most ideal situations a significant number of students will come into our classrooms with difficulty accessing technology.

Finally, perhaps the most shocking statistic is seen in age. Though the idea of a *digital native* is a fallacy, there can still be a lingering desire to assume that younger generations use and consume technology at a higher rate, but that is not always the case. Access for people aged 18-29 actually fell from 77% in 2019 to 70% in 2021 (Pew, 2021); this was the only age group polled to see their access decrease.

These technological gaps can be particularly dangerous if our assignments and assessment practices mistakenly assume that there is universal access, or that all students have homogenous experiences or access to technology. A sizable number of our students, especially rural students (SEDTA, 2019) and students of color (Banks, 2006; Anderson & Perrin, 2018; FEC, 2021; Pew, 2021), come into our courses without sufficient exposure and access to technology. By making technological assumptions we can easily fall into traps that subconsciously uphold problematic

teaching practices that reward students simply for coming from a privileged background that provided access throughout their lives. Our assessment methods need to account for issues of technological access, because if students lack consistent and easy access to tools and technology, how can they be expected to learn and succeed in our courses?

Racism and Writing Assessment

While learning aversion and access to technology are significant problems facing writing assessment, there are also more noxious issues below the surface of our assessment practices – systemic racism. As I discuss racism in relation to writing assessment, I will be building off a definition provided by Kendi (2019) as he describes racism as "a marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racist inequities" (p. 18-19). As disquieting as it may seem writing assessment can easily enforce racist practices.

Writing assessment can easily reinforce racist ideologies because of the power grades have in a classroom. How we score materials, what we give an A, what we give an F reflects the kinds of writing, language, and projects we find valuable (Huot, 2002). Valerie Balester (2012) notes that "rubrics announce forcefully how we define 'good' writing," (p. 63) and Broad (2003) notes that "rubrics, the most visible and ubiquitous tool of *writing assessment*—arguably the aspect of rhetoric/composition that impinges most powerfully and memorably on our students' lives" (p. 4). Nothing better reflects our values as instructors than the rubrics we create, how these rubrics lead to the grades that we give our students, and the kinds of writing academics can value are often rooted in racist practices.

Racism and writing assessment intersect when our assessment practices punish students for code switching, integrating casual language, or any general deviation from white, western-European style and diction. As teachers of English, it can be easy to fall into the trap of expecting a very specific kind of writing: formal, white, language. As academics, this is the style of writing we are

most familiar with, this is the style that is required for most major journals and conferences – this is the style I am using for this dissertation. The genre conventions of academic prose are rooted in white language supremacy, and after years of undergraduate, graduate, and Ph.D. education it can be hard for instructors to deviate from a style that has been engrained over almost a decade of coursework. Inoue (2019) sees assessment, especially in the context of composition courses, as a racist practice, because students are often assessed not on the quality of their work, the knowledge they gain over a semester, or the learning that takes place, but rather they are graded on their ability to mimic the style of whiteness. For Inoue (2019), it is important to break away from conventional forms of assessment, as they act as a gatekeeper, and punish students along racial lines. While this kind of thinking may seem radical, as Inoue spends several pages defending his framework in his texts, he is not alone in his critique of assessment as a racist practice.

Behm & Miller (2012) echo Inoue's (2019) sentiments when they note that writing assessment is a tool that "reinforces value systems and defines, positions, and excludes groups of students, possibly limiting access to resources that facilitate learning and that improve students' life chances" (p. 127). Wood (2019) also shares these thoughts as he notes that "traditional frameworks limit student agency by further cultivating cultural hegemony and marginalize already marginalized voices" (p. 244). All of the aforementioned examples have a common thread, as these scholars all describe writing assessment as an exclusionary practice; this definition is nearly identical to Kendi's (2019) definition of racist policies. The policies and function of grading are not in place to facilitate learning, but rather to *weed out* students who are unable or unwilling to adapt their writing style to fit the model of white language supremacy. Our assessment practices and the grades we give to students define what *good writing* looks like, and these rubrics can work as tools of oppression and racism as outlined by Kendi (2019).

Our assessment practices need to bring up and directly address issues related to language. Building on this issue, Behm & Miller (2012) note "Coded white, rational, logical, orderly, and in control, Edited American English hides the coercive force of whiteness by seeming so ostensibly neutral, normal, and commonsensical as to deracialize whiteness while simultaneously highlighting and defining 'others' as abnormal and inferior..." (p. 131). Inoue (2019) states that "colleges, and universities today are literally and figuratively White settlements (many built on land stolen from indigenous peoples), which have become tacitly…White entitlement, an inner dike to protect. (p. 12). Finally, Ketai (2012) notes "assessment practices too often define basic writers according to institutionally articulated, historically racialized conceptions of writing ability and student 'need'" (p. 141). For all of these scholars, academia and assessment is rooted in white language, and rewards students for mimicking whiteness and it is our obligation to address these issues and examine how they can alter our assessment practices.

The issues of racism and assessment are particularly salient to the multimodal turn as new media and new tools for communication have changed the way writing looks and sounds. Selfe (2009) noted that the influx of new media would offer new avenues for communication as projects like podcasts and videos offer new voices an opportunity to enter the conversation; however, these advances will be moot if our assessment practices continue to expect and project white academic English. While scholars are aware of the implications of assessment on multimodal projects, work needs to be constantly done to ensure our practices are sound. Reinforcing white language supremacy is not learning, but a form of indoctrination (Moran & Herrington, 2013; Wierzewski, 2013; Bloch, 2019).

Anti-racist and social justice themes need to be foundational aspects of our writing courses, as language, and how we use it, is an immensely powerful tool that can marginalize and subjugate populations. It is not only important to live these values in the courses we teach and assignments we

design, but to also follow through and make sure our assessment practices actively work to combat racism as well. Part of this solution is utilizing assessment methods that foster expansive learning and socio-cultural theories[9]. These approaches help take learning out of an abstract academic context and ask students to consider how their work will function in the world outside of the classroom. If our courses preach anti-racism, but our assessment values do not, we are, at best, sending mixed messages to our students and, at worst, actively working to reinforce racial and cultural prejudices in our courses.

Towards a Solution: Contract Grading

Learning aversion, access to technology, and white language supremacy are three major pedagogical problems that can be exacerbated through writing assessment. These problems defy simple solutions, and while instructors cannot hope to find a single panacea for all the ills of assessment, there are options that can make our classes more engaging, accessible, and equitable. Over the following pages, and throughout the course of this dissertation, I will argue that SCLCs can create a form of assessment that fosters expansive learning while also combating learning aversion, access, and white language supremacy.

Inoue and Labor-Based Contracts

As we begin a discussion of contract grading it is impossible to ignore the prolific work of Asao Inoue (2012, 2015, 2019). Inoue's monographs, edited collections, and articles have sparked a renewed interest in contract grading, and started valuable discussions on the intersection of assessment, social justice, and anti-racism; many contemporary scholars have built on his work with contracts (Litterio, 2016, 2018; Hammond, 2019; Poe, Inoue, & Elliot, 2018; Wood, 2019; Cowan, 2020). Personally speaking, Inoue's 2015 *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies* was the primary

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[9] Chapter 3 will examine these themes in more detail.

inspiration behind my initial interest in writing assessment, and I modeled my first contracts after his labor-based approach.

Inoue (2015, 2019) takes a labor-based approach to writing assessment. In his model, students earn grades based on the amount of labor the complete. This can include completing assignments, revising work, participating in peer review, or completing optional assignments. In this assessment model, students are not graded on the *quality* of their work, or their ability to recreate a master model; rather, they earn grades by putting in the work to improve their writing. This is a better model for assessment as it takes into account the fact that students come into a class with diverse experiences, abilities, and expectations for a writing class. No matter where their skill levels are at the start of a course, labor-based grading gives every student a chance to grow. The egalitarian approach is described by Cowan (2020) when she notes:

> In Inoue's model, a student can earn up to a B by following the letter of the contract (not dissimilar to Danielewicz and Elbow's [2009] hybrid contract), but whereas Danielewicz and Elbow reserve As for "exceptional work," Inoue requires that students complete additional assignments to achieve higher grades (like Farber's 1990 contract and J. Smith's 1999 contract) (n.p.).

Inoue's labor-based contracts value labor for many reasons, including the use of labor to combat racist writing assessment practices. As Inoue (2019) notes

> all grading and assessment exist within systems that uphold singular, dominant standards that are racist, and White supremacist when used uniformly. This problem is present in any grading system that incorporates a standard, no matter who is judging, no matter the particulars of the standard (p. 3).

Here, Inoue acknowledges the subconscious racism present in conventional assessment. Historically, writing assessment was used as a tool to indoctrinate students to write in a specific way. The

academic writing style is overwhelmingly inspired by white, western European standards. Conventional assessment is used as a tool to uphold these standards – students will either conform or fail. Inoue's focus on labor removes this from the assessment equation, as his students are not assessed on their ability to recreate this style, rather on the work they put into their work, not matter the diction, audience, or language used.

Though Inoue's (2015, 2019) labor-based contract can be an effective tool, and a great way for instructors to begin to think about the intersection of systemic racism and writing assessment, there are problems beyond racism that assessment can and should address. For example, I believe Inoue overemphasizes labor to the point where it is detrimental to other aspects of effective assessment. Inoue (2019) himself is very clear on the importance of labor, as he states that "Through my research and reflection, I realized that what I value most in students is their working, their labor (p. 68)." While I agree that labor is an important part of the assessment process, and while Inoue's work is of immense importance for the field of assessment, it is also important to note that an overemphasis on labor can lead to the same problems of learning aversion. To again quote Inoue (2019):

> I don't think it's a good idea to coerce students into doing more work than they are willing or able to do simply because I feel they should. There are consequences for a student not meeting the terms of labor delineated in the contract, so I let them know this, but I don't force more labor on a student who isn't willing to initiate that labor, and I don't think badly of students who for whatever reason are not ready to do the work we ask of everyone in the class (p. 204)

Unfortunately, that is not the case as labor contracts can breed learning aversion in other ways as students may feel encumbered by excess work, which was the case when Medina and Walker (2018) utilized contract grading in their technical writing courses.

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In Medina and Walker's (2018) contract course they increased the labor requirements, and the number of deliverables students were required to produce as the grade level increased, identical to the method used by Inoue. While requiring students to do more work to receive higher grades seems like a logical strategy, this may not be the case. Medina and Walker discovered that some students found their grading contracts, and their focus on quantity, rather than quality of work, to be tedious and retrograde. Medina and Walker (2018) found an emphasis on workload was a constant theme throughout their reviews. In the student comments phrases such as a "ridiculous amount of work for that [grade]," "too much work for [this course]. This is like a [sic] upper division research class," and "the requirement for an A are quite extensive" (p. 57) show students' disgruntled nature towards product-heavy contracts.

Though I see a lot of value in the work done by Inoue (2015, 2019), and feel it is valuable to the assessment community, more work needs to be done on writing assessment, contract grading, and anti-racist pedagogies in general. Inoue's labor-based approach provides a better model for assessing writing, but it is not perfect, and I believe changing our focus towards SCLCs can improve assessment further.

Learning Contracts

An integral part of this dissertation will be a push away from labor-based contracts and towards learning contracts. George Boak (1998) provides a useful definition for learning contracts as "formal agreements between a learner and someone who is helping them to learn" (p. ix), and learning contracts have a history of success in a variety of disciplines including business (Boak, 1998), counseling (O'Halloran & Delaney, 2011), engineering (Frank & Scharf, 2013), and technical writing (Littero, 2016). The versatility and freedom offered by learning contracts allows them to evolve in order to meet the challenges of any age of assessment.

Learning contracts are a collaborative form of assessment where students and instructors work together to create assessment criteria that benefits students. In learning contracts, students play a very active role in setting their goals and learning objectives, as opposed to more conventional forms of assessment where students are presented learning outcomes and rubrics and expected to meet abstract criteria without any of their own input. This collaborative nature is important, as Broad (2003) notes that

> Very rarely do rubrics emerge from an open and systematic inquiry into a writing program's values. Instead, they are most often drafted by an individual (usually the writing program administrator) and approved by a committee before being delivered into the hands of evaluators as the official and authoritative guide to judging students' writing (p. 12).

Learning contracts are useful tools for demystifying assessment and making rubrics more equitable as students and instructors work together to craft assessment criteria that works for each individual.

Labor contracts, and their focus on the work students complete, are useful to help us to shift away from conventional assessment, and the idea that students need to recreate an abstract master model in order to achieve a high grade, but their focus on labor can also be problematic. With labor contracts, students will focus on completing work, and the amount of work required to earn their desired grade. In these situations, the problems of conventional assessment still exist, as the motivation for expansive learning is still lacking. Students are rewarded for completing labor, and while this may provide students with an opportunity to explore and learn skills important to them, I argue it is more effective to utilize learning contracts.

A focus on learning is necessary as students come into our classes with diverse experiences, expectations, and needs in terms of learning. Using a singular, inflexible rubric, often fails to account for the various ways students learn. To assess all students on final products, or a singular rubric does not make sense as everyone has different ways and reasons for learning. Our students can often

have a better understanding on what skills they have, what skills they can improve, and what skills they need to learn. Though it may be difficult at first[10], if students have difficulty articulating their goals we can and must work with them and help them develop meaningful learning goals for their work. While students may not know exactly what they need to learn in the moment, continued conversations over the course of a project can help students understand and articulate their goals.

Student-Centric Learning Contracts

With these factors in mind, I argue for the use of a new form of learning contracts, student-centric learning contracts (SCLCs). SCLCs build off the work of previous iterations of learning contracts, but also refocus their attention towards a more holistic, formative view of assessment. Learning contracts, such as the ones described by Boak (1998) often focus too heavily on end results; given his background in business this overly pragmatic approach makes sense for his needs and goals. However, academia and learning should not be viewed through the prism of business. While learning contracts, and their focus on tangible skills is important, the process of learning, and how the steps we take change our focus and perception of what we want to learn and how we will learn it is important as well. Over the following pages I will go into more detail on the foundation of these contracts.

In SCLCs, students and instructors work collaboratively to outline what a student wants to learn, and how they will learn it; a sense of collaboration is necessary for effective learning contracts (Moreno-Lopez, 2005; Frank & Scharf, 2013; Littero, 2016). Students have increased agency in the creation of SCLCs as Boak (1998) notes that all learning contracts "share certain characteristics: a degree of choice for the learner, a learning plan, and (usually) an agreement between the learner and

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[10] Speaking from experiencing, using SCLCs it is almost always difficult at first, but with individualized attention and conversations it gets easier over time.

someone who will help them," (p. 1). SCLCs are no different as students are empowered to define what they want to learn, why they want to learn, and how they will learn.

In SCLCs, students articulate the learning objectives that are important to them and work collaboratively with instructors to create a contract that allows them to reach their goals. Students will create their contract criteria by writing out their individual learning goals for a project similar to Shipka's (2009) statement of goals and choices (SOGC). In Shipka's (2009) SOGC students produce detailed statements of the goals they wish to achieve throughout a project. Students articulate what they are trying to accomplish, how they will accomplish it, and discuss how their choices affected their composition process. In SCLCs, students will produce similar documents, where they outline what they want to learn, and how they will learn it.

Instructors will not play a passive role in the creation of SCLCs, as they will actively help students in the drafting process. Sharing their expertise with the student, an instructor will help them create learning goals that are achievable; instructors can offer a great deal of help to students as they attempt to identify and achieve their learning goals (Beck et al., 2018). For example, if a unit is focused on podcasts, and a student wants to learn to become a more effective speaker, an instructor will work with the student and discuss various strategies they might explore to reach their goals.

After students articulate their learning goals, they will then be assessed using uptake. Assessment through uptake is ideal for SCLCs, as final products are not always the best indicator of learning. For example, let's say a student needs to design a website for a unit project. If the student has minimal experience with web design their final product may be lacking but, given their limited experience, they have likely learned a significant amount. By contrast, a student that has a great deal of experience building websites can submit a fantastic final project but may have learned very little by comparison. To account for different levels of learning, SCLCs utilizes elements of pedagogical

cultural historical activity theory (PCHAT) to measure uptake (Prior, Walker, & Riggert-Kieffer, 2019).

As a pedagogical approach, PCHAT takes a holistic view of writing. Prior, Walker, & Riggert-Kieffer (2019) note PCHAT

> asks students and teachers in writing classrooms to attend to the complexity of literate
> activity as they produce (with multiple tools and people) texts in/for/about various activity
> systems and to build awareness of the situatedness of tools and genres. PCHAT understands
> learning to write as an ongoing process whereby one's knowledge and practices interact with,
> shape, and are shaped by semiotic engagements with multiple activity systems (p. 5).

PCHAT looks at writing as a process, one that does not exist in isolation, but is connected to the world around us. In PCHAT, the world influences our writing, and our writing is an ongoing process – even after a final draft is submitted, we still need to think about writing, specifically through uptake genres. Uptake genres are defined by ISUwriting.com as "any kind of production (texts) that explicitly ask [students] to articulate" (n.p.) the decisions they made throughout their writing process. Uptake gives students a platform to discuss their writing process, their projects, their struggles, and their success in a meaningful way.

Through uptake students are able to articulate what steps they took to achieve their learning goals. PCHAT makes sense in SCLCs as the contract pushes for expansive learning, and asks students to document what their learning looks like at all stages. As Prior, Walker, & Riggert-Kieffer (2019) note proof of learning (POL) documents: "ask students less to *reflect on* than to *document* their learning and choices as they engage in discovering, observing, making, and analyzing," (p. 5) and this distinction is key. Reflecting on a final deliverable is product oriented and emphasizes said deliverable over learning. SCLCs are interested in the learning choices that occurred throughout a unit; the final product does have significance in the broader context of a unit. It is an example of

what a student has learned, and what they are capable of producing at a specific point in their academic career. However, final products are not the be-all end-all and what matters just as much, if not more, are the steps that led to said product. POL documents ask students to discuss their learning choices and gives them an opportunity to holistically discuss their project and their process. Students will be assessed on how they are able articulate and demonstrate what they learned, while also discussing how their learning affected their rhetorical decision making throughout every step of a unit.

The structure of SCLCs focuses on learning and providing students an opportunity to define the learning that is important to them. Throughout this project I have argued that learning is the most important outcome of teaching, and this contract is designed to facilitate learning. Now that I have defined SCLCs, I will discuss how it can be a useful tool to combat the issues of learning aversion, access, and racism.

Learning Aversion

Student apathy and learning aversion stem from two major problems: a focus on tedious *busy work*, and a lack of motivation. SCLCs combat these issues by allowing students to dictate the goals of their contract, which provides students with intrinsic motivation.

Final deliverables assessed on external criteria are a primary cause of learning aversion, as they do not motivate students to learn. In these situations, students only need to reproduce a product that reflects the values outlined in a rubric to earn a high grade, and students are aware of this (Booth, 1963; Taylor, 1971; Meikle, 1983; Stan, 2012; Littero, 2016). Many scholars have identified this as a problem, and many contracts seek to deemphasize the importance of final deliverables (Reily & Atkins, 2013; VanKooten, 2013; Frost, 2018; Inman & Powell, 2018; Medina & Walker, 2018; Wood, 2019). Recently, Inoue (2012, 2015, 2019) suggests instructors adopt a labor-based contract to combat the challenges of modern composition. While Inoue's contract is an

effective model, and was the original inspiration for SCLCs, Inoue's focus on labor can actually fuel learning aversion.

Inoue (2012, 2015, 2019) sees labor is the most equitable way to assess composition and assesses students on the work they do within a unit. While labor is an important component of the composition process, labor and learning are not the same. When using contracts, Medina and Walker (2018) found that their contracts overemphasized labor to the point where students disconnected with the course material. In these situations, students were not motivated to learn, as they saw the labor-intensive approach as tedious, and in an attempt to combat learning aversion the SCLC does not focus on labor, rather learning.

With SCLCs, students are assessed on learning and articulating what and how they learned. While labor and completing assignments are valued to an extent, they are far from the emphasis of this contract. A focus on learning over labor allows SCLCs to intrinsically motivate students. Boak (1998) notes: "learning contracts are generally motivational. They usually generate more enthusiasm and a more lasting effect than those learning experiences that have been designed by tutors or trainers," (p. 5) and O'Halloran & Delaney (2011) echo these sentiments as they note learning contracts "fostered greater accountability, responsibility, and commitment" (p.75). This sense of accountability is derived from the active role students play in assessment. Adsanatham (2012) believes that students should be involved in the grading process, as it helps them "see that their voices matter and can make a difference in *their* learning environment, as well as society at large," (p. 156) and SCLCs gives students increased agency to help motivate them to learn while not overwhelming them with labor.

While it is promising to see many scholars discuss the potential of learning contracts as a motivational tool, students have discussed these merits as well. Methal Mohammad (2010), an international graduated student at Texas A&M, found that learning contracts afforded her the

opportunity to find out what she valued as a student and a scholar. When she was enrolled in a course that utilized learning contracts Mohammad felt that she had more agency, more at stake, as she was playing an active role in her education[11]. Mohammad did not see herself occupying the passive role of meeting standards set by a professor, and as such she was more engaged in her studies. The existing literature shows the potential for learning contracts to combat student apathy, and I have also seen firsthand how learning contracts can not only motivate students to learn, but also help with issues of digital access.

SCLCs and Access to Technology

From personal experience, I have seen the benefits of pairing learning contracts with tech-heavy assignments. In the fall of 2019, I taught my internship course and utilized contract grading; my internship was focused entirely on multimodal composition, and students completed a digital literacy narrative, a podcast, and a website. For this course I collected data through a survey at the end of the semester. The questions primarily focused on how our contract enabled learning and allowed students to explore the rhetorical affordances of various media. Two respondents, given the pseudonyms Dave or Christina, discussed their thoughts on the contract.

In response to the question: *How did the use of grading contracts alter your approaches to writing throughout this semester?* Dave noted "The grading contract held me accountable for much of the work." When asked about the benefits of contract grading Dave notes that he "personally liked the accountability of this course, as it placed the oppertunity [sic] of success immediately in front of me. All I had to do was complete the actual work to fulfill the contract." Christina stated that the contract "motivated [her] to write [her] best." When asked about the benefits of contract grading, Christina noted that the method: "allows students to really focus on there [sic] work." Finally, when

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[11] My findings, discussed in chapter 4, echo these themes.

asked if she would prefer contracts or traditional assessment Christina stated that she would prefer "contracts because i [sic] feel I am able to learn more and experiment more."

Both Dave and Christina found that contracts motivated them to learn, and helped them overcome potential technological issues (Fedeli, Giampaolo, & Coryell, 2013; Frank & Scharf, 2013). They both knew that they would not be assessed on their final deliverable, so they felt free to focus on their work, unencumbered by issues of personal technological efficacy. While this contract worked with a small number of multimodal and digital projects, I feel that future research will validate this approach for a variety of media. In this course, our contract deemphasized labor and final deliverables and students were assessed on their uptake documents. Throughout the semester, no matter what kind of project, my students, in general, felt comfortable using any technology because of the contract.

Part of the success here stems from giving students the ability to outline a contract that works for them. With SCLCs, students have expanded freedom to dictate their individual learning goals, and the general shape of their assignments as well. While having students create their own rubrics may seem like a lot of work, it is necessary when considering access to technology. When discussing multimodal composition, Ball (2012) notes that "it is important thing for teachers to remember… that the rubric needs to be created fresh, with students, for each kind of project you assign" (p. 68). Not only do student-generated contracts create motivation, but they also help to combat issues of access. Students are able to highlight the skills they want to hone and are not burdened by the technological perceptions of the instructor. In my course a few students had previous experience with web design and other forms of digital composition, but a majority of them have not utilized these tools in a high-stakes college setting. More research is required to examine how individual contracts work to combat learning aversion and access, and I will continue this research for my dissertation and beyond. Based on responses I received from my students I believe

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the collaborative rubrics not only combated learning aversion, but also helped ease issues of access across a variety of media and modes throughout the semester.

SCLC and Anti-Racism

While learning aversion and access are important issues, racism, and its place in assessment, also deserves substantial attention. Kendi (2019) notes it is not enough to be neutral towards racism, rather, we need to strive to be anti-racist at every level, and this includes assessment. To be anti-racist requires instructors to actively work to eliminate racist practices, to create a classroom that is equitable for all. The importance of an anti-racist turn is especially salient in the wake of a Trump Presidency, as Trump has worked constantly to enforce racist policies. The Trump administration worked to mitigate or eliminate anti-racist training (Executive Order 13950, 2020; Beggin, 2020; Miller, 2020). In accordance with Executive Order 13950, The University of Iowa moved to eliminate diversity training (Shanahan, 2020). This work is designed to normalize nationalism and White supremacy, and instructors must be vigilant and firmly anti-racist in every aspect of their pedagogy, including their assessment practices. Though the current Biden administration will hopefully be more inclusive and actively anti-racist, recent years have shown a single election[12] can drastically shift the direction of a nation.

While there is no single solution to systemic racism, SCLCs attempt to combat racism by giving students more power in the assessment process. To quote Freire (2005)

> a pedagogy which must be forged *with,* not *for,* the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity. This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation. And in the struggle this pedagogy will be made and remade. (p. 48)

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[12] Or the whims of an extremist Supreme Court.

SCLCs take this into consideration, and afford students the opportunity to use the language, tone, and voice that matters to them. Though some students may be reticent to this idea, or think that these' anti-racist approaches are merely virtue signaling, inviting students to outline their linguistic goals can be helpful. As Cowan (2020) notes

> The key to relieving much student anxiety, however, may be the inclusion of more student input when defining the terms of a contract, harkening back to the highly individualized contracts of the 1970s. Spidell and Thelin (2006) argue that more student contribution can counteract potential resistance/apprehension (pp. 4-48), pointing to Ira Shor's (1996) negotiated curriculum as laid out in *When Students Have Power: Negotiating Authority in a Critical Pedagogy.*

Letting students define their target audience, as well as the voice and tone that will help them reach their rhetorical goals. Again, SCLCs afford students tremendous agency in not only defining what and how they will learn, but how their learning will manifest in the world. The definition of learning discussed in chapter 1 specified that learning is pragmatic and has a reason to exist in the world (Engstrom, 2001; Ambrose et al, 2010; Berkeley, 2020.) Allowing students to define their audience takes composition out of the abstract, and into a real-world situation. This not only allows students to engage with their work more easily, as it is situated in an authentic context, but also allowed them to use a voice and tone that matters to them while matching their rhetorical situations.

How we use language, and what language we allow is important. Much like grades, the language we allow in our courses reflect the language we value as instructors. If we make no conscious effort to discuss language, we are not only doing a disservice to our students, but also working to support white language supremacy. Again, Kendi (2019) notes we must be overtly anti-racist, and to do so in assessment we need to discuss language, and expand what languages are allowed in our courses. As such, SCLCs allow students to define the language they will use in their

work. By allowing students to define their linguistic goals and means SCLCs attempt to combat the ideology that academic whiteness is the only *proper* way to write. The importance of language, specifically Black language, has been expressed in a position state from Baker-Bell, Williams-Farrier, Jackson, Johnson, Kynard, & McMurty (2020). In this piece, they call for Black linguistic justice, and call for instructors to put a stop to utilizing academic language as the standard form of communication. The position statement also calls for instructors to end the teaching of code switching, and other such methods designated to integrate white language into student work. Expanding the voices available to students is important because it helps students engage with their work. If they see their voices are valued, and they are not forced to adopt academic diction for the sake of a grade, they can more easily engage with course material. The work of Baker-Bell et al. (2020) is a good starting point, and the principals discussed here can and should be expanded to include other voices, dialects, and styles.

Conclusion

Building an effective theoretical foundation is a crucial first step for any research project. Throughout this chapter I outlined the existing scholarship on three key issues facing writing assessment: learning aversion, access to technology, and racism and writing assessment. While these are far from the only problems facing writing assessment, these issues can actively work to hinder learning while also promoting white-language supremacy in our courses. The initial SCLCs were built to make with these issues in mind, and designed to make our courses more equitable and accessible for students. While I believe SCLCs can achieve these goals, it is not enough to rest on theoretical promise alone. As this dissertation continues my next chapter will focus on the methodological foundations for my research and outline my IRB-approved study designed to help evaluate the efficacy of SCLCs.

CHAPTER III: METHDOLOGY – A STORY TO TELL

In the first two chapter of this project, I outlined some of the major problems facing writing assessment and described how learning aversion, access to technology, and white language supremacy can cause tremendous harm to our assessment practices and pedagogy. It is the goal of this project to directly address and offer solutions to these complex problems through the use of student-centric learning contracts (SCLCs). As this project continues, this chapter will outline the research questions that are at the foundation of my institutional review board (IRB) approved study. This study was designed to help me better understand how SCLCs work in a writing class, and what I can do to improve future iterations of SCLCs. Throughout this chapter I will discuss my research questions, the data I collected, and the relevant literature on the methodologies that informed my research practices – these methodologies include feminist, social justice, and sociocultural frameworks for research. As I discuss these methodologies I will do so through a series of methodological themes, including pragmatism, collaboration, social justice, and reflexivity.

Positionality

Prior to discussing my research questions, methodologies, or research design any further it is important to first address my positionality as a teacher and a researcher. I am a white, straight, cis, male of western European heritage, and as such I bring a certain amount of privilege with me into the classroom and the research process. For this project I researched how SCLCs can be used as a tool for social justice, to make the classroom and the assessment process a more equitable experience for students. In doing so I directly researched students using feminist, social justice, and sociocultural methodologies – methodologies that were built in response to the exigencies and realities faced by marginalized populations. The privilege afforded by my positionality can sometimes be at odds with these research goals, so it is important to understand how positionality affects my work as a teacher, and a researcher.

The importance of understanding positionality, especially when working from a position of privilege, is articulated by Walton, Moore, and Jones (2019) as they note

> positionality contextualizes people in complex ways that allow for tension, for conflicting truths, for imperfection, for things that seem like they don't fit or can't coexist to do so. It opposes dumbing down, stripping away, simplifying, and cultural strip-mining. In so doing positionality equips for the work social justice by serving as a lens for self-reflection (for informing one's own action) and also as a tool that opens space for connection to others (for increasing acceptance and understanding). Positionality can help us to perceive ourselves and other people more fully; as such be a useful tool in coalition building (p. 80).

For Walton et al. (2019), it is important for researchers to acknowledge their lived experience, how it impacts their work, how it can clash with methodologies, and how it can change the dynamics that exist between the participants of the research process. Who we are, where we come from, what life experiences we have, and what our bodies represent are all important pieces of our identity, pedagogy, and the research process. Walton et al. (2019) continue to underscore the importance of positionality by stating "understanding [positionality, privilege, and power] is necessary if we want to build coalitions across the field…" (p. 64). As I work with SCLCs, and push for a more socially just approach to assessment, it is important to be cognizant of my positionality, how my privilege affected my research process, and how this privilege can be used to help facilitate the kind of coalition building necessary to work with diverse students in a collaborative research environment.

With positionality, especially my positionality as a white man, in mind, it is also important to think about my citation practices in relation to my research and pedagogy. Walton et al. (2019) highlight the importance of citing diverse authors when they note

> the propensity to cite white, male scholars means that each generation of new technical communicators is reading the work of scholars from the same canon that fails to include

work from minority scholars, sustaining and reinforcing the lack of inclusivity and

representation (p. 3).

The lack of inclusivity and representation can be a serious detriment to research, scholarship, and pedagogy at all levels. This danger is further articulated by Baker-Bell, Williams-Farrier, Jackson, Johnson, Kynard, and McMurtry (2020) as they note it is important to seek out and cite authors of color to help "develop the next generation of researchers' Black Linguistic Consciousness of citationality politics…" (n.p.). Though this statement is directed at work with graduate students, it is important to seek out, cite, and integrate diverse voices in classes of every level. Baker-Bell (2020) emphasizes the importance of seeking out diverse scholars as she notes that "Their voices and stories matter! And as educators and researchers, we must listen and engage their perspectives in our research, theories about language learning, and pedagogical practices" (p. 40). Building on this pedagogical theme, Smitherman (1999) also highlights the importance of language and notes that "language is critical in talking about the education of a people because it represents a people's theory of reality; it explains, interprets, constructs, and reproduces that reality… (p. 58)." In a quest to do social justice and anti-racist research and pedagogy citing from a diverse body of scholarship is necessary to live these goals, and to understand the lived experiences at the heart of these principals. By failing to seek out and cite women and BIPOC authors, I am ignoring their experiences, experiences that are necessary for effective use of anti-racist and social justice methodologies and pedagogies.

While taking steps to diversify my citation practice can help, there is no one-dose panacea for accounting for positionality. I must constantly pay attention to and attempt to account for my positionality in a continual effort to become a better instructor, researcher and ally for students. This will forever be a work in progress and, as Kizhaber (qtd. In Russell, 1995) notes, it is "over ambition – to eradicate in, three hours a week for 30 or 35 weeks, habits of thought and expression that have

been forming for at least 15 years…" (p. 52). Being an ethical researcher, instructor and ally is not a singular act, or a single section in a dissertation, but a continued exercise that must persist throughout this project and my career.

Research Questions

Returning to my project, I have researched contract grading extensively, and while there does exist some excellent scholarship[13] on writing assessment and contract grading, these sources are still limited and there is a need for more research. The need for additional research on grading contracts is not a new phenomenon as Asao Inoue (2015) and Michelle Cowan (2020) have both commented on the lack of recent scholarship on contract grading, and I must agree with Inoue (2015) and Cowan's (2020) assessment, as I have also noticed a need for additional scholarship on contract grading. Specifically, I have found a lack of sources dedicated to the more practical, day-to-day aspects of using contract grading. Many of the available sources on contract grading ignore these pragmatic questions, and instead skip past the awkward stages of integrating contracts into a writing class and building contracts with students. Instead, authors often elect to discuss the theoretical promise of contract grading, or discuss what their students thought at the end of their course. While there is value to this scholarship, it can also be problematic and lead instructors back to a top-down model of assessment, and an assumption that the contracts they create are perfect, while requiring little to no tweaking throughout a semester. Based on my experiences teaching with SCLCs over the past two years I can say that is not the case.

The field of writing assessment has a strong need for additional research dedicated to the practical aspects of teaching using contract grading in undergraduate courses, and my research questions helped me to create a study to help fill this scholastic gap. The existing literature suggests

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[13] Including the work of Mohammad, 2010; Fedeli, Giampaolo, & Coryell, 2013; Frank & Scharff, 2013; Inoue, 2015; Littero, 2018; Medina & Walker, 2018; and Wood, 2019.

that contract grading can help improve assessment, but the value of this literature is moot if instructors are unsure of how to effectively integrate contract grading into their courses. Based on these needs I have been developing SCLCs over multiple semesters; I have conducted human-subjects-approved research and will continue to do so as this project evolves. As I have developed and taught using SCLC the following questions guided my research:

- Do SCLCs promote expansive learning?

- How do SCLCs influence the way students write, or the ways they discuss their writing?

- What are students' attitudes towards assessment, and are these attitudes changed by the use of SCLCs?

- How does student uptake of SCLCs improve my own understanding of the benefits of and problems with SCLCs?

- What specific kinds of activities and discussions can help to engage students and to integrate contracts?

- Can SCLCs be designed so that they are effective tools for both individuals and entire classes?

- Can SCLCs be used as part of an effort to make writing classes more accessible and socially just?

- Can SCLCs be used combat issues of unequal access to technology?

The overall goal of this research project is to better understand how students take up and use SCLCs in writing courses, how SCLCs influences the ways students write, as well as the ways students conceptualize, produce, and reflect on their writing. I feel SCLCs have the potential to give students more academic freedom, the freedom to explore the kinds of language and writing that is important to them, and adopt new practices for learning more about their own literate practices.

Opening these linguistic gates offers us a chance to combat white language supremacy and make classes a less oppressive environment.

Though some of these questions are quite large in scope, and not answerable in a single round of research, these big-picture themes are important to me as researcher. This dissertation, and these questions on assessment, represent ongoing projects that will drive my work for years to come. Though I may not be able to answer these questions here, the results from this project will help inform the trajectory of future research projects.

Research Design

At the heart of my research in this project are students. To account for their lived experiences, and to help me find answers to my research questions, this project is built on a foundation of participatory research. Participatory research is a natural fit for the kind of work I am doing with SCLCs. SCLCs are a form of assessment built *with* students, not *for* students. For this project I have created a draft of a contract, and I know through this study SCLCs can be improved. Students will be active participants throughout the process as the data I collect for this project it will be used to create new draft, to better account for any potential shortcomings in this initial draft. As this project, and my work in general progresses, SCLCs will need to be periodically researched, and the work of students needs to help fuel revisions of these contracts.

Participatory research can be a useful method to advocate for racial equity by actively working with research subjects (University of Minnesota Library, 2022). This method is also useful as a tool to de-center the whiteness and privilege I bring to my work as participatory research actively

> enlists those who are most affected by a community issue – typically in collaboration or partnership with others who have research skills – to conduct research on and analyze that issue, with the goal of devising strategies to resolve it. In other words, community-based

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participatory research adds to or replaces academic and other professional research with

research done by community members, so that research results both come from and go

directly back to the people who need them most and can make the best use of them

(University of Kansas, 2021, n.p.)

As my research is focused directly on students, participatory research is an ideal method for my

work. I am interested in how assessment affects students, so I want to hear from them directly. In

doing so I collected data from multiple points throughout the semester to understand students, and

their work. Collecting data with students, and listening to their concerns, was an important aspect of

my data collection process, and has been an important part of my pedagogical approach since I

started teaching. Adapting my methods and strategies during the semester based on student input

not only helped to improve class, but also gave students the feeling that their voices and their

concerns matter. I was very open with students about this from the start of class, as I informed them

I would be collecting data, and asking for their input to improve SCLCs. SCLCs are designed to

improve the quality of assessment for students, so taking time throughout the semester to listen to

their concerns and take their thoughts into account as I analyzed their data was critical to the success

of analyzing the efficacy of SCLCs.

Assessment is a complex subject, and there is no single data point that can tell the entire

story of how SCLCs, or any assessment method for that matter, changes the way students look at

writing. By collecting and analyzing multiple sets of data over the course of an entire semester I am

able to chart how SCLCs might change the ways students approach writing projects. Using multiple

data collection points allowed me to dig deeper and look at the work of students holistically. For this

research project, I categorized the data I collected from multiple stages of the writing process into

the following categories: Drafting/Scaffolding**,** Artifacts of Production**,** and Proof of Learning

(POL) stages.

Drafting/Scaffolding

The first set of data points I collected fall into the Drafting/Scaffolding category. This category includes documents students produced throughout a unit. These projects included forum posts, progress report memos, quizzes, in-class work, and learning contract drafts. These kinds of assignments are important to me as resistance to contracts, and general confusion about their value, are a huge early-semester barrier to using SCLCs and contract grading in general[14]. By examining the work students are doing in this stage, and by collecting and coding these documents, I am able to better understand how students deal with new challenges, and provide insight into what kinds of questions they have as they begin new projects.

Artifacts of Production

The next set of data points are the Artifacts of Production. These documents are made up of the final deliverables students submitted at the end of major unit projects. These documents included students' final learning contracts, and final unit projects. Collecting these products helped me see how contracts and assessment influenced the work created by students. By looking at their contracts and final products I can see how the contracts influence the work that students created. Additionally, by collecting this data, and juxtaposing it with the Drafting/Scaffolding data, I can see how the SCLCs influenced their finished products. In my research I am interested in examining how assessment methods influence the ways students write, so juxtaposing drafts of contracts with final products and uptake documents helped me make connections to see how these assessment methods influenced choices throughout the writing and reflexive process. Analyzing these data points helped me better understand if and when SCLCs fall apart, and where changes need to be made to make stronger connections between scaffolded assignments.

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[14] These issues proved to be a problem in my class as well, and these themes will be examined in more detail in chapters 4, 5, and 6.

Proof of Learning

The final selection of data points, called Proof of Learning (POL), includes metacognitive work complete throughout the semester. POL documents included work from students, including uptake documents, and an end-of-semester survey. Additionally, I completed POL documents as well, as I kept a journal of personal memos and auto-ethnographical notes throughout the semester.

From students, I collected their uptake documents. As noted by ISUwriting.com (2021), uptake documents are "any kind of production (texts) that explicitly ask [students] to articulate" (n.p.) the decisions they made throughout their writing process. Uptake gives students a platform to discuss their writing process, their projects, their struggles, and their success in a meaningful way. These documents are important as they offered students a chance to talk about what worked, what didn't work, and what potential changes they might make in the future. These documents provided insight into the ways I might improve my contract and make clearer connections between course material and their learning contracts.

In addition to uptake documents, students also completed a survey[15] that was administered anonymously through Qualtrics. In addition to being completed anonymously, students' survey responses were not accessed until after final grades had been posted. Using this approach allowed students the chance to answer course-related questions without the worry of their grades being impacted. This survey provided students with a series of questions related to the class, the use of SCLCs, and their general thoughts on the efficacy of this approach to assessment. Students completed this survey during the final week of class along with instructor evaluations. Completing this survey at the end of the semester gave students an opportunity to think about this class holistically, and consider what benefits SCLCs provided.

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[15] See Appendix A for these survey questions.

Much like students, I also examined the course through my own set of reflexive documents. Throughout the semester I wrote personal memos and kept auto-ethnographic notes to keep track of my own work. These documents were completed throughout the semester, usually in my office after finishing a class. These memos were created to help keep me grounded, to make sure I was living up to the methodological principals and foundation I created at the start of my project. Additionally, these documents will be important for future iterations of research. As a teacher, the best laid plans can easily go astray – a student may say something incredibly interesting that shifts an entire class, a lecture may fall flat, or an assignment just may be too confusing to have value. By documenting these activities, and the response of students, I was able keep track of my class and make the necessary changes to improve future version of these activities, lessons, and assignments. This practice was especially important while writing a dissertation while living through the Covid-19 pandemic; the past two+ years have seemingly merged into an indistinguishable blur for me, so it was necessary to keep notes to remember key details from my teaching.

Each of these data points provided rich selections of qualitative data, and as my work with SCLCs continues this data will be collected and coded to help improve SCLCs. In the forthcoming chapters I will revisit these data collection points and coding process and discuss them in greater detail. However, I wanted to briefly introduce them here, to give some context for my methodological approaches, and provide some detail about how my data relates to these approaches.

Methodological Themes

Methodologies are an important first step to the research process as they help guide us to the right kinds of questions to ask, help inform the ways we collect data, and the decisions we make at every step in the research process. As Harding (1987) notes, methodology informs how our research "should proceed; it includes accounts of how 'the general structure of theory finds its application…'" (p. 3) in the work we carry out. Over the following sections I will review the literature supporting

the methodological themes and ideas at the heart of my project. For this project, my methodology is made up of four guiding themes:

- Pragmatism

- Social Justice

- Collaboration

- Reflexivity

Together, these themes worked to help me conduct research and push me towards more equitable and accessible classes and assessment practices. These themes focus on the problems we face in the classroom, and look towards our students as not subjects, but partners needed to understand and improve our teaching. These methodological principals represent the intersection of some key features of multiple methodologies including feminism, social justice, and sociocultural theory.

Pragmatism

The first methodological theme guiding my work on SCLCs is pragmatism. Pragmatism means structuring and designing research projects that put our theories to the test. I want my research to be pragmatic in the sense that I want to see how SCLCs work, and if they are doing what I have designed them to do. The importance of pragmatism is articulated by Jeff Grabill (2014) as he notes, "A good rhetorical idea should help us solve rhetorical problems. If the idea isn't useful, it isn't good" (p. 257). Though Grabill is quite blunt, he is equally correct. It is important that our work does something, and my work with SCLCs is no different. It is important to me that this work facilitates change, improves my pedagogy, and improves the quality of assessment for students. Grabill (2014) continues and states that our "methodology must be a theory of and for action," (p. 259) and that is a central focus of my research methodology as I want this work to be a call to

action, to show other instructors the value of SCLC, and how they can implement them into their own courses.

Pragmatic themes manifest throughout feminist scholarship (Shrewsbury, 1993; Jarratt, 1998; Fannow & Cook, 2005; Given, 2008; Royster & Kirsch, 2012; White, Rumsey, & Amidon, 2016). The importance of pragmatism, and prioritizing work that can facilitate change is emphasized by Eileen Schell (2010). When discussing feminist research methodologies Schell (2010) asks her readers to consider:

> How can feminist rhetorical research make a difference, and not only for scholars taking up feminist rhetoric? How can feminist rhetorics be useful in addressing many of the pressing issues of our day such as ongoing gender and racial discrimination and continued economic, social, and political injustices and inequities in a globalized world?" (p. 16).

Here, Schell (2010) directs our attention to the fact that feminist methodologies can address complex problems across the spectrum. Schell (2010) stresses the point that feminist research should aim to enact change, that it should accomplish something, it should amplify voices of the marginalized, and it should make a push for equality. Harding and Nordberg (2005) share these ideals as they note that the "point of good research, for feminists has always been to advance social progress," (p. 2010-2011) again, highlighting the importance of research leading to action. In addition to issues with gender, feminist methodologies can also help with racial, economic, social, cultural, and economic issues. This is important to note, as addressing any of these issues can amplify the agency and improve the lives of marginalized populations, which is a key goal of SCLCs.

Much like feminism, social justice methodologies also focus on putting research into action (Miller, 2008; Agboka, 2013; Walker, 2017; Klassen, 2020). Colton and Holmes (2018) note that social justice methodologies aim "to recognize injustices within institutional contexts in order to call for the revision or reimagination of these contexts… (p. 5)" echoing the sentiments of feminism

described by Harding and Norberg (2005). In a similar vein to feminism, it is not enough to simply acknowledge and understand the problems in the world, and in writing assessment. Research needs to do more and put this work into action, as Klassen (2020) notes that social justice work "moves beyond the ideal or abstract to the concrete" (n.p.). By working directly with students, and using student-centric research questions and goals, I hope to make immediate and future changes in my course and assessment styles to improve the quality of education for students.

Pragmatic themes can be found throughout my research questions, as I structured this project to help me understand questions including: How do SCLCs influence the way students write, or the ways they discuss their writing? What specific kinds of activities and discussions can help to engage students and to integrate contracts? And can SCLCs be used as part of an effort to make writing classes more accessible and socially just? These questions were crafted to help me understand how SCLCs function at the classroom-level, to see how students view SCLCs, and investigate how SCLCs influence student writing.

From personal experience I know that there can be some resistance to SCLCs, and contracts of any kind, so it was important for my research questions to be structured to help me combat potential reticence. Through these research questions I wanted to gain a better understanding of what steps I could take as an instructor to understand how students conceptualize SCLCs, what questions they have, and what steps I can take to more effectively integrate them into my classes.

Documents from the drafting category were critical in helping me understand these pragmatic research questions. Looking at assignments like progress report memos and learning contract drafts posts gave students the chance to discuss their thoughts on our current projects, questions they had, and concerns they had in relation to course material. Reviewing these documents can help me improve SCLCs in the future, but in the moment as well. Adaptability is a must for educators, as some lessons, projects, and activities just fall flat.

For example, after noticing some general confusion during the unit 2 project[16], I integrated

progress report memos into unit 2 and 3. These progress report memos were simple documents, and

had students discuss what work they've completed for our current projects, what they still needed to

complete, a timeline for completion, and sample learning goals for the project. While these memos

represented a relatively minor change to the course, I saw positive reactions from students after

integrating them into the final two units. These memos added structure and helped create a more

definitive timeline for these projects. Tasking students with writing draft versions of their learning

goals also gave me the opportunity to have conversations with students and help give them feedback

for improving their learning goals, and final projects.

Progress report memos helped me understand and improve my class during the semester,

but as the semester ended, POL documents proved useful as well. By examining students' responses

to the end-of-semester survey I learned how SCLCs functioned on a macro level. In this survey

students were asked: Some educators use contract grading because they feel it gives students more

freedom to do the kinds of writing that are important to them; do you feel that the contracts gave

you more freedom? And: Some students find contract grading confusing. Did you find contract

grading confusing? If so, what about the contract was confusing?

Through these questions students were provided a platform to discuss the use of SCLCs in a

broader sense. These questions gave students a chance to discuss how SCLCs helped them while

also giving them space to discuss the ways SCLCs can be improved. These questions are built on

pragmatism, and their responses will help me directly improve SCLCs for future courses.

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[16] Unit 2 was a personal portfolio. For this project students analyze a job posting, wrote a brief report on the posting, and created a resume and cover letter for a specific job.

Social Justice

In addition to pragmatism, my methodological foundation also includes elements of social justice. A social justice methodology prioritizes research that combats racism, sexism, ableism, and other forms of discrimination while amplifying the agency of marginalized populations. Feminist research practices highlight the importance of social justice, as Fannow and Cook (2005) note that "Feminist approaches to research have always emphasized action and social change (p. 2223)." This stance is important because we live in an imperfect world. A world where racism, ableism, agism, and all kinds of negative bias can be overt, yet subtle enough that they can go largely unexamined within our practices of teaching and grading. It is necessary for our research, no matter the subject or goals, to push for a more equitable and socially just world.

Fannow and Cook (2005) are far from the only feminists to emphasize the need for social justice (Harding, 1987; Harding and Norberg, 2005; Give, 2008; Hess-Bieber, 2008; Royster & Kirsch, 2012). When discussing research from a feminist perspective White, Rumsey, and Amidon (2016) note that feminist research should work to:

> (a) create a safe space for all learners, (b) empower students to disrupt dominant patriarchal and cultural frameworks, (c) incorporate life experiences and authentic voices in order to legitimize the personal experience of students, (d) listen to student voices and silences as a means of encouraging honest dialogue between teachers and students, and embrace diversity as an asset (p. 47).

SCLCs share these goals, as they aim to create a safe platform where students can articulate their own learning goals, goals that are important to them and their future trajectory inside and out of academia.

The importance of social justice can be seen from a sociocultural standpoint as well. Gee (2008) highlights the importance of "ensuring that all learners have had equal [opportunity to learn]

is both an ethical pre- requisite for fair assessment and a solid basis on which to think about educational reforms that will ensure that all children can succeed at school" (p. 80). Colton and Holmes (2018) extend anti-racism to a social justice perspective as they note social justice research aims to help us "understand how to avoid sexism, racism, able-ism, age-ism, and other prejudices within research, teaching, and professional practices," (p. 5) and these authors continue that social justice methodologies and research should focus on "nonpassive models of enactment" (p. 6). Finally, Jones (2016) states that social justice research methodologies

> investigates how communication broadly defined can amplify the agency of oppressed people—those who are materially, socially, politically, and/or economically under-resourced. Key to this definition is a collaborative, respectful approach that moves past description and exploration of social justice issues to taking action to redress inequities, (p. 347)

and these methodological aims are important features of the work I am doing, as I attempt to push writing assessment in a more social just direction with SCLCs.

The importance of social justice in the context of writing assessment can be seen as conventional assessment evaluates students against their ability to recreate and replicate white academic diction. This emphasis on whiteness puts students in a difficult place as they can feel the need to conform the academic norms in terms of language, as their grades are at stake; to deviate from the norm puts their grades at risk (Behem & Miller, 2013; Inoue, 2019).

From the perspective of my research project, I see social justice as an integral part of modern writing assessment, specifically in terms of language. Writing assessment has historically forced students to conform to a white, Eurocentric style of writing. In doing so, this privileges this *academic* style as the only acceptable way to write. As Behm & Miller (2012) note, writing assessment often "reinforces value systems and defines, positions, and excludes groups of students, possibly limiting access to resources that facilitate learning and that improve students' life chances" (p. 127).

Wood (2019) outlines these problems further and notes that "traditional frameworks limit student agency by further cultivating cultural hegemony and marginalize already marginalized voices, catering to academic expectations through refraining ideologies of a linguistic standard purposed for an academic audience" (p. 244-245). This white, Eurocentric view of writing is problematic as Baker-Bell (2020) notes:

> the ubiquity of whiteness in schools erroneously positions White Mainstream English-speaking students as academically prepared to achieve because their cultural ways of being, their language, their literacies, their histories, their values, and their knowledges are privileged in classrooms. From this assumption, linguistically marginalized students of color are falsely positioned as linguistically inadequate because their language practices do not reflect White Mainstream English (p. 20).

Every voice has value, not just those voices historically valued by academic institutions, and our writing assessment should not function as a tool of oppression. An important aspect of this research is to create a more equitable and accessible form of writing assessment, to help students of all genders, dialects, and socio-economic status see value in their voices. As Baker-Bell, Williams-Farrier, Jackson, Johnson, Kynard, and McMurtry (2020) suggest, educators need to "stop using academic language and standard English as the accepted communicative norm, which reflects White Mainstream English!" (n.p.). Baker-Bell (2020) continues that "Teachers, language researchers, educational administrators, public policy theorist, critical race theorists, community activists, parents, high school youth – all need to be involved in the quest for linguistic justice, [and] anti-racist pedagogy…" (p. xv). Writing, pedagogy, and assessment research of all kinds need to work actively to combat racism while promoting social justice, and my work with SCLCs is no different.

To gauge the efficacy of SCLCs' ability to reach social justice goals my research questions asked: Can SCLCs be used as part of an effort to make writing classes more accessible and socially

just? And: How do SCLCs influence the way students write, or the ways they discuss their writing? These questions were present while constructing the initial framework for SCLCs, as I knew I was interested in how students perceived language, and how they made decisions on what kinds of language to use in their work. In addition to writing learning goals, the SCLCs used in my course had students write short descriptions (2-3 sentences) discussing their perceived audience, and the voice, tone, and language that would help them reach this audience. I was not sure how much of an effect this would have on their writing, and I was curious if these questions gave students the opportunity to pause, and think about how and why they are making linguistic choices in their writing process.

To understand these questions, I collected drafts and final versions of student learning contracts. In these documents students needed to define their audience, and the kinds of language they would use to reach this audience. Through SCLCs, I wanted to emphasize the importance of language and make sure students were taking time to consider their linguistic choices. Through my in-class work I made sure to constantly reference language throughout a unit, while asking my students to consider how language functions in their own work. By looking at their sample and final learning contracts I can see how much of a change my daily lessons on language influenced their contracts over time. Examining the change over the course of these drafts can help me understand what additional steps are needed to further emphasize language in my units and help me integrate more effective lessons on language to help SCLCs achieve their social justice goals.

In addition to learning contracts, I also collected student uptake documents to see if and how language factored into their decision making throughout a project. These assignments gave students a lot of freedom to reflect on any aspect of a project that seemed important to them, but in some situations, I took steps to add additional focus on language. For example, in the second unit I had my students complete a personal portfolio. In this project students had to find and analyze a job

listing while also completing a resume, cover letter for said job. In the uptake document for this project, I had students respond to a series of questions in the guise of a job interview, and I specifically asked "What skills do you have, and what skills do you want to improve in the future to get that dream job," and "What writing/communication traits will be important to your future career?" These questions are fairly direct in terms of how language is used in the context of this project. In the future, I may try to be more subtle, but questions and assignments like these were created to help see how I could use SCLCs to push for social justice, specifically linguistic justice, in my classroom.

Collaboration

Collaboration is the next major methodological theme, and collaboration is deeply important to my work with SCLCs. Emphasizing collaboration, and seeing students as equal partners in the research process, is necessary for effective research. With SCLCs I want to make classes more accessible and assessment more equitable for students, but this is a complex task. As an instructor I cannot expect to accomplish my goals singlehandedly or hope to solve the ills of writing assessment without input from students. Students have as much at stake in SCLCs as anyone, and their voices need to be heard. Working directly with students and using their input can help improve SCLCs during the semester, while also influencing future research goals and questions to improve SCLCs. For these reasons, my research needs to be thoroughly collaborative.

The first part of effective collaborative research is centered on seeing students as individuals and acknowledging their unique lived experience. As Cumming-Potvin (2009) notes "sociocultural theory…reflects the view that learning is constructed and negotiated actively through social experiences" (p. 83). To construct writing assessment that works for our students, we first need to understand who our students are. We need to learn what they value, understand that everyone has

different values, and use this to help individualize assessment. Klassen (2020), echoes these themes and reminds us that our:

> students do not come to the lecture room without a history, background or narrative. History, background and narrative influence the academic development of students. If the lecture room is a space of care and belonging, then students' needs can be met, which will result in greater participation. A caring community evokes openness, trust and confidence (p. 4).

Here, we can see Klassen (2020) highlight the importance of our students' individuality, because if we want students to be willing participants in our work, we must acknowledge them as individuals, not research subjects or data points. Gee (2008) continues this trend and reminds us that:

> learners have not had the same [opportunity to learn] just because they have been exposed to the same information or content. The learning and assessment environment must afford them similar capacities of action. A learner for whom certain objects, people, or features of the environment are not affordances, either because the learner cannot perceive their possibilities for action or cannot effect that action, is not being exposed to the same environment as is a learner for whom these objects, people, or features are true affordances open to the learner's developed or developing effectivity (p. 82).

Both Gee (2008) and Klassen (2020) understand the importance of seeing students as individuals. If we fail to see students as individuals, and learn about their unique experiences it is impossible to build the bonds necessary to ensure they feel comfortable participating in the research process.

Seeing students as individuals, and as partners in our work is not limited to sociocultural theories, as many feminists emphasize collaboration as well (Shrewsbury, 1993; Powell, 1999; Ratcliffe, 2005; Given, 2008; Hess-Bieber, 2008; Calafell, 2010; Acosta, 2020). Utilizing feminist approaches to research can help us see our students as individuals and help facilitate a sense of

community. To do this, we can look to the work of Selfe and Hawisher (2012); they noted that research "proceed best when participants forge relationships over time, across conventional spatial and geopolitical boundaries, and around conditions of mutual interest" (p. 37). These conversations, and building a bond through dialogue, represent a key step in effective research. Shrewsbury (1993) notes that feminist research "requires continuous questioning and making assumptions explicit, but it does so in a dialogue aimed not at disproving another person's perspective, nor destroying the validity of an- other's perspective, but at a mutual exploration of explications of diverse experience" (p. 167). Royster and Kirsch (2012) agree as they highlight the importance of "engaging in a dialogue, in an exchange, with the women who are our rhetorical subjects…to understand their words, their visions, their priorities whether and perhaps especially when they differ from our own" (p. 21).

Building this sense of trust is key for effective research. If students are going to be vulnerable, if they are going to offer suggestions and criticisms of how a class operates (especially if said research is focused on their grades) they need to feel they are in a safe place, one where their opinions will be valued. Calitz (2017) highlights the importance of building bonds as she notes that "According to interview data, participants valued opportunities to be involved in the decision-making, and consequently felt frustrated by the absence of consultation…" (p. 159). If our research doesn't actively invite students to participate and show them their opinions are valued, they will shut down. We can discuss how our research aims to improve education for their and their peers, but these will not resonate with students if we fail to demonstrate a commitment to their opinions.

Building off the ideas from Selfe and Hawisher (2012), I made sure to periodically check in with students, typically at the beginning of class to engage in casual conversations about the class, asking their thoughts on their work, and the SCLC. By making the effort to have casual conversations, to get to know students' experiences and long-term goals, I am better able to assist

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them in reaching said goals. These conversations were important to help not only create a sense of community, but to also make changes mid-semester to improve the quality of the class, and the contract. By allowing for open negotiation, and adapting to student needs, I was able to demonstrate how their input was valued.

For example, in my courses I integrate a lot of individual writing, and videos into daily lessons. These writing sessions and videos help to break up class and allow students the opportunity to get their work done in class. While this is usually a non-issue, teaching during a global pandemic changes thing. My classroom was small, had limited desks so social distancing was not an option, and had only a single window that only opened 45°. With this in mind, we had a discussion, and collectively agreed that these previous in-class assignments could be done outside in class in safer environments[17].

In addition to these conversations, students' answers to my survey will also help influence my work with SCLCs. In this survey I ask students: *How did using contract grading help you in this course? How did contract grading make this course more difficult?* And*, Reflecting on your time in this course, do you prefer traditional grading or contract grading?* These questions, and the survey in a general sense, gives students the opportunity to discuss how the course functioned, if SCLCs worked for them as individuals, and prompted them to discuss how SCLCs work or didn't work for them.

As my work with SCLCs continues, collaboration is key. The feedback I received on this survey will influence my research goals and contract design for future semester, and this cycle will

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[17] This is just a single example, but these are the kinds of conversations I would have in class to ask for student feedback and, when appropriate, integrate their changes into my course. More detailed examples will be described in the following chapters.

continue. Taking time to demonstrate your commitment to collaboration is important to help learn about what works, and what I might need to change to improve the quality of SCLCs.

Reflexivity

The final methodological theme for my project is reflexivity. England (1994) defines the research practice of reflexivity as a "self-critical sympathetic introspection and the selfconscious [sic] analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher" (p. 244). Through reflexive practices we better understand "how power comes to bear on the research process and how we reflect on our position within the research endeavor" (Leavy & Harris, 2019, p. 103). The process of being reflexive is important for research as it asks us to look back at the work we are doing, providing us an opportunity to remind ourselves of our initial goals, and make sure we are doing what is necessary to live up the methodological standards that initially influenced our research questions and goals.

Reflexivity is an important aspect of conducting human-subject research because conducting qualitative research over the course of a seventeen-week semester is a challenging endeavor. From developing research questions, to drafting IRB proposals, to collecting and analyzing data we are looking at months, if not years of work depending on the scope of one's research. Over the course of a semester life happens. It can be easy to lose focus, to forget some of the principals we had guiding our work weeks earlier. A reflexive approach is valuable as while we may have the methodological principals and ideologies at the forefront of our practice as we start research, we need to periodically pause and make sure we are living up to the themes, goals, and principals of our selected methodology.

Taking time to consider where we are in the research process is a key aspect of many feminist scholars (Shrewsbury, 1993; England, 1994; Kirsch, 1999; McKee and Porter, 2010; Schell, 2010). From a feminist perspective, McKee and Porter (2010) highlight this point, and note that research needs to foster a "critical consciousness about one's own position, gender, and status are

key features of feminist thinking. Feminist researchers are continuously attuned to the dynamics of power in all phases of a research project" (p. 115). Shrewsbury (1993) muses further on this point as she notes that feminism

> is engaged teaching/learning – engaged with self in a continuing reflective process; engaged actively with the material being studied; engaged with others in a struggle to get beyond our sexism and racism and classism and homophobia and other destructive hatreds and to work together to enhance our knowledge; engaged with the com- munity, with traditional organizations, and with movements for social change (p. 166).

Both McKee & Porter (2010) and Shrewsbury (1993) understand that research is a delicate process. As the people carrying out research, it can be easy to let our own ideas and interpretations swallow up our research and results. We must always remember that we are not alone in research. We are working with, and for students. A sense of reflexivity is important to keep us grounded and remind us of our methodological goals. Acosta (2020) warns that "deep reflexivity…requires one to go beyond acknowledging our own social positions or how that position impacts the research we produce," (p. 33) and when we engage in reflexivity we need to dig deep, to really understand the problems we are facing.

Shrewsbury (1993) and McKee and Porter (2010) make important distinctions in their definition of reflexivity. For these feminist scholars, reflexivity is a critical act. It is not simple reflection over what we have done, but an opportunity to check in, to make sure we are working to achieve our goals. From a social justice perspective Teo, Gao, & Sheivari (2014) warn us that "reflexivity may allow the conditions for avoiding the narcissistic trap of adoring reflexivity for its own sake…" (p. 76). Teo, Gao, & Sheivari (2014) clarify this point as they note that reflexivity is "intended to inspire informed action in social justice work" (p. 66). This reflexive practice is aimed at ensuring we are achieving our goals.

This is particularly important to the research I am conducting, as there is a sizable power imbalance from my positionality, and my role as an instructor researching at writing assessment. To make sure I am living up to my methodological goals, to make sure that I am not using my privilege to direct my research to the results I want, reflexivity is critical. Over the course of my research project, I engaged in multiple reflexive processes including autoethnography and memo writing to interrogate my actions and hold myself accountable for teaching.

Throughout the semester I wrote contemporaneous memos immediately after class to document what happened on a given day. In my memos I kept track of how discussions went, what unexpected topics/responses came up, how my classes responded to material, and what questions they had based on the material, the assignments. Taking the time after every class to keep notes and write memos with ideas for improving future classes was necessary and fruitful. As this project spanned the course of an entire semester, I needed written documentation of my actions to keep track of what happened throughout the course. This was not only necessary to remember fine details, but to also make sure I was living up to the goals set forth by my guiding methodological principals.

Informing Future Studies

Another facet of reflexivity is taking the time to reflect on what we've learned and consider how it will influence future research. While I have and will continue to argue that SCLCs are an ideal way to improve writing assessment in this moment, I also understand that this approach to assessment has significant room for growth, and future development to meet the ever-changing needs of writing assessment. Looking at the history of the field, we can see waves come and go. Almost two decades ago Yancey (1999) outlined three substantial waves in in assessment that took the following forms:

the first wave (1950.1970), writing assessment took the form of objective tests; during the second (1970.1986), it took the form of the holistically scored essay; and during the current wave, the third (1986. present), it has taken the form of portfolio assessment and of programmatic assessment (p. 484).

While each of these waves were seen as state-of-the-art assessment methods in their time, the field has since shifted, and will shift again. As more scholars research any method for assessment new, exciting nuances will manifest, and the field will gradually shift to new options; as my research continues, I will use these shifts and new discoveries to improve SCLCs to account for these changes and meet the needs of the evolving field of assessment. I know the research surrounding SCLCs will grow, and our use of learning contracts will continue to evolve. It is important to reflect on the work we're doing and use that as the foundation for new scholarship. As Kirsh (1999) notes "we must use this knowledge to inform future projects. Acknowledge the limitations of and contradictions inherent in research data as well as alternative interpretations of that data" (p. 5). McKee and Porter (2009) make a subtle, but important amendment to this train of thought as they note that "For feminist research the welfare and betterment of research participants, both collectively as groups and as individuals, are paramount, taking precedence over research findings, over methodological considerations, over disciplinary or institutional values" (p. 165). This research is built on a foundation of helping students, and my reflexive practices give me an opportunity to reflect on that and serves as a reminder that my research must always come second to the service of students.

For example, in my project I collected data in the form of students' uptake documents. Uptake documents offer students a chance to discuss their work, what went right, what went wrong, and what changes they might make going forward. In these documents, I was able to code and collect information that informed where units and the SCLC fell short of my goals. For example, in

unit 1 students were still uneasy and unsure of what their learning goals should look like. After finishing this unit, I made an increased effort to include more genre research activities so students could examine more examples and get more ideas of what kind of work and skills they might include in their contracts. This proved effective, and using the examples provided by students I will integrate more genre research sessions, and pre-unit devoted entirely to contracts in future versions of this course.

Conclusion

Participatory research is an invaluable practice, as it offers us a new perspective on our teaching. Dedicating time to researching our courses provides us a platform to articulate the pedagogical goals we have for our courses and allows us an opportunity to reflect and analyze what works, what doesn't work, and what needs to change to better match our practices with the theories and principals we value as educators are all important steps in refining our pedagogies; and involving students as participants in our research helps us to see and integrate their ideas and innovations into our future teaching practice. To start this work, a strong methodological foundation is an important first step for the research process, and throughout this chapter I discussed the theories that provided the infrastructure to my research on SCLC. Working with students and for students is an important aspect of my scholarly identity, so as my career progresses, I see myself improving, expanding, and making continual use of the methodologies I have outlined in this chapter. While the research I have started, and the data I have collected are excellent starting points, as my dissertation continues, my next chapter will be dedicated to analyzing and interpreting the data I have collected and using this data to inform the design of my future work.

CHAPTER IV: DATA, DATA EVERYWHERE

Adaptability and evolution are necessary features of effective writing assessment. Though our assessment practices may be crafted with the best supporting literature and theory available it is important to keep an open mind, interrogate our practices, and discover what changes may be necessary to improve the quality of our classes. I had adaptability and evolution in mind as I designed the initial draft of student-centric learning contracts (SCLCs) and as my research on contract grading has progressed, the contracts I have used have grown from simple labor-based contracts to a hybrid of labor and learning models. These changes were instituted as I learned more about the problems[18] facing writing assessment, and I added sections on audience, language, and student-generated learning goals to better address these issues in SCLCs. Though I strongly believe in the pedagogical potential of the current version of SCLCs, I know taking the time to research my practices, and student reactions to these contracts, will help provide new insights, and ways to further improve this method of assessment.

To better understand how SCLCs function in the classroom it is necessary to conduct research and investigate my own pedagogical practices. As such, I created a study that was approved by Illinois State University's (ISU) Institutional Review Board (IRB). For this study I collected data during the fall semester of 2021 where I taught two courses that utilized SCLCs as a method for writing assessment. Throughout this chapter I will discuss the respondents, data set, and data collection process. After outlining these aspects of my study, I will then offer a discussion on my research questions, the codes built, and an analysis of my findings.

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[18] Including the problems of access to technology, learning aversion, and white language supremacy outlined in chapter 2.

English 145.13

The data collected for this project came from two sections of English 145.13, Writing in Business and Government Organizations; these courses were taught in-person during the fall semester of 2021. English 145.13 is part of the first-year composition sequence at ISU and is structured to help business majors[19] improve the writing skills necessary for success in the professional world. English 145.13 classes are capped at 18 students per section, and a total of 36 students were enrolled in my two sections of 145.13. While I have multiple semesters worth of experience teaching 145.13 this semester was unique for multiple reasons. In addition to this being the first time I taught 145.13 using SCLCs, the fall of 2021 also coincided with a substantial spike in cases of Covid-19, which had a tremendous impact on my pedagogy and research practices.

I taught my sections of business writing from a very pragmatic perspective, as I encouraged students to use this class to research potential careers and experiment with the genres and kinds of writing they may encounter in the professional world. To help students research potential careers I taught three major units. The first unit was focused on research methods and students completed an annotated bibliography as a final deliverable. For this annotated bibliography students needed to find 3-5 sources on a kairotic issue in their field. In addition to this bibliography, students also wrote a 1-page memo where they discussed how they might apply this research to other projects, or professional development opportunities.

The second unit of the course was a personal portfolio. For this project students had to find a posting for a job that could reasonably apply to after graduation. After researching and analyzing their posting, students then created a 2-page corporate culture analysis. In this analysis students researched their company, examined various materials that highlighted the company's business

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[19] And undeclared students with potential interest in business.

philosophy. Using this information students would then create a resume and cover letter based on what they learned about a job and company.

The final unit of the semester focused on digital spaces as students designed a web site. This project examined how digital tools influence our rhetorical decisions and gave students the option for more creativity. Most students used this site to build a personal website, but some students with entrepreneurial ambitions used this project to create a website for a current or future business.

Respondents and Data Collection

The process of soliciting student participation in my research took place over the entire semester. The discussion of my project started during our first class as I introduced myself, the broad goals of our course, and informed students that I was conducting research for my dissertation. This initial discussion of my project was quite short, as there was a lot of material to cover on the first day of class. During the second class I went into more detail with students as I fleshed out what SCLCs were, and how they would function in our class. I also discussed my research goals, and how their patriation in my study could directly benefit them, and future students as well.

I informed students that by participating in this study students would help me better understand how assessment shapes and influences the way students write. Based on my research from chapters 1 and 2 I strongly believe writing assessment can cause myriad problems for students including learning aversion and general apathy. Additionally, writing assessment can also cause deeper problems by punishing students that lack access to technology, and force students to conform to white language standards. I emphasized that with student input I would be able to work to fight these issues, improve the quality of assessment for this semester, and in future semesters as well; this discussion was designed to encourage students to participate in this study.

Taking time to discuss my project with students was an important feature of the methodological foundations of this research project. My work researching SCLCs was, and will

continue to be, a collaborative endeavor. The goal of SCLCs is to work with students, not for students, to help improve the quality of writing assessment; I cannot achieve these goals alone. I wanted students to feel comfortable sharing their work, and to also feel engaged in the research process. Selfe and Hawisher (2012) highlight the importance of building bonds with students as they note research "proceed best when participants forge relationships over time…and around conditions of mutual interest," (p. 37) and that is true to my project as well. My work on assessment is explicitly designed to improve the quality of writing assessment for students, so students have a lot at stake in this research as they will directly influence future drafts and researcher questions for SCLCs. While trying to build a rapport with students is something I have consistently valued over my teaching career, I will admit it was more difficult than ever during this challenging semester due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Covid-19 and Research Challenges

Though many classes at ISU returned to an in-person format in the fall of 2021, the Covid-19 pandemic was still raging. The summer of 2021 began to show signs of optimism in relation to Covid, but that began to fade as the start of the fall semester coincided with a significant spike in cases from the Delta variant. The CDC (2021) notes the "Delta variant was more infectious and was leading to increased transmissibility when compared with other variants, even in some vaccinated individuals" (n.p.). The CDC (2021) elaborated on the dangers of the Delta variant by noting it "is highly contagious, more than 2x as contagious as previous variants" (n.p.). In an attempt to mitigate some of the dangers of teaching in person, students, faculty, and staff were required to wear masks at all times while inside campus buildings. Though masks were absolutely necessary, they represented the bare minimum of safety protocols as ISU's administration neglected to make the safe, effective Covid-19 vaccines mandatory for students, faculty, and staff. Masks, while necessary, also gave class a much more impersonal and surreal feeling, and made it significantly harder to build

a strong rapport with students. Walking through the halls and into classrooms with nearly everyone wearing masks served as a constant reminder that this was not a *typical* semester, and we were all placed in a precarious situation by returning to in-person classes during a substantial increase in infections.

The implications of Covid and Delta necessitated significant changes to my pedagogical approaches. I was teaching both sections of 145.13 in 250B, one of the smallest classrooms in the 250 suites[20]. Per a university document affixed to one of the tables in the classroom (see figure 1), 250B is capable of holding six people while adhering to the CDC's (2021) 6' social distancing guidelines; these guidelines were ignored as both sections were filled to capacity. Given the layout and size of the room, nothing could be done to provide extra space for students as every seat was accounted for. Having this document affixed to a table sent mixed messages to students. This document showed students that ISU was aware of the steps necessary to help ensure safety, but also showed that ISU was actively disregarded these safety precautions to bring students back to in-person education.

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[20] Though based on conversations with students far from the smallest classroom on campus.
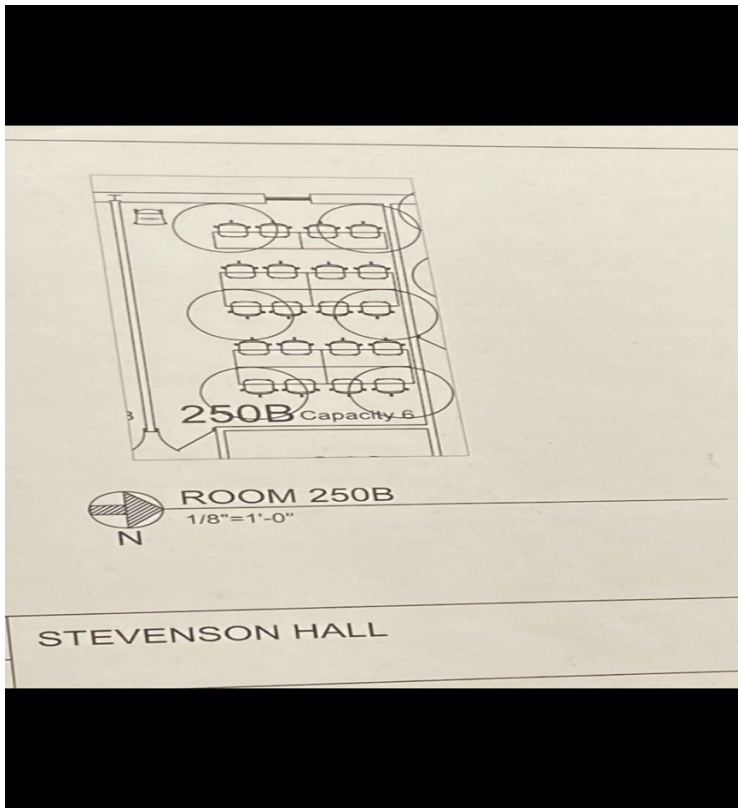
Figure 1: Stevenson 250B seating chart with social distancing guidelines

The small size of the 250B was not the only concerning feature of this classroom, as 250B only has a single window. While this window can be opened to allow some fresh air into the classroom, it is only capable of being opened at a very slight angle. While the minimal ventilation offered by this window is better than the alternative, it is not capable of providing adequate air flow for the majority of students in the room; unless you are sitting in one of the four chairs directly by the window there is very little air circulation. Again, the CDC (2021) recommends bringing in as much fresh air as possible to help mitigate transmission, but that layout of the room, and the reality of teaching in a cold weather environment, made that impossible for a large portion of the semester.

To help account for overcrowding, a lack of ventilation, and to try to ensure the safety of students, I made some substantial changes to my day-to-day teaching practices. One of the first decisions I made was to cut down on almost all group work. In addition to cutting down on group

work, I also reduced the time we spent in class. My sections of 145.13 were scheduled to run for 50 minutes, but in practice I typically used around 20-25 minutes of the allotted class time. During the time I cut from class I would typically have students complete small assignments or engage in group discussions, but I elected to have students complete these tasks outside of 250B in safer environments. Though these pedagogical approaches have been effective for me in the past, I could not in good conscience continue these practices as they would put students in additional danger of contracting Covid.

While I took additional steps to guard against Covid, the highly infectious nature of this disease made student cases inevitable. I had several students miss class time due to Covid, and I had to cancel multiple classes for my own health reasons as well. Though I am fully vaccinated, and received a booster shot during the semester, I was still in close contact with hundreds of people each day I was on campus. As such, I made sure to be tested for Covid every week. Even though I tested negative throughout the semester, there were multiple occasions where I thought I had contracted Covid and canceled class out of an abundance of caution while I awaited results. In addition to the stress created by Covid, the poverty wages ISU pays its graduate students nearly resulted in our union calling for a strike several weeks into the semester. These stressors greatly affected my performance, and my ability to build the kinds of bond with students that make up a key part of my research methodology.

Data Collection and Data Set

In spite of the obstacles created by Covid, students were still very willing to participate in my study, and I was able to collect a significant amount of data for this project. The collection of data started during the final week of the semester. During the last full class meeting I handed out the Qualtrics-hosted survey link and informed consent document (Appendix B) to students. Prior to handing out the informed consent document and survey link, I reiterated the goals of my study,

outlined how students' work would be used, and discussed how their contributions would be beneficial to them and future students[21]. The informed consent document also noted that students would not be identifiable in this project – as this chapter continues any students mentioned by name have been provided with pseudonyms.

In addition to discussing the goals of my project, I also emphasized that these informed consent documents would not be accessed until the end of the semester, and after final grades have been posted. To ensure this, informed consent documents were collected and turned in with instructor evaluations to the English department office. This step was necessary to reassure students that their willingness to participate in this study would not affect their grade whatsoever.

Finally, the informed consent document asked students what documents, if any, they wished to contribute to my project. Students were given the option to contribute all of their work, none of their work, or select individual pieces of their work to be collected. Out of the 36 students enrolled in these courses 25 returned the informed consent document. Of the 25 students that returned this document 20 agreed to have all their documents examined, 3 agreed to have some of their documents collected, and 2 declined to participate. In addition to the 23 students that consented to having their work collected, 12 students completed the survey.

This survey consisted of 8 questions – 1 yes/no question asking students if they previously participated in any course that used contract grading, and 7 short-answer questions that focused on how the use of SCLCs affected their work throughout the semester. This survey was designed to give a more holistic view of how SCLCs functioned, and to provide students with a platform to discuss how this approach to assessment affected and influenced their approach to writing over the course of the entire semester.

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[21] These topics were also expressed in writing on the informed consent document.

Data Points

Collecting a variety of data points was important for this study. Researching writing assessment is a complex task, and no single data point is capable of providing the entire story of how SCLCs functioned in these classes. With this in mind, I structured this project to collect multiple pieces of data over the course of the entire semester to gain a more holistic view of how SCLCs influenced student work. These documents included:

- Learning contract drafts (for unit 2 and 3)

- Final learning contracts (for all 3 units)

- Progress report memos (for units 2 and 3)

- Final unit projects (for all 3 units)

- Uptake documents (for units 1 and 2)

- Genre research projects (for all 3 units)

- Quizzes (2 total)

- Forum Posts (1 total)

It should be noted that while I collected a variety of documents, there are some documents that will not be discussed in this chapter. That is not to say this data is without value, but some situations made it impossible to code pieces of data. For example, genre research documents and quizzes were two data points that I collected throughout the semester. In practice, these assignments were done in small groups throughout the semester. As these groups consisted of a mix of students who consented and did not consent to their work being collected, they had to be disregarded for this project.

Additionally, while some documents, including uptake documents and progress report memos, provided rich data and will help influence future studies, they were cut from discussion in

this chapter. Some of these pieces did not strongly connect to any particular research questions I had for this round of research, but they will still be saved to help inform future research questions and studies. In addition to being saved for future projects, a lot of data collected from these pieces have substantial thematic overlap with other documents and commenting on the same themes multiple times would not add significant insight to the data collected here.

Coding Practice

After final grades had been posted, I was able to begin the coding process. In total, documents from 23 students were collected. These 23 students contributed 218 individual pieces of data; these documents are broken down in more detail in table 1 below.

Type of assignment	Documents collected	Notes
Unit 1 learning contract	20	43 individual learning goals
Unit 1 uptake	16	
Unit 1 final	23	
Unit 2 learning contracts	18	41 individual learning goals
Unit 2 progress report	18	
Unit 2 final	23	
Unit 2 uptake	20	
Unit 3 learning contracts	20	46 individual learning goals
Unit 3 progress reports	16	
Unit 3 final	23	
Forum posts	21	
Totals	218	130 total learning goals

Table 1: Data collection totals

After these documents were collected, they were then transferred into individual Word documents and broken up by assignment for coding. As I analyzed the data, I made use of two different approaches to coding data, opening coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 2014) and a priori coding (Saldaña, 2013; Blair, 2015). Both of these approaches to coding allowed me to sort data based on broader themes, and to draw conclusion from my data.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) define open coding as the process of "Breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data. At the same time, one is qualifying those concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions" (p. 195). Blair (2015) continues that "Open coding involves applying codes that are derived from the text (emergent codes)" (p. 17). An open approach to coding data made a lot of sense for my project, as even though I have ideas of how SCLCs function in these classes, I did not want my own understanding of these practices to overly influence my analysis of how students were performing and perceiving SCLCs throughout the semester. SCLCs are designed with students, not for students, so it was important for me to allow the coding process to make visible, as much as that is possible, students' practices, perspectives, and stories about understanding and using SCLCs. As Charmaz (2014) notes, "Initial coding should stick closely to the data. Try to see actions in each segment of the data rather than apply pre-existing categories to the data," (p. 116) and as I went through the process of coding my data, I did my best to adhere to this advice and let the data speak for itself as much as that is possible.

To do this, to let the data *speak for itself*, I took a methodical approach to coding. I looked over all the data collected for a particular assignment, and as I looked through the data, I took notes and wrote memos to keep track of what themes, concepts, and key words I noticed emerging from my data. By analyzing each piece of data multiple times, I was able to let codes grow organically from the data. Taking multiple passes at coding also let me see how consistent my codes were, and allowed me to cut, combine, or refine codes when necessary. For example, during an initial round of coding of unit 1 learning contracts I created individual codes for grammar, formatting, and sentence structure. While each of these codes were relatively common, I felt these codes worked better as a collective under the code Style & Mechanics.

While open coding was important for my analysis, it was not the only approach to coding data in this project. A priori coding was also used throughout this project. Blair (2015) notes that a

priori coding is a practice "where codes are created beforehand and applied to the text (p. 16)." In this project I often utilized a priori coding after initial rounds of open coding were complete. The rounds of open coding were done first, in an effort to let the codes emerge organically. After examining these open codes, I was left with a very broad picture of the data and a substantial number of codes. A priori codes helped me break down these large collections of data into even more manageable sections, and to draw conclusions from broader collections of data.

For example, as I analyzed learning contracts, I coded each individual learning goal created by students. While this provided rich data on its own, a priori coding helped make this data more manageable for specific research questions. One of my research questions is explicitly focused on expansive learning. Using a priori codes made sense for breaking down learning goals into Definite and Expansive goals to draw a clearer conclusion for this specific research question. In another instance, while breaking down student success with SCLCs, I created the codes Progress+ and Progress- to help break down how well students were able to make process learning goals. A priori coding was useful in these instances, and the process of creating these codes will be discussed in more detail as this chapter continues.

Data Analysis: Survey

When I started this project, I was looking for ways to change how writing assessment functions in a classroom to improve the quality of education for future students. From an academic perspective I know writing assessment can be an incredibly problematic practice. However, to begin to improve the quality of assessment for students it is important to get their perspective on writing assessment, how it functions in praxis, and how it influences their work. As I begin to break down and analyze the data collected for this project the first research question I will consider is *What are students' attitudes towards assessment, and are these attitudes affected by the use of SCLCs?*

To find out how students view assessment, and how SCLCs potentially changed these views, I looked at several questions from my survey and used open coding to begin to draw conclusions for this research question. The data in the following sections was organized using simple a priori coding to break most responses into yes/no positive/negative answers, but some answered were more detailed than others, and required additional rounds of open coding to document deeper themes; these themes will be discussed over the following pages. These codes are broken down in table 2 below.

Survey Question	Yes/Positive	No/Negative	Notes
Have you ever been enrolled in a course that used contract grading	4 (≈33%)	8 (≈67%)	
Did you find contract grading confusing?	2 (≈17%)	10 (≈83%)	Yes responses coded further.
Did Contracts Make this Class More Difficult	0	12 (100%)	No responses coded further.
Reflecting on your time in this course, do you prefer traditional grading or contract grading?	12[22] (100%)	0	Positive responses coded further.

Table 2: Select survey responses

Though contract grading, in a variety of forms, has been utilized by instructors for decades, it is still a relatively uncommon practice (Yancey, 1999; Elbow & Belanoff, 2009; Cowan, 2020). To understand how students view assessment, and to get a baseline of students' experiences with contracts, the first question of my survey was quite simple as it asked: *Prior to taking this course, have you ever been enrolled in a course that used contract grading?* From the 12 responding students 4 (≈33%) had previous experience with contract grading while 8 (≈67%) had not. I was honestly surprised by how

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[22] For this response, Yes/Positive indicates that students would prefer contract grading over traditional assessment.

many students had experience with contract grading, but given the small sample size even 1 response has the potential to shift the data by around 10%.

As many students were new to contract grading, I was quite eager to code responses to the survey question "Did the use of grading contracts change your approaches to writing this semester?" As I was coding this question, I was not sure what exactly to expect. This question was broad and gave students a large amount of leeway for their answers. As I analyzed the data, I was hoping it would be useful to generate future research questions, but I soon realized some of the responses to this question had an unexpected connection to my research question *Can SCLCs be used as part of an effort to make writing classes more accessible and socially just?*

Before moving on, it is important to note that while the majority of responses were favorable to SCLCs, they were not unanimous. One student (≈8%) was indifferent to SCLCs stating that "No, it did not change my approach, I was writing as if a traditional ABC grading system was used." This perspective is understandable, as though our class used SCLCs, students still needed to do quality work in order to pass, and final grades were still issued on an ABC scale. While this response was somewhat indifferent to SCLCs, the positive responses provided deeper insight.

A total of 11 students (≈92%) stated yes, SCLCs did change their approach to writing in this course, but these responses were divided into two different codes. Seven respondents did not elaborate further on what changes they made. These responses were typically one-word answers including some variation of *yes*. While it was promising to see that SCLCs did change their approach to writing, without further elaboration it is hard to draw any substantive conclusions from these results. Fortunately, the other four students that responded yes also provided some explanation on what affect SCLCs had on their work, and their approaches to writing.

The following responses are where we can see how SCLCs can create a more equitable classroom. In these responses students highlighted multiple themes that show how SCLCs allowed

them to pursue the kinds of goals that were important to them. One student stated that using SCLCs "allowed me to focus on what I needed to improve upon, rather than generic classwide [sic] goals." On a similar note, a second student said SCLCs allowed them to be "more focused on [their] goals rather than the goals of a rubric." These responses are some of the more promising pieces of praise for SCLCs. Rubrics, as discussed in chapters 1 and 2, can be problematic, and coerce students to conform to a style of writing that may not have value for them[23]. In these responses we can see students discuss the importance of articulating their own learning goals. The use of SCLCs for this student gave them the freedom to pursue goals that were important to them.

In addition to helping students build goals that reflect their values, other students made comments that reflect the linguistic freedom offered by SCLCs. One student stated that they "felt more comfortable with using my own writing style as often when I know I'm going to be graded for using a certain style I'm not comfortable with." Finally, another student said that SCLCs enabled them to "write more freely and accurately," given their unique rhetorical goals, audience, and tone. Though the responses to this question showcase SCLCs potential for equity and linguistic justice, there is still more that can be done to actively promote inclusivity, and I will revisit this theme at the end of the chapter.

Are SCLCs Confusing?

As a majority of students are new to contracts, this has the potential to cause pedagogical problems. While SCLCs are designed to increase student agency, that can also be a difficult experience for students as building their own learning goals can be a daunting task. Though I believe in the theoretical potential of SCLCs, it was important to see if these contracts put too much additional pressure on students. Pragmatism, making sure things work properly as intended, is a key part of my methodology. Pragmatically speaking, it does not matter how much theoretical value

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[23] Value beyond learning to mimic a style to earn a high grade.

SCLCs potentially have, if students have trouble understanding how they function, or they prove to be too difficult to comprehend, they have little value in praxis. Thankfully, the data shows that students found SCLCs quite simple. My survey asked students *Did you find contract grading confusing? If so, what about the contract was confusing?* In response to this question, 10 students (≈83%) responded either with "No," or some straightforward variation of that response. While 2 students (≈17%) responded that the contracts were a bit confusing, their responses were also quite promising.

When discussing the difficulties they had with SCLCs, one student noted the contract was confusing "because I was unfamiliar with contract grading, I did not fully understand what was expected of me early on in the semester." Similarly, another student said that though they were "confused at first…once [they] saw how it was done it was simple to understand." These responses made a lot of sense, and after reviewing my personal journal entries I realized I spent a lot of class time discussing the theoretical value of contracts, but I needed to include more time discussing how contracts function. I made this note in one of my own personal journal entries, and took time to think about what corrections I could make to ameliorate this issue.

Class Difficulty: Emergent Codes

While the data suggests SCLCs were relatively easy for students to understand, it is also important to consider if these contracts made classes more difficult for students. Returning to the theme of pragmatism, if our assessment methods make courses too difficult for students, changes must be made. While there is nothing wrong with making a course rigorous, I am firmly against pedagogical approaches that make classes difficult for the sake of being difficult. As discussed in chapters 1 and 2, learning aversion is a major problem with writing assessment, and classes with unwarranted difficulties have the potential to contribute to this problem.

With difficulty in mind, my survey asked students *How Did Contracts Make this Class More Difficult?* The results to this question were very promising as all 12 respondents indicated that SCLCs

did not drastically increase the difficulty of the course. After seeing 12 positive responses I used open coding to break these responses into three different categories: *it did not make class more difficult, it made class easier, and difficult but rewarding.*

The first emergent code was *SCLCs did not make the class more difficult,* and the responses of 6 students (50%) fell into this code. Of these 6 students, 2 responded simply with "It didn't," and the other 4 responses were slight variants of that straightforward comment. These responses included "I had to do what I said I was going to do other than that it wasn't hard." This comment in particular was very insightful, as it demonstrates that students feel SCLCs give them more ownership over their learning, without making the course more difficult. While it was promising to see that SCLCs did not make the course more difficult, the next two codes showed some of the benefits of SCLCs.

The next code was *it made class easier.* This code came up once (≈8%), as a student responded with "it was actually easier," using SCLCs over other forms of assessment. While this was good to see, this student did not elaborate any further on how the use of SCLCs made class easier for them. Fortunately, the final code, *difficult but rewarding,* provided richer data.

The code *difficult, but rewarding,* was found in 5 responses (≈42%). This code came to be after reading one response that stated "It made the course more difficult due to having to actually reflect on what I needed to work on as an individual, and made me apply myself more," and this was promising to read. While the student noted that SCLCs made the course a bit more difficult, it was the good kind of difficult. This response showed that SCLCs encouraged deeper thinking about what and why we are learning. In lieu of *going through the motions*, SCLCs gave this student a platform to think about what was important to them as a learner.

This was not an isolated response; I found in multiple responses as another student noted SCLCs made them "think on how to personalize learning goals and feedback." Finally, a third student noted that while SCLCs made class more difficult, it was because they had to "change my

mindset and remember I was taking the course for my benefit not simply as another requirement."

This response was particularly exciting, as it can be difficult to get students to really engage with

material in a survey course. Here, the student noted that SCLCs really changed their perspective, and

allowed them to really engage with material because they saw how they could benefit from this style

of assessment. These responses showed the potential of SCLCs, as students seemed to genuinely

enjoy the additional challenge of creating their own learning goals, and this is reflected by responses

to the last question of my survey.

Student Preferences Traditional Assessment vs. Contract Grading

The final question of my survey asked students *Reflecting on your time in this course, do you prefer*

traditional grading or contract grading? As with other questions, the results here were quite positive. All 12

respondents said they had at least a slight preference for contract grading, these 12 responses were

broken down further using open coding and three variations of positive responses emerged from

this round of coding.

Seven (≈58%) responded with either *Contract* or *Contract Grading* without additional

explanation. Four students (≈33%) were positive, but indifferent with responses including "Either

or works fine for me," and "It depends on the course but generally I prefer contract grading." The

final respondent was quite positive about the experience and noted that they "prefer contract

grading, it gave an abundant amount of freedom and made me feel more at ease in completing

assignments."

These survey questions played an important role in helping me understand *What are students'*

attitudes towards assessment, and are these attitudes affected by the use of SCLCs? The responses from this

survey were generally positive, and showed encouraging signs that students had a positive view of

SCLCs as an assessment method, and in many cases had a stated preference for this approach to

assessment. Understanding this question was important for my project, as SCLCs need to be built

on a solid foundation. If the results were different, and students showed a great deal of dissatisfaction with SCLCs, wholesale changes would be necessary.

While these survey responses indicate that SCLCs improved the quality of this class for students, it important to dig deeper into other pieces of data to substantiate these results. Transitioning now from my survey responses, I will examine the learning contracts students created for this course. These contracts, and the learning goals created, will provide more details on how these contracts influenced the way students write.

SCLCs, Student Learning Goals, and Expansive Learning

While the survey section of my data provided some insights on how students view assessment, and how SCLCs functioned over the course of the semester, I also wanted to learn how these contracts influence the day-to-day writing practices of students. With this in mind, one of the most important research questions I had for this study was *Do SCLCs promote expansive learning?*

To tackle this question, I began by analyzing the learning goals students created for their individual unit learning contracts. These learning contracts seemed like an obvious place to start, as they outlined what kinds of concepts, ideas, and skills students hoped to learn during a unit. Using open coding, I reviewed every student's learning goals multiple times and ended up with 7 unique codes for student learning goals. The codes, as well as a brief description of each code, will be outlined over the following pages. After creating these codes, I went through every learning goal to see how many times each code occurred, and the results are listed below in table 3.

Code	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Total
Writer Research Identity (WRI)	8	6	8	22
Writing in the World: WITW	12	4	19	35
Creativity	1	0	4	5
Critical thinking/reading	4	12	2	14
Research	9	5	0	14
Doing the Thing (DTT)	9	8	6	23
Mechanics	5	6	8	19

Table 3: Emergent codes for learning goals

Emergent Codes

Writer Researcher Identity (WRI) is one of the core learning outcomes of the writing program at Illinois State University – Isuwriting.com (n.d.) notes that WRI "means you are able to think beyond just acquiring skills and begin to understand how all of your skills (and the skills you haven't yet acquired) change what you can and can't do as a writer" (n.p.). When reviewing learning goals, I noticed consistent references to WRI as many students were interested in examining the intersection of their own personal beliefs and the work they were looking to do in the future.

For example, in unit 1 we see two students directly mention how effective research skills can help them better understand their role as writers in their field. In Tony's unit 1 learning contract he stated "This class seems useful when it comes to writing and researching papers. I need to take this serious and actually learn about potential careers for my future." Echoing the same themes Janice notes that

> I want to learn more about my field of study and how I will fit in. I never really had the chance to research exactly what I am majoring in and I am excited to learn about the benefits of social media marketing as well as learn more on how to market properly on social media so I can use my skills to my advantage.

Comments like this were quite common across all units as many students wanted to use this course to contemplate their place, and how their role as a writer will manifest in the professional world.

In a similar vein to WRI, the next code created was *Writing in the World* (WITW). WITW was created after I noticed many students had learning goals focused on how their writing will function in the future. With these learning goals, students were often interested in the long-term trajectory of their work, and how their work would need to grow and evolve to meet the needs of their professional goals. This is similar to the kind of expansive learning outlined by Engstrom & Sannino (2010) as they described expansive learning as "learning in which the learners are involved in constructing and implementing a radically new, wider and more complex object and concept for their activity" (p. 2) Goals coded as WITW are exemplified, by Johnathan, who noted during our unit 3 that he wanted

> to be able to understand the tools needed to succeed in my future profession. I think it is important to be familiar with that because it will make the process smoother and would allow me to better understand this profession.

Goals where students want to learn how their work will function outside of 145.13 were coded as WITW. While they are looking to gain the technical skill of learning to build a website, they are also thinking ahead about how their website will work in the professional world, and what steps they can take to improve their writing in the world.

The code of *Creativity* was created in response to unit 3 learning contracts. In this unit we spent a lot of time discussing how various forms of media and modes of communication interact in digital spaces. These digital spaces gave students a lot of freedom in terms of how things were designed and structured, and as such a significant number of students mentioned creativity as a learning goal. In her learning contract, Barbra emphasizes creativity as she wrote

The next goal I have is to be creative. I wanted this to be one of my goals because in this class we have the freedom to be creative and use our knowledge to do so. I want to think outside the box and create a website people might've not seen or heard of before

Barbra was not alone in focusing on creativity, as Joey also noted that he wanted to use this project to examine how to "Make my website creative and neat," and these overt references to creativity were common enough to warrant the creation of this code.

As 145.13 is a writing course, part of that includes emphasizing *Critical Thinking/Reading* (CTR) skills. In this course we examined rhetorical situations, rhetorical appeals, kairos, and other strategies for breaking down complex rhetorical problems. As this was a consistent theme of the class, many students outlined CTR as goals for their project. This code was particularly important in our second unit, as several students were interested in building their critical skills while examining and researching various corporations. CTR can be seen in this goal from Trevor.

To write a successful corporate culture analysis, I used samples of both my professors work and other analysis examples to reference my own and create a template. Then I researched the corporation I chose to analyze, through its website, social media page and websites like indeed which give the reviews of the company from past and current employees of the company. This information allowed me to understand the corporations [sic] values.

This goal, especially the final two sentences, is a strong example of goals coded as CTR. Here, Trevor notes he wants to do a deep, rhetorical reading of an organization's social media pages. This goes beyond reading for content, and instead analyzing the values and philosophies embedded deep in this content.

One important aspect of teaching composition is dedicating time to *Research Skills*, and an emphasis on research was employed consistently across all units. As one of the major units was an annotated bibliography, my class featured multiple class periods dedicated to examining techniques

for academic research. Given this strong emphasis on research in my lessons, it makes sense that multiple students outlined Research Skills as an important learning goal. In one of the more elaborate learning goals of the semester, Adriane stated:

> I would want to learn how to better use the tools available online and through Milner Library, especially the Subject librarians that [were] mentioned during class. Learning how to use these available resources would help me to consume effective research and guide me to the materials that I need and save more time on research and leave more time to work on the actual project.

Adriane was not alone in this regard, as multiple students highlighted the importance of conducting research in a variety of contexts. While Adriane was working on an annotated bibliography, Joanna was designing a website. Joanna noted that with her project she was

> trying to reach other students like me who are interested in the finance field and want to know more what it consists of. I also am trying to reach my own self because this research has benefitted my own self a great deal and has taught me so much more about this profession.

While Adriane and Joanna had slightly different goals for their research, they both understood the importance of effectively conducting research. Both students were also able to make practical connections and see how research can help them beyond writing papers in college.

My next code, *Doing the Thing* (DTT) was named after a common refrain I've heard throughout grad school from faculty and colleagues alike. DTT means that you are taking the steps necessary to complete your work and advance to the next project. DTT is the most pragmatic code created, and often focuses on students' desire to learn the mechanics and genre conventions of an assignment. Laurel's goal of wanting "to learn how to complete an annotated bibliography because before this unit I did not know what it was" and Brian stating that he wanted to "learn how to create

a website using Weebly because I may want to do so in the future for my company, myself, etc." are two strong examples of DTT codes.

In addition of learning the mechanics of an assignment, DTT also captures students' desire to simply finish a project. A strong example of this sentiment comes from Joey's unit 3 learning contract. Unit 3 was the final unit of the semester, and Joey stated that "At this point in the semester my goal is to just finish all my work. I'm pretty much burnt out." While others were not as blunt as Joey, this theme was quite common throughout every unit.

The final code created was Style & Mechanics. Style & Mechanics was used in a broad sense here to include issues with grammar, syntax, documentation style, word choice, and various other sentence-level issues. One example of these kinds of goals came from a student named Jack who wanted to "Better grammar and paper structure" during our unit 1 project, and this was a recurring goal for many students.

Data Analysis: A Priori Codes

With the data from learning contracts now in a more manageable state, I took things a step further and made use a priori coding to further break down the learning goals into larger categories. When discussing a priori coding, Saldaña (2013) advises researchers "to do some very deep thinking…" (p. 63) about the kinds of codes you are creating "before you start applying [them] to your data." With Saldaña's (2013) advice in mind I thought about what kind of codes made sense, and what kind of codes would help me break down this data. After examining the data and reflecting on my research questions I created the codes of definite goals and expansive goals for this round of coding to examine the relationships between SCLCs and expansive learning. The specifics of these codes will be discussed over the following paragraphs, and the totals for each code can be seen in Table 4 below.

Code	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Total
Definite	13	14	15	42
Expansive	30	27	31	88
Total	43	41	46	130

Table 4: A priori learning goals

Definite Goals

The first code created was definite goals. As the name suggests, these goals are very specific and included learning skills with definitive answers that can be applied in a variety of situations. These kinds of goals included a variety of straightforward goals with right/wrong answers and are reflective of the codes DTT and Style and Mechanics. These kinds of goals cover topics such as sentence-level issues, grammar, syntax, mechanics, vocabulary, spelling, and documentation style.

Definite goals also included tasks such completing a project or learning how a specific task is done. For example, in the unit 2 personal portfolio project a few students had never completed this kind of project before, so learning how to write a resume and cover letter was a semi-common learning goal. One student named Jason wrote: "What a cover letter is. This is the fist [sic] time that I ever written a cover letter," which was a reoccurring goal for multiple students across units. A similar goal was presented in chapter 3 by Jamie as she noted:

> I want to learn how to create a website! I have never created a website before so I am really
>
> excited for this project. I made one of my learning goals to learn how to make a website
>
> because I feel like I will have to make one in the future and it helps to know how!

While Jason and Jamie's focus on grammar, sentence structure, and formatting have value, I wanted SCLCs to help facilitate expansive learning, and tackle more complex problems.

Expansive Goals

In contrast to definitive goals, I created the expansive category. Expansive goals, as the name suggests, are goals that can directly lead to expansive learning. Engstrom & Sannino (2010) define expansive learning as "learning in which the learners are involved in constructing and implementing

a radically new, wider and more complex object and concept for their activity" (p. 2). Expansive learning conceptualizes learning as a human activity that aims for deeper understanding of what and why we are learning while also examining how learning changes the way we see the world. Expansive goals are also aimed at understanding one's writer researcher identity, and learning how rhetorical situations influence writing decisions, and how different media change the ways we write and are seen in the codes WRI, WITH, Creativity, CTR, and Research.

Findings

With the definitive and expansive codes created I then went through and totaled up each of the 130 learning goals collected into these broader categories to see how often students created each type of goal. In total, 88/130 ≈ 68% were coded as expansive goals, and 42/130 ≈ 32% were definitive goals. These results were a bit surprising, as I thought students would opt for more definitive goals, but that was not the case. These results were quite consistent across all 3 units as well as unit 1 saw 30/43 ≈ 70% expansive goals. Unit 2 was slightly lower at 27/41 ≈ 66%, and unit 3 saw a slight uptick as 31/46 ≈ 67% were expansive goals.

The high number of expansive goals comes from the fact that two of the three most frequent codes were categorized as expansive goals. WITW had 35 occurrences, and WRI with 22. In my course students consistently outlined more complex, more expansive goals for their projects, and their own benefit. While SCLCs helped to facilitate this, it is also important to understand that SCLCs cannot do this on their own. The kinds of assignments, readings, class discussions, and many other variables will have an impact on the goals students write.

Given the structure of my course, WRI and WITW being two of the most prolific codes makes a lot of sense. I taught 145.13 from a very pragmatic lens, and each of the major projects had students examine various aspects of the working world. The structure of the course asked students to think about expansive topics, including their identity, and how they communicate with the world.

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As I dedicated a great deal of class to emphasizing the importance of complex and expansive goals over definitive goals, it makes sense that the overall philosophy of my pedagogy would be reflected in these goals.

If I were to teach this course again, and instead emphasize other aspects, say research or creativity, I feel like those codes would occur most often than they did here. For instructors using SCLCs, it is important to consider what you value as an instructor, what you emphasize in your daily lessons, and what you want students to learn. The goals, skills, and techniques that are important parts of your daily pedagogy will likely be reflected in student learning goals. While structuring class in this way can be useful tools to direct students' attention towards specific goals and concepts, it is important to understand that this can also be problematic.

One of the foundational goals of SCLCs is to increase student agency, to allow them the opportunity to articulate and explore the kinds of learning goals that are important to them. Reflecting on my course and my data I wonder if I perhaps overemphasized concepts like WRI and WTW. I discussed these topics quite often in class, and they were the emphasis of most of the projects; since these codes occurred so frequently, I had to pause and consider if this was a finger-on-the-scale moment. For future courses I will have to pay significantly more attention to how I structure lessons, lectures, and projects. I want students to use SCLCs to create goals that feed their intellectual and professional curiosities. It is important that the goals students create are important to them, and not just create learning goals that conform to the topics and concepts I discuss in class. One of the major problems with rubrics is that they "announce forcefully how we define 'good' writing," (Balester, 2012, p. 63) and I do not want SCLCs to fall into a similar trap.

Final Goals and Student Success

The data collected and analyzed thus far seems to suggest that my use of SCLCs had some of the desired effects that prompted the creation of this contract. Students responded positively to

the use of SCLCs, and by a large majority decided to pursue expansive goals throughout this course. While the learning goals showcased positive signs for my research, it is important to dig even deeper into the data to see how well students follow through on their goals. To measure the efficacy of student achievement, I revisited the comments I provided students on their final unit deliverables. With SCLCs, the commentary I provided was directly inspired by the learning goals outlined by students, and analyzing this feedback would provide insight on how well students did with their goals. To begin to break down student success I started by coding my responses to student learning contracts. To do this, I again utilized a priori coding and created two codes for my responses to student writing – progress+ and progress-. As the names of these codes suggests, I coded students' learning goals based on the progress they made towards their learning goals. Student progress is broken down in more detail in table 5 below.

	Progress+ on learning goals	Progress -on learning goals
Unit 1	42	1
Unit 2	40	1
Unit 3	40	6

Table 5: Learning goal progress

The first code is progress+. As the names of this codes suggests, I coded students' learning goals based on the progress they made towards their learning goals. These decisions were made based on my evaluations as an instructor. If students did sufficient work to achieve their learning goals, said goals were coded as making progress+. For this code, progress+ would be similar to a C, where a student did enough to pass with full credit towards our contract. For example, in unit 1 I taught an annotated bibliography and a student named Michael wrote

I need to learn how to write an effective annotative bibliography for this project. Response: I looked at examples of annotative bibliographies online and the sample provided by the instructor in order to understand how to write an annotative bibliography.

In his project Michael's bibliography was not perfect. He was missing a hanging indent on his citations, and his annotations were also shorter than I would have liked. However, Michael demonstrated a clear understanding of the genre of annotated bibliographies, and he found excellent sources for his project. There were still issues with his project, but Michael, in my estimation as an instructor, had clearly made sufficient progress on his goals.

By contrast, my second code, progress- would mean a student did not do enough to earn passing credit for a learning goal, and revisions were required. For example, in unit 3 Jessica stated she wanted to "make a website that looks professional. I want this to be a website that would look exactly like one that would be the first result of a google search." While this was a solid learning goal focused on understanding genre conventions, Jessica's page appeared to be hastily assembled, only consisting of blocks of text, and a header image completely unrelated to the content she was discussing. In the current state, Jessica's project required substantial revision to earn full credit and was assigned progress- for this goal.

In total, there were 8 instances of progress- from the 130 learning goals collected; this number translates to approximately 6% of all learning goals. The instances of progress- were spread across all three units. Units 1 and 2 both had one instance of progress-, but this code occurred 6 times in unit 3; all 8 instances of progress- came from unique students. The most frequent goal that were missed were definitive goals as DTT accounted for both progress- codes in units 1 and 2, and three of the occurrences in unit 3; Style & Mechanics was also missed once in unit 3. The other two goals missed were expansive, as two instances of WITW occurred in the third unit.

Seeing progress- triple at the end of the semester was a bit concerning and caused me to pause to consider what went wrong. There are many potential issues that could have caused this spike. The first is that unit 3 was focused on digital rhetoric, and students had to complete a web site. Designing a web site was a lot more complex than previous units. Units 1 and 2 were, by

comparison, very formulaic as the genres of annotated bibliography and resume/cover letter are very well defined. In contrast, websites have significantly more moving parts as students need to contend with the amalgamation of content, images, audio, color, fonts, spatiality, and in some cases audio. This makes sense, considering a majority of the missed goals were DTT, and focused on completing the project.

Another potential answer is burnout and general fatigue. Earlier in this analysis I mentioned a learning goal from a student named Joey. In his unit 3 learning contract Joey stated "At this point in the semester my goal is to just finish all my work. I'm pretty much burnt out." After reading this statement, I went back to check previous learning contracts, as well as unit 2 and 3 progress report memos, to see if I needed to add a code for burnout. Though no other students articulated burnout in their assignments[24], I could tell many were feeling it to some degree. Additionally, though there was no final in my class, a majority of students had final exams for other classes. Unfortunate as it is, we cannot ignore the fact that students often must make difficult decisions on how to spend their limited time at the end of the semester. Honestly, as the instructor I felt significant burnout myself, and the final few weeks of the semester were a grueling endeavor.

Finally, Covid could have been a major factor as well. Surviving[25] a semester, teaching in-person during a global pandemic takes a massive toll on the body, mind, and spirit. Unit 3 took place from October 18-December 3, which correlated with a massive spike in cases in McClean County. Per ISU's Covid-19 Campus Case Tracker, ISU recorded 297 positive covid cases, which makes up 11% of the 2597 total positive cases ISU has recorded[26].

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[24] Though quite a few did in casual conversations, especially during midterms and finals.
[25] Literally and metaphorically.
[26] Numbers as of April 7, 2022. ISU suspended their Covid dashboard entirely on May 9, 2022.

Issues Beyond Learning Goals

While having only 8/130 (≈6%) learning goals fail to make progress+ may seem like a highly successful semester, as an overwhelming majority of students were able to make progress on their learning goals, that is not to say student work was without issues. For many students there were issues with formatting, sentence-level mechanics, wording, and some broader conceptual goals (such as WRI and WITW goals). However, the data here only documents how often students reached their *stated* goals. For example, a student could have reached their stated learning goals, but still had substantial issues with formatting, or sentence-level issues. While I did comment on these issues in my feedback, they were not the focus of my commentary, and are not reflected in the data collected and analyzed in this chapter.

As students wrote their own learning goals it makes sense that they would find high levels of success. They stated this was what they wanted to do, so it was likely their goals were on their mind throughout the writing process. Looking at writing from a holistic sense, SCLCs showed potential for helping students reach their stated goals but writing instruction is complex; while SCLCs are no panacea for all the ills of student writing, they still showcased tremendous promise. As this project continues, I will need to consider ways to improve this contract process, and ways to better account for issues not reflected in student writing goals.

Evidence for Future Revisions

While the data suggest a lot of positives for SCLCs, there is still room for improvement. Reflexivity, and taking the time to contemplate and analyze my own pedagogical practices, has been an important part of the methodology for this study. In keeping with a reflexive approach, I kept notes and wrote extemporaneous memos to document potential missteps and changes that could be made to improve the quality of SCLCs. I will briefly touch on these issues over the next few

paragraphs, and will build on these questions, and discuss potential solutions in the next chapter of this project.

To begin, as I went through and coded results from my survey, I noticed multiple students mentioned they were confused by SCLCs early on. Before the semester started, I debated including an entire pre-unit on contracts to help students understand how SCLCs function. This would be a shorter unit, around 2-3 weeks, where we dedicate time to discussing contracts, conduct genre research on sample contracts, and examine several examples of learning goals. This pre-unit would likely include more readings about how contracts work, and additional articles about building successful learning goals. This pre-unit would not be entirely focused on articles, as it makes sense to include a project as well. This pre-unit final would be a version of a learning contract, allowing me to give students feedback on their contracts, and give them advice on how to potentially alter their learning goals to make them more achievable.

Based on the data adding a pre-unit makes a great deal of sense. Though students grew comfortable with SCLCs as the semester progressed, students need to feel confident in the work they are doing at all times. If students are confused by SCLCs at any point, or are unsure of how to build goals, their chances for success are diminished. While this problem manifested during the coding of survey responses, I also noticed it mid-semester and took steps to clarify and scaffold SCLCs.

After completing the first unit, I took a moment to consider what I could do to more effectively scaffold learning goals into units 2 and 3. After considering my options, I altered my second unit to include more genre research activities and added progress report memos as an assignment. These activities gave students the opportunity to explore potential learning goals in low-stakes situations. The genre research projects had students examine existing pieces of writing, to see what successful features and concepts made a piece *good*. Additionally, the progress report memos

gave students a chance to think about their learning goals midway through a unit. These projects were integrated into units 2 and 3, and I feel that is why there was such a strong response to this question, and why students noted that their confusion over contracts occurred early in the semester. For future classes I will work to actively incorporate these activities into my lessons, as they seem quite beneficial to students and their learning contracts.

Finally, one issue for SCLCs going forward is access to technology. *Can SCLCs be used to combat issues of unequal access to technology?* was one of my key research questions as technological efficacy is important for modern college students (Hawisher & Selfe, 2011; Ferruci & DeRosa, 2019; Khadka & Lee, 2019). While using digital tools represents a necessary skill for modern writers, I feel I did not address these issues as effectively as I would have liked, and there are ways to improve my digital pedagogy. During the Covid pandemic I taught online asynchronous courses, so I would create lecture videos, and posted them online for students to watch at times convenient to them. I feel there is much potential to this approach, especially during digital projects. In future versions of SCLC classes, I want to experiment by offering asynchronous videos for lectures and lessons and using in-person classes for more open lab dates. Earmarking time in-class while working with technology is important, as access to technology is not universal, and assuming universal access can place unnecessary burdens on students. As this project continues, I will discuss some the changes I am making to include more hybrid classes, to ease issues of access in the next chapter of this project.

Conclusion

Student-centric learning contracts (SCLCs) are designed to be a dynamic approach to writing assessment. As the needs and goals of students change, so too can SCLCs. With this research project I aimed to gain a better understanding of how students view SCLCs, how it changes their approach to writing, and if they feel SCLCs are a positive change for their classroom experience. The results were quite promising, as student responses to SCLCs were generally quite positive. While it was

satisfying to see such positive responses, I also know SCLCs are not without their flaws. The final

two sections of this dissertation will take a praxis-oriented turn. Building off what I have learned

from coding data, the final two chapters will focus on revising and building a new version of SCLCs.

CHAPTER V: BACK TO THE START

Conducting participatory research is an invaluable practice for any instructor, as working with students can help us make informed decisions on what changes may be necessary to improve our pedagogical practices. Research was in mind as I started this project, and is why I collected coded, and analyzed data to measure the efficacy of student-centric learning contracts (SCLCs) in the fall of 2021[27]. I have been working on SCLCs since the spring of 2019 with the goal of building on Inoue's (2015) labor-based model to better account for learning as a key pedagogical outcome. To improve SCLCs, and to find out what changes may be necessary for future versions of this contract, I first needed to learn how these contracts functioned in a writing course, and how they influenced student writing.

After taking time to analyze the data from my research section I can say the results from this study were very encouraging as students responded very positively to SCLCs. While I would call this initial semester a success in many ways, it is important to note that the data and student responses to SCLCs were not universally positive. Based on personal notes, comments from students, and insight gained from analyzing my data I know there is still more to be done to improve SCLCs. While taking the time to conduct research is important, it is not enough to simply ruminate on my findings, and this chapter of my dissertation will be dedicated to putting my research into action.

As such, the next phase of this project will be focused on revising portions of my course to better support SCLCs. Throughout this chapter I will reflect on my experiences teaching with SCLCs for the first time. Using the data collected and analyzed in chapter 4, I will outline some of the changes I have made to improve the quality of future SCLC courses. In doing so, I will focus on the broader, thematic changes I am making to my SCLC courses. Each instructor can and will make adjustments to SCLC courses to fit their unique goals, university-specific requirements, and teaching

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[27] This class will be referred to as my research section throughout this chapter.

styles. With this in mind, this chapter is not designed to be a template to be copied verbatim, rather it is intended to provide instructors with general ideas on how to build and modify their courses to better support SCLCs.

Supporting Learning Goals

The central feature of SCLCs is providing students the opportunity to build their own unique learning goals for major projects. I included this feature in SCLCs to provide students with increased agency and motivation in the assessment process by allowing them to pursue the kinds of learning goals that are important them. As Boak (1998) notes "learning contracts…generate more enthusiasm and a more lasting effect than those learning experiences that have been designed by tutors or trainers," (p. 5) and the positive results from my research section corroborate this claim. Learning goals are critical to the success of SCLCs, and as such every aspect of our course needs to support students as they do the work necessary to understand, articulate, and achieve their learning goals throughout a semester.

As building learning goals is the key component of SCLCs, the most substantial changes I have made to my courses are focused on helping students build and achieve their unique learning goals. This has led to several major changes to my approach to teaching SCLCs including revising course learning goals, adding a new unit focused on SCLCs and writing learning goals, a final project based on the new unit, and adding additional emphasis on rhetorical genre studies (RGS). Over the following sections I will discuss why I have made these changes, and how these changes can be used to help instructors better integrate SCLCs into their own courses.

Revised Learning Goals

The first major change to my SCLC courses was a significant revision of my learning goals. The learning goals we state in our syllabus demonstrate what we value as instructors, and what our

institutions value as well[28]. Our stated learning goals are a very useful tool for SCLC instruction, as they show students what general themes they may use to construct their own learning goals. Before moving on to a detailed discussion of these revised learning goals I need to briefly mention that the learning goals I described over the following pages are my own individual learning goals for my courses. These learning goals are slightly different from the learning outcomes required from my university. With that said, I adapted many of these learning goals to have significant overlap with the university's learning outcomes. I was lucky to have a great deal of synergy between these outcomes, and those from my current university, but I may need to adapt these goals as my career continues. Instructors interested in using SCLCs will have to be cognizant of how their learning goals work with the learning outcomes required by their university and make changes where necessary.

After reflecting on the learning goals from my research section, I feel I could have done a lot more to construct effective learning goals for this course. In my original SCLC syllabus, I listed the following learning goals for the course.

- Learn to research, assess, and evaluate writing in your field (accounting, management, finance, etc.)
- Develop a concise writing style
- Develop an understanding of the audience for business writing
- Develop skills in reading and creating multimodal projects as a means of inquiry and scholarship
- Examine the different processes that occur when compositing projects using different media
- Begin to understand the affordances and limitations of various types of media

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[28] While drafting learning goals instructors must be aware of the goals stated by their institution. Each institution will have their own unique goals and expectations that must be accounted for in our learning goals. While I have not experienced any significant problems integrating institutional learning goals into my syllabi, instructors should be aware of this as they build and revise their own courses.

While these learning goals are fine, and highlight a variety of important skills for student writers, I feel these goals lack a certain sense of depth and cohesion. After reviewing these goals, I was left feeling that yes, these goals are important, but why are they important? What do these goals look like in praxis?

As students are building their learning goals for SCLCs it is important to provide them with more detailed learning goals to help guide them early in the semester while also providing some inspiration for their own learning goals. With this in mind, I revised my course's learning goals, and with these new goals I took a slightly different approach as I divided learning goals into four major clusters: understanding multimodal rhetorical situations, learning research methods, developing multimodal literacy, and writer researcher identity. After creating these clusters, I added more specifics about each of these goals, and I went into more detail about how these goals look in praxis. The individual learning goals are as follows:

1: Understanding multimodal rhetorical situations

- Discuss and understand the affordances and limitations of a variety of media and tools for composition

- Examine how various media alters our audience

- Investigate how different media and digital tools change our writing process

2: Research methods

- Learn and build effective research strategies for academic and professional contexts

- Examine how different media change our research needs

- Consider how cookies and algorithms affect our research process

3: Critical literacy

- Develop critical reading skills across a variety of modes and media

- Create a foundation for visual, linguistic, audio, physical, and spatial literacies

- Learn how multimodal compositions can function not only as a creative outlet, but also as an avenue for strong rhetorical communication as well

4: Writer Researcher Identity

- Learn how our identity influences our writing

- Examine how our audience, and rhetorical goals influence the ways we use language, and the kinds of language we use

With these new, more elaborate learning goals in my syllabus students can get a stronger sense of the general themes our course will cover. For example, the first set of learning goals are dedicated to helping students understand how multiple modes and media affect the writing process. Understanding multimodal rhetorical situations is an important, but broad, goal for the semester, so while the learning goal itself is vast, the bullet points help narrow things down for students. Each of these modes and media – be it printed text, the spoken word, visuals, or a combination of media – brings with them unique affordances and limitations. Understanding how media and technology change the ways we write is critical for this course. As Lutkewitte (2014) notes "Multimodal composition is not simply an extension of traditional composition, and we can't simply overlay traditional frameworks onto composing with multiple modes," (p. 4) and Lutkewitte (2014) is correct. A text-based essay and podcast are two entirely different kinds of writing and will require an entirely different approach to writing. With this detailed learning goal and relevant subpoints, students can get a better grasp of the major learning goals, and how they operate in practice. This top-down approach applies to all the revised learning goals.

The next two clusters, research methods and critical literacy, are core requirements for many writing courses, and represent skills necessary for academic success across the curriculum. These outcomes are focused on learning to effectively collect and analyze sources. While discussing research, and how to navigate databases, is an important part of these learning objectives, these goals

also strike at more complex themes of agency in the research process. Research tools are not impartial and have the potential to cause significant, long-term harm to students. Students can, and often do, use platforms like Google to conduct preliminary research[29]. While using search engines for research is not necessarily a bad[30] approach, our courses and learning objectives must also tackle some of the problematic features of these tools. Again, these more detailed learning goals demonstrate key concepts, while also showing students more manageable applications that can be used to build their own learning goals.

The final cluster of learning goals are a new addition inspired by the results of my research study from chapter 4. These goals are focused on students understanding their writer researcher/identity, and the role they actively play as an author in rhetorical situations. Identity, and understanding the role of a rhetor within the rhetorical situation, is an important concept for students to understand. Our writing, research, and work does not exist in a vacuum, but rather in conversation with a complex world. In addition to being useful learning goals, these themes also help to ground the course in expansive learning. As discussed in chapters 1 and 2, expansive learning frames learning as a process of understanding the world, and learning how to communicate in real-world contexts.

While a restructuring of learning goals may seem minor, I feel this change has the potential to significantly improve SCLC instruction. In SCLC courses students will have the agency to write their own learning goals, but this can be intimidating and, as the next section will discuss, potentially confusing. My new list of learning goals was designed to create learning goals with broad themes, supported by more specific, defined sub-goals that manifest as a unit progresses. For example,

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[29] This is especially true as academic databases are prohibitively expensive. After graduating, students will lose their ability to access a variety of databases, so it is important to examine and dissect how search engines, such as Google, operate.

[30] While using search engines like Google for cursory research is not the worst approach, Hess (2018), Noble (2019), and Reyman (2018) provided more nuanced discussions of the problems caused by search engines and algorithms.

students may start a unit off with a broad learning goal of "Learning how to complete an annotated bibliography." As the unit progresses, they can refine their broad goals into something more definitive and achievable like "I will learn how to navigate the university's database collection," or "I will pay attention to the rhetorical situation of a publication. I will look at who wrote the piece and when and consider what they have at stake in this argument." This framework represents the kinds of thinking I want students to keep in mind as they write their own learning goals. By refining the learning goals in my syllabus, I am not only clearly articulating what I want students to learn, but also demonstrating ways in which they can write broad learning goals that can be shaped into something more definitive and achievable.

Pre-Unit

Building off the revised learning goals is the addition of a pre-unit to my courses (Appendix C). The goal of this new unit is to introduce students to SCLCs, how they function, and what will be expected from them throughout the semester. The need to improve how SCLCs are introduced to students became obvious while I was reviewing my personal journal entries from my research course. Throughout the first unit I had multiple entries where I questioned if I was doing enough to explain SCLCs and how they function in my class. In my research section, the discussion on SCLCs was very brief, limited to about 5 minutes worth of discussion during the first week of class. In this discussion I talked about the goal of the contracts and did a breakdown of the sample contracts listed in the syllabus. While this discussion technically covered how SCLCs would function in this class, I still felt a deeper dive into the structure and function of SCLCs was necessary to ensure students have a clear idea of what will be expected of them.

After completing the first unit of the semester I had a feeling that I did not do enough to help students understand these contracts, and these feelings were corroborated when I examined data collected from my survey. To understand how students felt about SCLCs I asked them *Did you*

find contract grading confusing? If so, what about the contract was confusing? In response to this question two students voiced frustration over how confusing my class was at the start of the term. One student stated that "because I was unfamiliar with contract grading, I did not fully understand what was expected of me early on in the semester." Echoing the same sentiments, another student said that though they were "confused at first…once [they] saw how it was done it was simple to understand." Though these students did come to comprehend SCLCs by the semester's end, these comments were still cause for concern. To help ameliorate issues of initial confusion, one of the major changes to my class is the addition of a pre-unit entirely focused on contracts and creating learning goals.

Pre-Unit Breakdown

This pre-unit will cover the first 3 weeks of the semester and include two major deliverables: a group presentation on pedagogical chat (PCHAT), and a semester-long SCLC. The primary goal of this pre-unit is to help introduce students to major course themes and provide them a low-stakes opportunity to work with SCLCs. To help students get a grasp of SCLCs I will include multiple readings to help them understand how contracts work. The first new reading, from the University of Waterloo (n.d.), is titled *Self-directed learning: Learning contracts.* This article highlights the theoretical value of learning contracts and outlines the kind of work students will asked to do as they compose learning contracts. This short piece is particularly effective as it is written in a very accessible style. This reading helps to showcase how learning contracts can be beneficial to students and will help them buy-in and engage with SCLCs at the start of the semester. In addition to this article, I have also created a handout on SCLCs. Much like the University of Waterloo (n.d.) article, this handout outlines the benefits of SCLCs while also providing a sample version of the contracts for use throughout this semester. Dedicating significant class time to these readings, and revisiting their themes throughout a unit, will help combat the initial confusion some students experienced while working with SCLCs.

In addition to the readings on learning contracts this unit will also be focused on aspects of pedagogical cultural-historical activity theory (PCHAT) and rhetorical genre studies (RGS). PCHAT and RGS are key aspects of Illinois State's teaching philosophy, and though I was initially reticent to integrate them into my pedagogy I can no longer envision teaching without them. I feel PCHAT and RGS work particularly well in the context of SCLC courses, as they help contextualize learning within our world. To help establish both PCHAT and RGS students will read Walker's (2010) *Just Chatting*, and Kostecki's (2012) *Understanding Language with Cultural Historical Activity Theory*. After reading these articles on the basics of PCHAT, students will be placed into groups, and create presentations based on various key terms of PCHAT.

For these presentations students will be placed into groups of 4-5 students. As a group, they will be assigned one of the six[31] key concepts of PCHAT. These are short (~5-minute), informal presentations that act as an introduction to PCHAT, and the kinds of genre research presentations we will utilize throughout the semester. To help students conceptualize these presentations, I will create a sample presentation on a PCHAT term before they begin their own group work. These presentations will be given during the final week of the unit.

These presentations are designed to help students understand PCHAT, but that is not the only goal of these presentations. As the semester continues these pre-unit presentations will also form the basis for collaborative RGS presentations that will be assigned throughout the semester, as students will complete similar presentations for each individual unit. Working in groups, breaking down readings, assignments, and genres will be a powerful tool to help students understand their projects while also providing them with a starting point as they build their own unique learning goals for their SCLCs. In these RGS presentations students will have an opportunity to hear from all their

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[31] These terms are production, representation, distribution, reception, socialization, activity, and ecology.

peers, analyze their work, and think about how they might apply these findings to their own learning

contracts. For example, one element of PCHAT is *Production*, or working to understand

> the means through which a text is produced. This includes both tools (say, using a computer
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> to produce a text vs. using a cell phone to produce a text) and practices (for example, the
>
> physical practices for using a computer vs. using a cell phone have some similarities, but also
>
> many differences) (Walker, 2010, p. 74)

As students work on their presentations for production, they may be inspired to consider how the

tools they use to produce a text changes the ways they write. Coming into a class, students may not

be thinking about production, or how our tools change the ways we write, so these group

presentations on PCHAT are designed to jumpstart the way students think about learning.

These presentations are something I have found useful in my classes as I typically teach a mixture of

text-based assignments, aural presentations, and digital projects. PCHAT concepts like production

can be used to inspire a solid foundation for learning goals throughout a semester. These

presentations offer a chance for organic inquiry to take place, and this is the mindset I want to

cultivate throughout a semester.

For example, I frequently teach websites as a major unit. Part of my website unit features

genre research presentations on how images create meaning. In these presentations, students will

have to break down the symbolic meaning of an image and discuss how different audiences may

take up the same image. In my courses, I have used apples as an example, as the piece of fruit can

convey religious, technological, or pedagogical[32] themes to an audience. While students are likely

aware of the importance of images in websites, these genre research sessions offer them an

opportunity to build their sense of visual literacy. These presentations may inspire students to write

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[32] In the sense that students give teachers apples. Though I have never received an apple myself.

learning goals focused on understanding visuals, and how visuals can work with text to create a more powerful rhetorical argument.

In addition to RGS presentations, this unit will also have students produce a semester-long SCLC. This final project will be framed as a low-stakes deliverable, as a tool to allow students to become more familiar with learning contracts, and to get a sense of how they function. With this final deliverable students will review the syllabus, look at the assignment sheets for major unit projects, and outline 3 major goals for the semester based on this material. To support their semester-long learning goals students will also draft an outline of how they might achieve these goals. The structure of this project, having students review broad course goals and materials, is done intentionally. Throughout the semester I will dedicate a lot of time in class talking about the broad themes present in my assignments, but it is up to students to think about how this relates to their individual learning goals. This semester-long SCLC project will help support the structure of the class, expose students to the process of writing learning goals, and give them an early opportunity to think about what they want to learn throughout the semester.

During the final class period students will revisit the contracts they built in the pre-unit. This final project will ask students to revisit their goals, and write a short reflective piece based on their experiences throughout the semester. Students will be prompted to write about a paragraph on the following questions

- What were your semester-long learning goals?

- How did you go about achieving these goals?

- How did your goals change throughout the semester?

- What new goals do you have for your writing going forward?

This provides students a platform to discuss the breadth of their work throughout the semester and beyond. One of the key goals of SCLCs is to get students to think critically about learning, how they

learn, and how these skills can help them in their field. With this project, specifically the final question, I hope students take a moment to pause, and consider how SCLCs can be useful to them beyond the scope of my course. Additionally, this project also gives me an opportunity to get a sense of what worked, and what did not work for students. The results from these projects can help to inform future research questions in the perennial quest to improve the quality of SCLCs.

These changes to my learning goals and the additional pre-unit are designed to help students in the construction of learning goals, and I would highly recommend instructors use this pre-unit and final project in their SCLC courses. This pre-unit and its final deliverable are designed to offer students the opportunity to work with SCLCs, and throughout this unit students will be able to learn more about how SCLCs will work in this course, while also having the opportunity to write learning goals in a low-stakes environment. It is important to give students an opportunity to ask questions, create drafts, and get feedback on their contracts without the pressure of writing their first set of learning goals while completing a major unit project at the same time. Building confidence is important, as students need to feel comfortable with this assessment method. As I continue teaching and researching SCLCs I will look closely at this pre-unit, and craft research questions to help me investigate the effectiveness of this new unit. These new research questions will help me consider what kinds of revisions may be necessary to improve this unit, and the role it plays in my course.

Emphasis on Genre Studies

While a pre-unit and additional readings focused on learning contracts are important steps to help students understand SCLCs, there is also a need for increased work on building learning goals. In my research course I made use of RGS for every unit, but RGS projects were limited to a single session of every unit. RGS presentations are something I am going to expand on in future sections as I feel RGS can be an incredibly useful framing to help students build learning goals for their major unit projects.

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Building learning goals is a complex task, and it is important for instructors to consider how their course is structured to help students understand and build learning goals. To help alleviate initial confusion with SCLCs and building learning goals, future versions of SCLC courses will feature increased emphasis on RGS. Using RGS to teach composition is one of the cornerstones of ISU's composition pedagogy. When discussing genre studies, ISUwriting.com (n.d.) defines this practice as

> the activities involved in looking very closely at a particular genre (multiple samples and variations) and investigating all the different features that might be present (or features that are absent). Genre Analysis also involves looking underneath the surface features of visual design, sentence-level qualities, and style and tone to uncover how genres can subject to (and can enforce) cultural, social, commercial, and political agendas.

Put another way, RGS asks students to look at examples of existing genres and analyze the key genre conventions present in these examples. RGS is helpful as it tasks students with evaluating existing examples of the kinds of projects they are working on. RGS can be a useful addition to any writing course, as this pedagogical approach can help students build confidence as they learn about the affordances, constraints, and key genre conventions related to the projects they are working on. While RGS can help students learn about the conventions of a genre, it can also help them learn how to innovate, and break rules as well. Kurtyka (2015) notes that:

> scholars in rhetorical genre studies (RGS) took a particular interest in how writers modify written genres across social spaces, sometimes called "re-purposing" (Prior and Shipka; Roozen), "recontextualization" (Berkenkotter), or "bricolage" (Nowacek). In studying genres in this way, scholars examine how writers combine their previous genre experience with present rhetorical challenges and imagined rhetorical futures (Roozen 320). (n.p.)

RGS can be a useful pedagogical tool in a general sense, but also has significant utility to help students generate learning goals in SCLC courses. Generating learning goals can be a complex task, especially early in the process. Boak (1998) notes

> Learners can sometimes be confused if they are provided with a range of examples at too early a stage in their acquaintance with learning contracts. For this reason it is sometimes helpful if any early menu of examples indicates only broad contract areas, and does not provide examples of detailed learning objectives, which can distract the learners from thinking about what they really need or want to develop (p. 54)

Here, Boak (1998) highlights how difficult it can be to create learning goals, but notes that it can be useful to provide examples to learners. By making use of RGS throughout a unit, instructors can provide these examples, and give students a starting point for articulating their own goals.

For example, in the past I have taught units on podcasting. These podcasts take the form of an interview where students write questions and have a conversation with someone in their field. Genre research has proven to be a useful tool to not only help students conceptualize this project, but also be a useful tool for building learning goals. When teaching podcasts our discussion of audio design is where genre research comes up. For this genre research session, I will play a portion of the TED Radio Hour podcast from NPR (2019). While this piece is playing, students will take notes on what they notice while listening to this piece; this short piece provides lots of interesting examples of using sound rhetorically. In this shot audio piece, there are instances of music, crosstalk, sound effects, and ambient noise. All these additions are used to make this audio production more engaging and interesting to listeners. While I do not expect students to create a podcast of the same professional quality as NPR, there is a lot of value to this genre research exercise. As students are listening to this example, they will take note of how these audio features change quality of this piece,

and perhaps inspire them to experiment with these aural additions in their own work. This is done so students can begin to think holistically about how they structure and present their podcasts.

To further help scaffold the rhetorical nature of podcasts, I have another round of genre research I call the ambient ethnography. This assignment is inspired by the work of Rickert (2013), and his discussion of chõra. Rickert (2013) notes "Plato's chõra is an ancient attempt to think the relation between matter and activity, work and space, background and meaning, and thus it already starts to broach issues concerning relations among bodies, minds, and world" (p. 42). For Rickert (2013), place has a strong influence on our work. Where we choose to present, where we interact with our audience can change the quality of our work.

To make the meaning of chõra more accessible, Rickert (2013) provides a useful example in the form of analyzing coffee shops.

> If I say a coffee shop is rhetorical, I do not simply mean that suasion emerges from a coffee shop's design choices…colors, layout, lighting, menu, and so forth…Nor is the rhetorical simply their assemblage. Rather, to understand how the coffee shop is rhetoric, we have to understand the way in which this ensemble of elements is given so as to affect or transform how we inhabit that space (p. 159-160).

This reading is paired with a short activity where students visit a location on campus. Students then inhabit the space, and take time to consider the rhetorical quality of their location for recording an interview. In the past students have really engaged with this activity and provided excellent analysis chõra. In particular, one student discussed how recording an interview in their dorm may be an uncomfortable situation for a professional, and these are the kinds of distinctions I want students to make with this assignment. This genre studies activity is structured to help students comprehend the genres we are using and provide potential ideas for their learning contracts as well.

By integrating RGS at multiple points throughout a unit I have multiple goals. First, I want students to become accustomed to the genres we are working with in major units. Regardless of what kinds of assignments are being used it is important that students feel comfortable and confident as they build their own projects. In addition to building students' confidence these RGS sessions can also be useful tools to help students build learning goals. By examining, critiquing, and deconstructing the essence of a genre students will get a stronger idea of what skills they need to improve, and how these skills can help them create what they want to produce.

In my research section I made a mid-semester adjustment to increase genre research activities throughout the final two units, and I feel this was a tremendous benefit to the class. In my survey data, students mentioned they were confused initially, but gained a stronger understanding of SCLC as the semester went on – I feel the additional rounds of genre research helped students as they built their learning goals. For example, in my research section our final unit was focused on websites. In this unit I added multiple rounds of genre research where students examined the structure of web sites, how images and visual create rhetorical suasion, and how users read online. Each of these genre research sessions focused on different aspect of web design and helped students develop an understanding of genre conventions.

These genre research sessions helped students identify genre conventions and provided them with a better understand of what they do and do not know. These activities are invaluable for helping students brainstorm potential learning goals early on in a unit. In my research section, students definitely improved the quality of their learning goals as the semester progressed, and this is due in no small part to the increased emphasis on RGS. I would recommend instructors take steps to thoroughly integrate RGS throughout their units to help students understand genres, as well as potential learning goals. As my work with SCLCs continues, I will be paying increased attention to RGS, and how it can work as a tool to help students build effective learning goals.

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Flipped Classes

While the changes discussed thus far are significant, perhaps the biggest change to my courses going forward will be the continued utilization of flipped classrooms. When discussing the concept of flipped classrooms Nouri (2016) provides us with a useful definition of this approach to teaching as they note that the

> flipped classroom model is based on the idea that traditional teaching is inverted in the sense that what is normally done in class is flipped or switched with that which is normally done by the students out of class. Thus, instead of students listening to a lecture in class and then going home to work on a set of assigned problems, they read course literature and assimilate lecture material through video at home and engage in teacher-guided problem-solving, analysis and discussions in class (n.p.)

In essence, a flipped classroom shifts the paradigm of how classes are taught. In a more *traditional* course students would show up to a class, hear a lecture, discuss key concepts, and would be given homework to apply these abstract concepts to various assignments. In the flipped model, this is reversed, as students would instead take up the conceptual material on their own, through lecture videos or reading, and they would then use class time to work on applying these theories with the instructor present.

My experience with flipped classrooms was limited, but I was interested in exploring this teaching modality. Like many others, I gained unexpected experience using a flipped classroom model when the magnitude of the Covid-19 pandemic began to be felt in March 2020. Classes, by necessity, were shifted online, and over the following semesters I taught my classes asynchronously. For these classes I would produce and upload a video to cover the lecture portion of a course and use scheduled class time for office hours. This approach worked well for a pandemic pedagogy, but I also see a lot of potential in flipped classes for my courses going forward.

In my courses I frequently teach multiple projects that utilize technology to various degrees. While teaching with technology is a necessary facet of modern composition pedagogy, it can also be quite difficult. In chapter 2 of this project, I discussed how sizable gaps in access to technology still exist, especially amongst marginalized populations (Anderson and Perrin, 2018; Gierdowski, 2020; Pew, 2021). Students come into our classes with a variety of experiences and abilities in terms of technology. As instructors we cannot assume our students have universal experiences or access to technology, so our pedagogies must account for this.

Speaking on the benefits of a flipped approach, Hamilton (2019) notes that "teachers of digital writing have tended to promote and deploy a hybrid pedagogy in order to help students gain full and complete access to the digital technologies needed to develop multimodal/digital literacy," (p. 171) and this is an approach I am going to adopt going forward. In addition to being an ideal way to ease issues of access to technology, flipped classrooms also have potential benefits to combat learning aversion. When discussing the benefits of flipped classrooms Nouri (2016) also notes:

> Over the past 30 years, university education and traditional lectures in particular have been strongly criticized. The main criticism has cast light on the following: students are passive in traditional lectures due to the lack of mechanisms that ensure intellectual engagement with the material, student's attention wanes quickly, the pace of the lectures is not adapted to all learners needs and traditional lectures are not suited for teaching higher order skills (n.p.)

For my courses, I typically have multiple tech-heavy projects. Flipped classrooms help create a more equitable approach to teaching, and going forward I will have earmarked multiple flipped class periods. During these days I will post videos to cover the lecture portion of class and use the class time to hold workshops. In these workshops students will be able to work with the various programs necessary to complete the unit projects. This will allow me to work with students more directly, to help them with any technological issues they may have. In the past, I have created

handouts for using programs such as Audacity and Weebly, and while these have been helpful, I feel a flipped approach can bring greater benefit to students, regardless of their experience with technology.

Using flipped classes also has the benefit of providing more time for more individual instruction. During these flipped classroom sessions students will work at their own pace, allowing instructors the opportunity to have conversations with students, to see where they are at with their projects, and have discussions with them about potential learning goals. As an instructor, I also plan on using these flipped classes to check in on students, and, if necessary, push students towards more robust, expansive goals for their projects. Building learning goals can be difficult, especially early in the semester. These flipped classes offer additional opportunities for individual instruction, and time to help students build rigorous learning goals for their projects. As my research on SCLCs continues, I will pay close attention to how these flipped classrooms influence learning goals.

Though my initial plans for flipped classrooms center mostly on easing access to technology, and building learning goals, flipped classes can also be used to help integrate the community building critical to feminist pedagogy. As Shrewsburry (1993) notes "Feminist pedagogy includes teaching strategies that are based on a reconceptualization of community with a richness that includes the autonomy and individuality of members who share a sense of relationship and connectedness with each other (p. 171)." During these flipped classes I will have the opportunity for more individualized instruction with students, and work to build up the sense of community important to Shrewsburry (1993) and others (Royster & Kirsh, 2012; Selfe & Hawisher, 2012). Budling a community, and working closely with students, is an important part of SCLC instruction, and these flipped class periods offer an excellent opportunity for building a rapport with a class.

Assessing with SCLC

Transitioning away from major course changes the final section of this chapter will discuss the new strategies I have for assessing student writing with SCLCs. After reflecting on my research section, I realize that my approach to assessing student work with SCLCs is something that needed revision. In my research section I graded student work based on the learning goals they included with their final projects. I would look at these learning goals, and grade students pass/fail based on their ability to demonstrate these skills in their work. This was not an ideal system as grading with SCLCs should be viewed in a more holistic sense. Learning is a complex task and signs of learning may not always manifest in students' final deliverables. Over the following pages I will discuss how progress report memos, forum posts, and uptake activities can be used in conjunction with final deliverables to more effectively assess student writing in SCLC courses.

Progress Report Memos

Drafting is important as the process of writing drafts, receiving feedback, and revising is incredibly helpful to improving student writing. Lamott (2005) highlights the importance of drafting by reminding us of "the idea of shitty first drafts. All good writers write them. This is how they end up with good second drafts and terrific third drafts" (p. 93). While I use rough drafts, peer review, and revision for major projects in my writing courses, there assignments were omitted from the learning goals portion of SCLCs, but will be added to future versions.

While using SCLCs for the first time I had students submit their SCLCs with their unit 1 final projects. There were no drafts, no revisions, or feedback from me – I did not see students' learning goals until I was grading their unit 1 projects. I quickly realized this was a problem during the semester and made a change to the structure of my course by integrating progress report memos into units 2 and 3.

I have used progress report memos in the past, mostly in the context of business writing courses, but memo assignments provide fertile ground for creating and refining learning goals. The memos I used were made up of two parts. In the first part, students outline an early draft of their unit learning goals. Students are not tied to these learning goals, as things can change throughout a unit. A particular reading may pique the interest of a student, or a RGS activity may spark a conversation that causes a shift in the structure of their learning goals.

The second part of this memo will have students discuss the work they have already completed for the unit project, what they still need to complete, and provide a timeline for them to complete their project. For example, in the context of a unit these memos are due after students have completed their RGS presentations. The use of RGS is important to help students understand what their final products may look like, and they can use these presentations to craft learning goals and drafting ideas. RGS presentations give students the opportunity to think critically about what effective examples of their projects look like in praxis. Students can use these genre studies presentations to think about what examples they might want to apply (or avoid) while completing their own work. In these memos students submit drafts of the learning goals, rhetorical situations, and a timeline to complete their project.

In addition to providing an ideal opportunity to work with student learning goals, these progress report memos can also be useful for tracking progress on final deliverables. As instructors are assessing students' ability to achieve their learning goals, these progress report memos should be kept close while grading. In these documents students discuss the kinds of work they have accomplished, and what further steps they need to take.

Forum Posts/Blogs

While memos are an important deliverable, they are not the only assignment used to track the trajectory and progress of student learning. Throughout every major unit I also utilize forum

posts to provide students another avenue to document their learning. I first started using forum

posts as a way to create a sense of community while teaching asynchronously during Covid. While I

eliminated forum posts when I returned to teaching in person, I still see a lot of merit for forum

posts as a type of work journal. With these posts students will keep a reflective journal, where they

describe their process for completing their current project.

For each unit, students will write three posts. Two posts of their own, where they will be

encouraged to discuss their progress on their SCLCs – this will include questions related to the

labor/learning, mechanics, their rhetorical situations, or their learning goals[33]. The third post will be

a response to their peers, where they will provide feedback, ideas, or advice. These posts are short

(200-250 words) and informal. Having used form posts extensively during the Covid pandemic I can

say these posts are an ideal outlet for students to document their learning as they provide clear

documentation of how their work evolves over the course of a unit.

While these posts will be helpful to document learning, they also provide instructors another

opportunity to check in with their students, to see what ideas they have for learning goals, or what

kind of progress (or lack thereof) students are making on their projects. This gives instructors an

organic opportunity to provide students with constructive feedback to help students when needed,

or simply provide extra motivation. I feel forum posts have tremendous potential to improve SCLC

instruction, and as my research continues, I will pay specific attention to the role of forum posts in

SCLC courses.

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[33] While students have the freedom to write on any topic related to their project, I usually provide 1-2 sample prompts in class. I usually pull important quotes from class readings to build these prompts.

Assessment Practices[34]: Uptake

With SCLCs students are assessed on their ability to reach their stated learning goals. While this is the primary assessment method, SCLCs also utilize uptake to assess student learning goals. Assessment through uptake is ideal for the SCLC, as final products are not always the best indicator of learning. For example, let's say a student needs to design a website for a unit project. If the student has minimal experience with web design their final product may be lacking but, given their limited experience, they have likely learned a significant amount. By contrast, a student that has a great deal of experience building websites can submit a fantastic final project but may have learned very little by comparison. So, in articulating and revising their goals throughout a semester, students will need to be aware of what they are taking up, what they already know, how they are building on what they already know, and how various media and modes of communication are shaping their activity. These contracts help to create a detailed account of different kinds of learning, but an important part of learning is also taking time for reflexivity.

Though SCLCs are an important feature in the assessment plan for this course, uptake plays an important role as well. Uptake documents are texts produced at the end of a unit, after students have submitted their unit deliverables. These uptake documents ask students to complete metacognitive work, to reflect on the texts they have produced, and articulate what and how they have learned. Including uptake as a portion of the assessment process is ideal for SCLCs, as final products are not always the best indicator of learning. Over the course of a unit students will make goals, work towards achieving their goals, revise their goals, and, through uptake, reflect on their ability to achieve their goals. Every step of this process helps create an important record of student learning, which is an invaluable tool for holistic writing assessment.

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[34] SCLCs will be the primary assessment method for this course, and the specifics of this method are outlined in other chapters, so I will not reiterate that here.

SCLCs and Formative Assessment

The inclusion and expanded role of progress report memos, forum posts, and uptake have significantly altered my approach to assessing student work with SCLCs. While I was designing SCLCs, I knew I wanted to utilize formative assessment on student work. Fernando (2018) notes that "formative assessment is learning-oriented, one of its main objectives is to monitor students' ongoing performance and provide feedback that will support learning (p. 73)" and this approach is ideal for SCLCs, as these contracts are designed to emphasize learning. SCLCs are designed to inspire students to learn and reward them for learning, but my initial assessment practice did not sufficiently support these goals.

In the research section I assessed students based on their learning goals, and how well they were able to demonstrate this learning in their final unit projects. In practice, I would grade work on a pass/fail basis – if I felt students did sufficient progress[35], they would get full credit. Reflecting on this practice, I feel my approach to assessing student writing was ultimately more summative than formative. Learning is a complex task, and final deliverables are often not the best indicator of learning. This is especially true with my course, as I utilized several multimodal and digital projects. Students may have been new to these projects and may have spent a good deal of time working to understand how these genres functioned. My summative assessment, based entirely off of learning goals and final deliverables, failed to account for a lot of the areas where learning can occur.

To revise and improve SCLC assessment, I will make some substantial changes to how I grade student work. Instead of looking at contracts and final deliverables exclusively, as I did in my first semester teaching SCLCs, I will now take a step back and grade students holistically on all the work they complete in a unit. Fortunately, my courses are already designed to be highly scaffolded. For example, in unit 2 of my research section students submitted the following:

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[35] Sufficient meaning work that is at least of C quality.

- Genre studies presentations

- Progress report memos

- Forum posts

- Learning contracts

- Final deliverable

- Uptake document

Students organically documented their own learning throughout this unit as they completed the above assignments. Each of these assignments provides insight into what students were thinking at a particular point in a unit. The genre studies presentations have students work to understand how a genre functions. The next assignment is a progress report memo, which has students discuss their tentative learning goals as well as what work they've completed and what they still need to work on. Next, the learning contracts and final deliverables show instructors what students wanted to learn, and how that worked in praxis. Finally, the uptake document gives students a chance to discuss their thoughts on their work. For complex projects, students can have lofty learning goals that are difficult to achieve, and that is absolutely fine. The uptake document gives students a chance to discuss what may have gone wrong, and what they can do to correct it going forward.

As instructors are grading student work, it is important to keep all these documents in mind. Learning is not a singular act, but a continued effort over many weeks. SCLCs were designed to facilitate learning, to track the trajectory of learning, and reward students for learning, but my assessment practices did not sufficiently account for these values. For future semesters I will shift away from assigning grades and comments from final deliverables and contracts, and instead take this more holistic, formative approach to assessment to better match the goals of SCLCs. This is an important aspect of SCLC pedagogy, and I strongly suggest instructors interested adopt this approach to assessing writing.

With SCLCs it is important to remember that student learning is at the heart of this assessment method. As instructors, everything we do in our courses should work towards facilitating learning. SCLCs are designed to help students think about learning, write about their learning, and interrogate the processes they use to learn. While using and assessing student writing with SCLCs, it is important to keep learning in mind. Look at forum posts, progress report memos, uptake activities, and final deliverables to build a more holistic understanding of what learning looked like for students. Again, learning is the focal point of SCLCs, and all the assignments, materials, and pedagogical strategies discussed throughout this project are designed to help facilitate learning in our courses. What this can and will look like in practice may vary based on your institution, student body, class type, and institutional learning outcomes, so some adjustments may be necessary.

Conclusion

At the start of this project, I was interested in doing more than researching assessment. As an academic, I view myself first and foremost, as a teacher. I feel I am at my most engaged, my most inspired when I am researching subjects that can easily be adapted for classroom use. That ethos was at the heart of the dissertation. While teaching is important, we must also remember that teaching is not a static act. Every semester, every class, every student will bring new exigencies to our pedagogies. What we have done in the past may not work or may require substantial adjustments to account for the learning needs of students. So, while I feel the initial draft of a SCLC course was a success, I also acknowledge some mistakes were made along the way. Throughout this chapter I reflected on my work, looked at my data, and made adjustments I feel will improve SCLC instruction going forward. Throughout this chapter I discussed multiple broad concepts I feel will improve my teaching, but this chapter was not intended to be an undisputed example, but rather a potential starting point that instructors can modify to fit their own pedagogical preferences. As this project continues my final chapter, will continue to examine ways to improve SCLC instruction, as I

dive into supporting course documents, and how they can be used to help facilitate the goals of

SCLCs.

CHAPTER VI: WHAT'S NEXT?

One of the key methodological principals driving my scholarship is pragmatism, as I have a strong desire for this dissertation to help improve the quality of writing assessment for students and instructors alike. While the theoretical heavy lifting from chapters 1 and 2 helped me conceptualize the problems facing writing assessment, and chapter 3 provided a foundation for researching these problems, I constantly found myself thinking of Grabill's (2014) definition of rhetorical pragmatism. Grabill (2014) stated that if an "idea isn't useful, it isn't good," (p. 257) and while this definition may be a bit blunt, it underscores the importance of academic work taking direct action to improve existing exigencies. While there is tremendous value to the theoretical work discussed throughout this project, I wanted this dissertation to go beyond theory and emphasize praxis so instructors could easily integrate SCLCs into their own courses.

Much like chapter 5, this chapter is designed to help guide instructors interested in using SCLCs in their courses. The strategies presented here are not intended to be the be-all and end-all of pedagogy, instead, this chapter is intended to give instructors pause, and an opportunity to think about how various course documents can be designed to further support SCLCs. So, with pragmatism and praxis in mind, the final chapter of my dissertation will continue to focus on teaching. Throughout this chapter I will outline some of the theory and strategies I have used to create and revise important course documents including my syllabus and learning contracts.

Building a SCLC Course

Before I begin a discussion on strategies for drafting course documents, I first want to talk about what it means to build a class with SCLCs. SCLCs are much more than an assessment method – they are a comprehensive pedagogical approach. While it can be easy to view assessment as simply a byproduct of teaching, that is not the case as our assessment practices need to actively work *with* our pedagogy to support our broader goals as instructors. As instructors prepare to teach with

SCLCs it is important to consider how this approach to assessment changes the structure of our courses. The most substantial change is what is asked of students. SCLCs ask students to think critically about what they want to learn, and what steps they will take to achieve this learning. As instructors are building a SCLC course, significant attention must be paid to the practice of documenting learning. In chapter 5 I discussed the addition of a pre-unit, increased use of rhetorical genre studies (RGS), and uptake to help students better understand the conceptual goals of SCLCs. These key steps are invaluable for SCLC pedagogy, and as this chapter continues, I will outline additional strategies for building syllabi and contracts to help instructors integrate SCLCs into their courses.

Building Syllabi

Syllabi are critical for effective instruction in any class as they offer students an immediate manifestation of our goals and expectations for a course. While syllabi are key course documents, Jones (2018) laments there is "not a great deal of scholarship focusing on syllabus design solely for composition courses, (p. 26)" and over the course of researching this chapter I can attest that this statement is frustratingly true. To make things worse, some of the scholarship that does exist on syllabi can best be described as questionable. Take Boldt (2014) for example. In an attempt to *help* instructors build syllabi Boldt (2014) states "you can already find some syllabi online. A quick Google search will turn up dozens of hits in your field" (n.p.). Boldt's (2014) problematic view of syllabi continues as they state "Once you have a basic outline for your syllabus, you can reuse most of it each semester. Once you get the language worked out in key sections, you really won't need to alter it much…" (n.p.). For Boldt, (2014) syllabi are presented as an afterthought, as tedious documents that can be copied from other sources and used in perpetuity with limited revision. While this retrograde advice on *building* syllabi is problematic, it is also common, especially for new instructors.

When I started my teaching career I was employed as an adjunct at multiple colleges. After being hired, these institutions provided me with a few sample syllabi and a template. While these institutions provided me with materials, they also made it clear there were minimal expectations for me to make any significant changes. After being hired I was often left with the sense that I was only expected to add my name and change dates to match the current academic calendar. From this perspective I often thought of syllabi as boilerplates, a vehicle for college polices, textbook requirements, and a burden to be endured before starting the actual work of teaching. While this lack of structure can be intimidating for new instructors, it was also liberating as I had the freedom to design and implement almost any kind of assignments and assessment practices I saw fit[36].

Looking back, I now understand how this perspective was detrimental to my courses. Syllabi can and should do so much more to support our classes and students. While it can be easy to ignore a syllabus, a well-designed document can provide copious benefits to a course and to students. Over the following pages I will discuss some strategies I use for building syllabi to help support SCLCs in writing courses. These strategies include simplifying syllabi, being cognizant of language and tone, and strategically integrating media in these documents.

Keep it Simple

When building syllabi, it can be difficult to make decision on what to include, and what to cut. While we ideally want these documents to accurately reflect and represent what our course is, and what students can expect, it is impossible to condense the essence of 16 weeks of course material into a single, readable document[37]. This is especially true when using assessment methods like SCLCs. As assessment is a key part of this course, it can be easy to add pages upon pages of

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[36] Within reason that is. While adjuncts and grad students are expected to conform to the outlines in these templates, from personal experience I know we are given a lot of freedom to structure classes and assessment practices to fit our teaching styles.
[37] Evident by this dissertation, which has over 100 pages discussing assessment practices alone.

detail on how this contract will function in the context of a course. We must make difficult decisions on what to include, how much detail to include, and what to omit entirely. With these difficult decisions in mind, I have made changes to embrace a more minimalistic approach to syllabus design.

While there is limited scholarship available on syllabus design, there are some academics doing important work on these documents. A prime example is Natasha Jones' work on syllabus design (Jones et al., 2012; Jones, 2018). In these articles Jones researched how document function, and importantly how syllabi are viewed from a student's perspective. Thinking about syllabi as a tool for students is important, as these documents should be used to help them navigate our courses. While there are many factors that go into building a syllabus, Jones (2018) found that students overwhelmingly support a more simplistic design, as when students were

> asked about elements that make a syllabus difficult to use, 79 students (about 77%) noted selected "long paragraphs/more words" made a syllabus hard to use. This reveals that students find "walls of text" discouraging and can possibly obscure information (bury content) in a syllabus. This is in line with previous research that found that…documents that are not too "text-heavy" are appreciated… (p. 30).

The findings highlight why a simplistic approach may be best. An overwhelming majority of students noted that excessive blocks of text hindered the readability, usability, and utility of syllabi. With a syllabus it can be tempting to include pages and pages worth of information, and I have done this many times in the past, especially for SCLC courses. While that may seem like a sound strategy, to ensure students understand every course policy and goal in great detail, it is important to remember that while syllabi are important course documents, they are not the only materials that will be used to teach a course. Our syllabi will be accompanied with teaching (in person, or online), assignment sheets, supplemental readings, class discussions, group work, and various other course materials and activities – there is no reason for a syllabus to be designed as a teaching tome.

With Jones' (2018) advice in mind I went back and revisited my original SCLC syllabus (Appendix D). After reviewing this syllabus, I noticed that there were several instances where I included excessive detail. For example, my original syllabus had four paragraphs dedicated to course attendance policy, three paragraphs for grading policies, and seven pages for additional information on SCLCs, including two sample versions of this contract. While this information is invaluable for students, this level of detail is not needed in my revised syllabus, and I have made extensive revisions to cut extraneous content from my syllabus.

For example, in chapter 5 I discussed the addition of a pre-unit focused on helping students comprehend how this course, and SCLCs, will function. This unit includes multiple class periods set aside for discussion on course policies, grading policies, and the role of SCLCs[38]. By taking this approach, and addressing these important issues in class, I was able to simplify my syllabus, as it is important for these documents to act as more of a quick reference than an exhaustive explanation.

To help condense some sections of my syllabus I have followed Jones' (2018) advice and made use of bullet points. Jones' (2018) research found that students

> noted that the use of bulleted lists in a course syllabus might make the document easier to use. Remember, nearly all of the students surveyed indicated that bulleted lists were a consideration. Scholars and researchers in document design acknowledge that bulleted lists make texts more skimmable and can break up large chunks of text. (p. 31)

Bulleted lists make sense, especially for my sections on grading, attendance, and classroom policies. I want my syllabus to provide students with a quick reference of key points and policies. In my original syllabus nearly all material was presented in paragraph form. While this approach may seem the most natural way to present information, it can also make it more difficult for students to quickly

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[38] As well as multiple readings, and a 5-page handout.

find important information. For example, the grading policy section of my original SCLC syllabus is as follows:

> As this course will utilize contract grading, grading will be dependent on your own work, and your own goals. You will articulate what you want to learn for each project, and I will use that material to assess your work. This course is designed to be practical and pragmatic, so do take your contracts seriously.
>
> All assignments will be submitted via Reggienet, which would be the case pandemic or not. If you submit your assignment late, even by a second, you will lose 10% of the points you have earned for that assignment, and another 10% for every 12 hours your assignment is late thereafter. Work that is over 72 hours late will not be graded, and will not be eligible for points.

While this is only two paragraphs, the material presented here is a bit convoluted and it is hard to quickly identify important information on late work or submissions. I have revised this to utilize a hybrid of a short paragraph and a bulleted list. My grading policies sections now reads:

> All assignments will be submitted via Reggienet. This way you don't have to pay for printing, and we can easily keep track of all submitted work. In addition to posting your assignments to Reggienet, submitting your work on time is critical for your success in this course. While there are firm due dates for every assignment, I know that life happens, often at inopportune moments, so I will do my best to work with you and help find solutions to any potential issues that may occur.
>
> Throughout the semester make sure that you:
>
> - Submit all work to Reggienet
>
> - Submit your work on time
>
> - Contact me ASAP if you need an extension

- Understand late work will incur a letter-grade penalty for every day an assignment is late

- Understand work over 3 days late will earn a 0

These slight edits have made this section of my syllabus much more user friendly. Students can now read a brief abstract of the section, and then quickly reference important course policies in the list that follows. I have adapted this abstract/bullet point approach throughout my syllabus to make this document easier to navigate, and to avoid making students dig through lengthy paragraphs to find relevant information.

Language matters

While what we include in a syllabus is important, we must also consider what kind of language we are using to present this information to students. Again, our syllabus is often a student's introduction to our course, and these documents help set their expectations for a semester. If our syllabi are lifeless, mechanical, or tedious how can we realistically expect students to engage with course material? To underscore the importance of langue and syllabi, Nusbaum, Swindell, and Plemons (2021) found that "participants reported feeling more positively about instructors based on syllabus sections that (1) expressed enthusiasm for the course content…" (p. 139-140) and after reading this line I took a long pause to consider how language functioned in my own syllabi.

As a scholar of rhetoric, I have spent years studying the importance and power of language, but I have never utilized these skills to analyze my syllabi. With the importance of language in mind, I revisited my initial SCLC syllabus and noticed some language issues, and specifically a pronounced lack of enthusiasm. This is important as Nusbaum et al. (2021) note that students reacted positively when a syllabus showed passion for course content, but this sense of passion was drastically missing from my own course materials. Throughout my original syllabus I noticed my phrasing was always

very cold, very matter of fact, and read like a template. For example, while describing SCLCs my syllabus stated that:

> Finally, this course will utilize student-centric learning contracts - see the end of the syllabus for the contract. Each major project will have a rubric outlining the labor requirements for each grade (page count, sources, etc.). In addition to the labor, you will also write out a list of goals of what you want to learn, and what you wish to accomplish for said project.

While this section does cover the main themes of SCLCs, I feel the phrasing I used made these documents seem more tedious and complex as opposed to innovative and exciting. The line "what you wish to accomplish for said project" sounds incredibly cold, uninviting, apathetic, and just generally off putting. The same stodgy tone can be found in my course description as well which stated:

> this course is designed with a very pragmatic scope, aimed at providing you with the tools to build an effective portfolio for your future. Throughout the semester you will not be writing for abstract exigencies, but rather situations you see yourself encountering in the future. I want this course to help you sharpen the skills you need for success, while also providing you with real-world situations that will be helpful outside of the college setting.

Again, the writing here seems quite lifeless, and even though I wanted this description to inspire and invigorate students I very much doubt it had the desired effect. While these are just two examples, my syllabus is riddled with sections that read like a soulless terms of service document. How could I reasonably expect students to be excited for the semester when my syllabus was so lifeless?

For future syllabi, I reworked several key sections of this document, including descriptions of assignments and SCLCs, to be more engaging. I feel SCLCs have the potential to make courses more engaging and enjoyable experience for students, and I want students to feel excited about my course from the start of the semester. By projecting passion, both in my syllabus and my teaching, I

hope to improve engagement throughout my courses. For example, I have reworked the section on assessment methods I described earlier. For my new syllabus (Appendix D) it now reads:

> In this course we will make use of student-centric learning contracts. Instead of having you conform to an arbitrary rubric, this innovative approach to assessment is designed to help you improve the writing and researching skills that are important to you and your future. Throughout the semester we will work together using this collaborative form of assessment to ensure this class is as helpful to you as possible.

As a micromanager, I know the language here will be revised multiple times before I use this syllabus in any course. With that said, I feel the language used here is much more engaging and exciting for students. In addition to being livelier, it also comes off as more human. My initial syllabus was cold and pretentious, so I took additional steps to use language that focuses on students, and how this assessment method can help them. From a pedagogical perspective SCLCs are designed for students, so it makes sense to use language that emphasizes them throughout the syllabus as well. For instructors considering SCLCs for their courses, I would highly suggest taking the time to carefully consider the kinds of language you are using in your syllabus. SCLC courses are designed to help inspire students to learn, and the verbiage of these documents should reflect the inquisitive goals of this assessment method.

Visuals and Design

The final aspect of syllabus design I will discuss is the use of visuals. With tools like Photoshop and Canva it is easy for instructors to create and integrate all kinds of visuals into their syllabi. While this provides tremendous freedom, and potential for creativity, it is important to think about how visuals are used, and what, if anything, they add to a syllabus. While it can be tempting to add copious visual aids to a syllabus, the existing literature takes a more cautious approach on the best practices for effectively integrate visuals into a syllabus.

As an instructor I frequently make use of multimodal and digital projects, as I see these assignments as necessary features of modern composition courses. As multimodal and digital rhetoric are important parts of my pedagogy it makes sense that I demonstrate these values by integrate media into my syllabus. Yancey (2019) shares this opinion as she makes extensive use of images in her syllabus. Yancey's (2019) course was focused on multimedia, and this heavily influenced her syllabus design as she stated that her "syllabus, which was filled with images, signaled that composing multimodally, and especially with images, was going to be normal practice in this course" (p. 131). In the context of her course, this makes a lot of sense. If you are teaching a multimodal composition course, but only use text in your syllabus, a lack of images can send students the wrong message about the importance of multimedia.

While Yancey (2019) embraces multimodality, and integrates images throughout her syllabus, Jones et al. (2012) take a more cautious approach to the use of media. In their article Jones et al. (2012) found that while visuals can be very beneficial to improving readability, they are far from a pedagogical panacea, and can easily backfire on instructors. Jones et al. (2012) state that "images that were included to supplement text and convey information related to the proposals positively impacted participants' perceptions, while unnecessary images negatively impacted participants' perceptions" (p. 363). Here, the authors strike at the most important aspect of integrating media – balance. While images can indeed be helpful, we need to think critically about why and how we are using them. Images can be a useful tool for syllabi, but when used excessively, or at random, they quickly lose their value. Images seem better served for a supporting role, to emphasize the important sections and policies in our syllabi.

Building off Jones et al.'s (2012) advice, Nusbaum et al. (2021) provide some insight on how images can be used in a syllabus. For their research Nusbaum et al. (2021) created a digital syllabus and used eye tracking software to generate a heatmap of their syllabus. This map showed that

students skimmed these documents, and their attention was mostly focused on headings, opening sentences, and images; these findings are not surprising, as similar trends can be found in Marinakos (2018) work on reading in digital spaces. Marinakos (2018) and Nusbaum et al.'s (2021) work shows that images can be a great way to draw students' eyes to specific portions of a document, providing an ideal tool to help important parts of syllabi stand out to students. With these perspectives in mind, I have edited my syllabus to integrate more images and charts.

In my original SCLC syllabus, I made minimal use of media, as I only included two visuals in the entire document. The first was small header, created on Canva, that contained the course title, and some generic images of technology. The second image was a screenshot from the CDC that documented how to wear a mask to properly cover one's nose a mouth[39]. While these images served a purpose, there is much room for improvement in my syllabus, so I have worked to integrate additional images into this document to emphasize important sections of my syllabus.

Nusbaum et al.'s (2021) research showed that images can be powerful tools to direct students' attention towards key parts of the syllabus. For SCLC courses I have added additional pieces of media to draw students' attention to learning outcomes, contract discussions, and grading as these are key parts of the syllabus they will likely reference throughout the course. For these sections I wanted to create images that worked to support the text, not overpower it, so I created header images for the learning goals (see figure 2).

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[39] Which was, and likely will continue to be, a necessary addition.

Figure 2: Learning objectives header

As the course learning objectives are important to me as an instructor, it made sense to use a visual to highlight this section. In chapters 1 and 2 I discussed why learning is important to a course, and here I used a visual to underscores the importance of learning in my syllabus. I also decided to go for a more simplistic design here, as I wanted this image to represent the gravitas of this section. In addition to header images, I also included a table and a pie chart to shows students a detailed breakdown of the points available in this course (see figure 3).

Grading Breakdown	
Major Unit Projects	60%
Scaffolded Assignments	15%
Uptake	15%
Forum Posts	10%
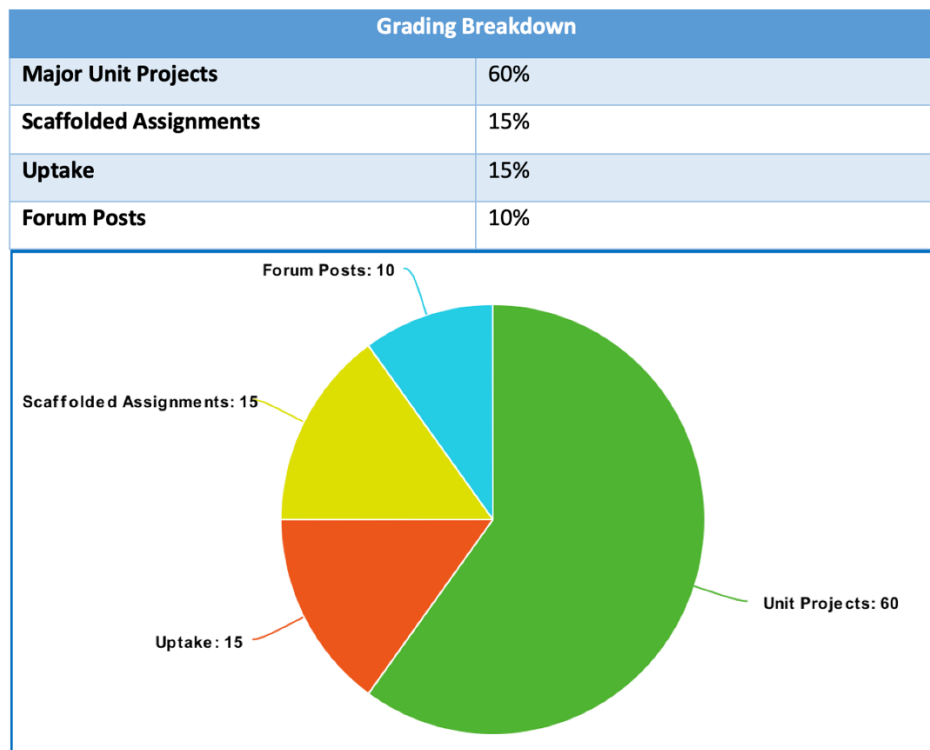
Figure 3: Grading visuals

These portions of the syllabus are important for me, and for students as well. These additional images are simple, but help break up blocks of text and highlight the parts of this document that students will likely reference multiple times throughout a semester. Though each individual instructor will want to emphasize different portions of their syllabus, I would highly suggest instructors take a more subdued approach to integrating media into their syllabi. As SCLCs continue to evolve, media in syllabus design is something I am very interested in revisiting and researching in an effort to further improve these courses.

Building Your Own SCLCs

Transitioning now from syllabus design the final sections of this chapter will be dedicated to the construction of SCLCs. While instructors are more than welcome to use my version of SCLCs verbatim, instructors interested in this assessment method should also feel empowered to modify this contract to match their own pedagogical needs. In addition to your own pedagogical goals, you may also have to make some changes to this contract to account for institution-specific goals. Over the following pages I will discuss the rationale behind this contract, how it manifests in my own contract, and provide some advice for instructors interested in using SCLCs.

Letter to Students on SCLCs

Before transitioning into a more detailed description of the labor and learning portions of SCLCs I also want to direct our attention to how these contracts manifest in our syllabus. In chapter 5 I described the importance of scaffolding for SCLCs. This included a pre-unit dedicated to multiple discussions on SCLCs. I would highly recommend interested instructors retain this pre-unit, and to further help scaffold SCLCs I would also recommend including a letter to your students, articulating what SCLCs are, and how they will function in your course. This brief letter, around 2-3

pages, will act as an introduction to SCLCs, and outline some of the key features, expectations, and

benefits of this assessment method. To build my letter[40] I used three key headings:

- *What are SCLCs?*

- *What is expected from me as a learner?*

- *How will SCLCs benefit me?*

These headings were designed to cover some of the questions students are likely to have at the start

of the semester. In the first section, *What Are SCLCs?*, I include a brief description of what SCLCs

are and provide an abstract of the labor and learning sections. The second section – *What is expected*

from me as a learner? – is formatted as a bulleted list so students can quickly see what will be expected

of them as they use this contract. My section includes the following:

As a learner you will be expected to complete the following while using SCLCs

- Reach the labor goals outlined for each project

- Complete all work on time

- Write achievable learning goals

  - Outline your strategies for achieving these goals

- Submit drafts of your learning contracts, and revise if necessary

- Complete uptake assignments for each unit

The final section of this letter is titled *How will SCLCs benefit me?* I wanted to end this letter with

a discussion on how SCLCs can be beneficial to students to help demonstrate how this contract

will improve their academic experience. Much like my revised syllabus, in this section I pay close

attention to the language I am using, and I try to utilize an upbeat, accessible tone. For example,

in this portion of my letter I state:

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[40] This letter can be seen at the end of the new syllabus in Appendix E.

The biggest benefit of using a SCLC is the increased freedom you will have to pursue your

own unique learning goals. Everyone in this class has different experiences, expectations,

and goals for this semester. So instead of asking every student to meet the same goals

outlined in an arbitrary rubric, with goals that may or may not be relevant to you, SCLCs will

let you pursue the kinds of learning and goals that are important to you.

Throughout the entire letter I really want to emphasize the benefits of SCLCs, while also putting

students' minds at ease. SCLCs will be a new experience for students, so as you are building your

own letters think about what you want to say, and what steps you can take to help engage your

students from the very start of the semester.

Labor Portion

To begin this discussion on building SCLCs I will start by focusing on the labor section of

this contract. My interests in writing assessment were initially inspired by the work of Inoue (2012;

2015; 2019), and his labor-based model. For Inoue (2019), labor offers instructors a more equitable

way to assess students. Instead of rewarding students for being academically literate, or for

recreating master models, Inoue rewards students for the intellectual labor, and the amount of work

they are willing to put in to completing a project; as Inoue (2019) notes, "the more labor you do, the

better your grade in the course will be (p. 130)." By using a labor-based approach, Inoue hopes to

better account for the diverse skills and abilities students bring into our courses. I see a lot of value

to this approach to assessment, and this is evident by the inclusion of a labor portion in SCLCs.

However, while I see value to assessing students based on labor, I feel Inoue's approach emphasizes

labor to a problematic degree.

While labor is an important part of writing, and something instructors absolutely should

value in the assessment process, focusing too heavily on labor can have unintended consequences.

For example, I cited Medina & Walker's (2018) cautionary tale on labor. While using contracts in

their course students felt their class was focused too heavily on labor, to the point where excessive labor was detrimental to the overall quality of the course; I see similar problems lurking in throughout Inoue's (2019) contract. In his contract every minute of labor is accounted for. That is not an exaggeration as Inoue's (2019) seven-page[41] contract notes that students should "be honest about completing labor that asks particular time commitments of you (for example, 'write for 20 minutes,' etc.)" (p. 332). While it is important to account for all the labor that goes into a project, the phrasing here, and throughout the contract, makes writing seem more like a chore students must endure to earn a grade rather than an exciting opportunity to learn and develop valuable skills. While there is value to Inoue's labor-based approach, I feel he goes a bit too far, and would suggest that instructors take a slightly more subdued approach to assessing students based on labor.

In SCLCs the labor portion utilizes more simplistic metrics to measure student labor. Instead of having students quantify every minute they spend writing, my contract rewards students for the work they naturally complete over the course of a project. For example, with my Academic Memoir prompt the labor portion has students complete the following tasks.

- Submit a draft of your project

- Complete the progress report memo

- Attend and participate in peer review

- Write 750-1000 words

- Submit your work in APA/MLA style

The tasks outlined here are relatively simple, but also represent the work students will naturally do throughout a unit. Additionally, I do not include the labor portion on the SCLC itself, rather, I have this information listed on my assignment sheets. This structure shows students that labor is indeed

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[41] Which I would argue is a bit excessive.

important to the writing process, but learning is still at the foundation of their individual contracts. While instructors are free to include the labor portion of this contract wherever they see fit, I feel including the labor portion on the assignment description makes the most sense. Again, for SCLCs labor is indeed important, but labor is not the focal point of this assessment method.

Learning Portion

SCLCs are practical documents, designed to help students learn the skills that will help in their academic careers and beyond. While learning is of immense importance to student success, building learning contracts can be difficult. The learning section of this contract is divided into two parts, the learning goals section, and the how will you learn section. Over the following sections I will provide more details on these sections, and discuss my approach to building these portions of SCLCs.

Learning Goals

In this part of the contract, students outline their learning goals. As an instructor it is important to work closely with students as they build their learning goals for this part of the contract[42]. In figure 4 below you can see the original version of the SCLC. This portion of the contract is divided into three key parts. The first part has students write their learning goals. Again, absent from learning section is the labor portion of the contract; while labor is important, I want this document to be explicitly focused on learning. In addition to creating a cleaner layout, this also keeps contracts consistent for each unit, so students can save the contract once and reuse the template throughout the semester. Usability is important to me, and to SCLCs, so I want to avoid this contract creating additional work for students.

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[42] In chapter 5 I outlined several strategies for working with students, including scaffolding small projects (forum posts, progress report memos), and using flipped classrooms to work with individual students.

Name:

Course and section:

Due Date:

Unit Learning Contract		
	What do you want to learn?	How will you learn it?
Learning goal 1		
Learning goal 2		
Learning goal 3		

Answer the following in around a paragraph each:
- Project specifics: what is your topic, and genre?
- Exigence: why are you writing?
- Audience: who are you trying to reach?
- Voice/tone: what kind of communication will help you reach your audience?

Figure 4: SCLC template

Moving on from the general design I want to discuss learning goals. For individual learning contracts, I feel having students write 2-3 goals is ideal. Before I started using SCLCs, my rubrics would typically contain 2-3 major goals, and over the course of my career that has worked out quite well. The data collected from chapter 3 seems to corroborate this theory, as there was not a single comment relate to excessive learning goals. Additionally, of the 130 learning goals collected, 122 ($\approx$94%) were coded as making progress+. Both of these points suggest that 2-3 learning goals works well for students, as they did not feel overwhelmed, and were able to find success with a significant amount of their learning goals. While these are encouraging signs, I feel further research on learning goals will be required to solidify this point.

As for the learning goals themselves, I would recommend having students keep their goals simple and achievable; in my course students would typically write a short paragraph describing what they want to learn, but bullet points would work as well, especially for early drafts. Building learning

goals is a complex, but critical part of SCLC instruction. While my discussion on learning goals is quite brief here, a more detailed discussion on this topic can be found in chapter 5. I discussed how rhetorical genre studies (RGS), and a dedicated pre-unit can help instructors and students build effective learning goals and contracts.

Finally, building learning goals is important part of SCLCs, so instructors must think carefully about how their course is scaffolded, what goals they have as an instructor, and what goals their institution has for their classes, as this can have significant influence on the kinds of goals students create. For example, in chapter 4 I analyzed the data I collected from student learning contracts. Throughout that semester I dedicated a significant amount of class time to expansive learning, or "learning in which the learners are involved in constructing and implementing a radically new, wider and more complex object and concept for their activity" (Engstrom & Sannino, 2010, p. 2). After analyzing the data, I found that a majority of the learning goals analyzed showed students focused on expansive goals. Throughout this semester I made a consistent effort to emphasize expansive learning and expansive goals and this expansive focus manifested in student learning goals[43].

While it will take additional research to substantiate this theory, how you frame your class and what you decide to emphasize will likely have a significant effect on the learning goals students choose to pursue. I feel this theory held true for my research section described in chapters 3 and 4. In that course I asked students to think critically about what kind of writing skills they would need to do in their future career. All of my projects, and a majority of my daily lessons, had this practical bent, and these themes were reflected in their learning goals. Two of the three biggest clusters were Writer Researcher Identity and Writing in the World and accounted for 57/130 individual learning goals (≈44%) and both these codes shared the practical focus at the heart of my course. Various

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[43] This is reflected in the data collected for chapter 4 as 88/130 (≈ 68%) of learning goals were coded as expansive.

institutions may ask instructors to prioritize different learning objectives, so keep this advice in mind as you work with students to build their learning goals.

How Will You Learn?

Articulating learning goals is a key feature of this contract, but SCLCs go a step further and asks students to outline the approaches they will take to achieve this learning. This portion of the contract is included to help students better scaffold their own work, to think about how they can break projects down into more manageable sections, and give them a more defined path to their goals.

Much like the learning goals themselves, this section seems to work best as short, bulleted lists. In my initial SCLC I had students write 2-3 steps they would take to achieve their goals. While it is a good idea to have students articulate the steps they think they will take while learning, learning is not that prescriptive, and the odds are incredibly likely that they will take divergent paths while learning. While having students outline the steps they will take to achieve their learning goals was successful in my research section, as SCLCs evolve, I am also exploring other options for these guidelines. As such, it is important to emphasize to students that this section of the contract is flexible, and that they will be multiple assignments throughout a unit to document their approaches to achieving their learning goals, and how it can/has changed. So, as a unit progress remind students to pay attention to their progress report memos and their forum posts to keep a detailed record on the steps they took to learn throughout a unit. All of these steps are used to help students document their learning, and to help them understand how learning works for them at an individual level.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

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Supporting documents, such as syllabi and contracts, are subtle tools to help scaffold SCLCs in a course. As students encounter SCLCs for the first time, they will likely have many questions about this assessment method, and what will be asked of them throughout a semester. Instructors

will want to think critically about how they structure these documents, as they will act as an initial reference point for students. In my research section, I feel like my syllabi and SCLC were a bit underdeveloped, as my data suggested a significant amount of confusion around SCLCs early in the course. Though students felt more confident and comfortable with SCLCs as the semester progressed, I knew there was a need to revise these documents to provide students additional support early in the semester. Throughout this chapter I discussed the changes I have made to these documents to better support the use of SCLCs in my own courses. By paying more attention to the kinds of language, tone, and media I used, I feel my syllabus and SCLCs are now better equipped to support students.

CHAPTER VII: TOMORROW

Throughout this dissertation I have had the opportunity to research, write, teach, and reflect on the process of building student-centric learning contracts (SCLCs). This experience has been invaluable for me, as I worked to develop and improve methods for assessing student writing. In their current form, I feel confident that SCLCs are a useful tool to help instructors create a more equitable and accessible form of writing assessment for students; however, throughout this entire project I knew my work with SCLCs would extend far beyond the scope of this dissertation. As my career continues, I see my work with SCLCs lasting for several years – SCLCs are complex and will require many more semesters worth of significant research. Through my research I have collected a bumper crop of new research questions to further investigate and improve this assessment method. As this dissertation comes to a close, I will use this final section to briefly discuss some of my ideas on the future trajectory of my work with SCLCs as I transition to the next phase of my career.

Dissertation Trajectory

To start this chapter, I first want to discuss the future of this dissertation, as I feel there is a good deal of publishable material in this project. My long-term goal is to convert this project into a book. I feel the work I have done with my literature review, research, and praxis chapters would be a useful addition to the existing scholarship on assessment, while also providing a solid foundation for my future work with SCLCs. The sections on praxis, and teaching with SCLCs is something I feel is particularly useful to the field. While there exists a lot of wonderful scholarship on assessment from a theoretical standpoint, throughout this project I always had trouble finding teaching-centric scholarship – this book would focus primarily on teaching, integrating, and building SCLCs.

While building a book will take time, and additional semesters of research, I feel there is also potential to revise individual chapters into articles and conference presentations. I feel my chapters collecting and analyzing data can be a useful proof of concept to demonstrate the value of SCLCs.

Revising and condensing these chapters will be the starting point of my post-dissertation agenda, and this work has already begun. I have submitted a proposal for C's 2023 based on these chapters and will submit to other conferences as well[44]. In addition to my data, I feel the work I have done with building syllabi and course documents could also be fruitful. Again, there is limited work on syllabi and how they function in writing courses, so I feel these sections could be revisited and reworked into something more substantial for future publication.

As I consider future publishing, I feel outlets such as the Journal of Writing Assessment, Assessing Writing, Prompt, or the Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy would be ideal venues for some of my work. I am particularly interested in open access journals. As outlined in chapter 3 this project was built on a base of pragmatism. I want this work to be accessible to teachers, so they can integrate SCLCs into their courses, and improve the quality of assessment for students. This is much harder to accomplish behind a paywall, so I want to prioritize open access whenever possible.

Future Research

Over the course of writing this dissertation I had the opportunity to collect a lot of data. In the fall of 2021, I researched how SCLCs functioned in my business writing class. In doing so, I collected hundreds of pages worth of data over the course of the semester. As I am still relatively new to conducting research, I had no idea what kind of data I needed, how much data was manageable, or how difficult it would be to code and analyze all the data I collected. With that said, my dissertation proposal had even more ambitious research goals. While these goals, and the additional data they would have provided, would have been useful tools to improve SCLCs, I also wanted to finish this dissertation in a reasonable amount of time. As my research continues, I want to revisit some of these goals, specifically interviews with instructors and students.

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[44] Computers and Writing, NCTE, and TYCA come to mind.

Interviews with Instructors

My initial plan was to spend the summer of 2021 interviewing instructors[45] about their approaches to teaching contract grading. As I was new to contract grading myself, I was interested in examining how other instructors broach these complex subjects with students. In my research section I feel I struggled a bit with introducing contracts to students, so I am extremely curious to see what steps other instructors take, what supplemental materials they use, and what kinds of projects they use to help students conceptualize and understand contracts early in the semester. Given the limited research on some of the more praxis-oriented aspects of teaching with contract grading, I feel this would make for a very interesting article, and subsequent conference presentation.

Building on these interviews, I feel they would also be an ideal opportunity to discuss how assessment works with contracts. Grading, especially grading based on learning, has the potential to be very subjective. In these instructor interviews I would also spend some time having conversations about assessment. Though I am in the early stages of building these interviews, the following questions seem like they might provide useful insight for instructors interested in contract grading:

- How do you assess student writing?

- What milestones do you use to track student progress throughout a unit?

- What kind of feedback do you leave?

- How much feedback do you leave?

- What modes or media do you use to provide feedback?

- What feedback strategies have work in the past?

- What innovative approaches do you take to leaving feedback?

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[45] For this project it would have been around 3-5 interviews but going forward I would like to interview a larger group, maybe 10-20.

- How do you build contracts with students, and how do the contracts influence you feedback?

While these questions will need to be narrowed, refined, and reworded, I feel they represent some useful questions to help demystify assessment in contract courses. A primary goal of my dissertation was to provide something useful to instructors, and a roadmap to easily integrate contracts into their courses. I feel this work is valuable and is something I will pursue after defending this dissertation.

SCLCs, Language, and Anti-Racism

Another area of SCLCs that I did not sufficiently explore is the intersection of SCLCs and language. Offering students an opportunity to compose using something other than academic English is an important feature to help make SCLCs more accessible for students, but my research questions did not lead to conversations on this important subject. As SCLCs are designed to make assessment more equitable, and combat white language supremacy, I will need to conduct additional research to see if SCLCs can indeed improve on this exigency. This is important as Inoue (2015) warns us that traditional methods of composing and accessing writing can actively enforce white language supremacy and marginalize underrepresented voices.

Inoue (2015) notes "everyone speaks and writes a brand of English that has its nuances, its deviations," (p. 37) and these nuances and deviations are often punished in writing courses as they do not conform to the white, western European style that dominates academia. To this point, Inoue (2015) asks "Who historically has had the privilege to speak and write the most in civic life and in the academy? Whose words have been validated as history, truth, knowledge, story, the most throughout history? White people" (p. 30). These white voices and styles dominate academia, composition courses, and can force students to conform to this style. The conformity to white language supremacy is dangerous, especially in the current socio-political climate in the United States. Scholars doing work on white language supremacy can be targets of right-wing extremists,

evident by Asao Inoue ending up on a professor's watch list[46]. While this has a non-zero chance to be potentially dangerous[47], I feel it is still a worthwhile endeavor.

SCLCs in Different Courses and Colleges

At the start of my dissertation, I was excited to see how different classes would interact with SCLCs. The students that sign up for English 101, Business Writing, Technical and Professional Writing, Advanced Composition, and Multimodal Composition all bring unique needs to writing courses, and I was excited to create research studies for a variety of courses. I wanted to use these courses as an opportunity to see what differences, if any, SCLCs had on a variety of courses. While these classes would have provided excellent opportunities to collect and code rich data, as well as provide a springboard for a variety of new research questions, I never had the opportunity to teach many these courses. After finishing coursework, I was exclusively assigned English 145 – Writing in the Academic Disciplines, and English 145.13 – Writing in Business and Government Organizations. While my Business Writing courses did provide a great deal of important data, I still feel that my research could have been improved by the opportunity to teach different kinds of writing courses.

As a researcher, and as a teacher, I will admit this was frustrating. The courses I was assigned were nearly identical in terms of scope and learning outcomes to classes I have taught since my earliest days working as an adjunct. I was looking forward to the challenge of creating new course preps and seeing how SCLCs functioned in a variety of classes, but that never came to be. As my career continues, I am looking forward to having the opportunity to teach new courses and create new studies to examine how SCLCs work in a variety of courses.

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[46] I will not draw attention to this site by naming it.
[47] Especially as the United States is plagued by anti-intellectual attempts to ban books, critical race theory, and experienced a literal coup.

In addition to experimenting with SCLCs in different courses, I am also looking forward to using SCLCs at different institutions as well. Prior to attending Illinois State University (ISU), I worked at Moraine Valley Community College, College of DuPage, and Governors State University; all of these institutions are significantly more diverse than ISU. As SCLCs are designed to help improve the quality of writing assessment for underrepresented and marginalized students, I am interested in researching how these contracts function at more diverse institutions, and how students would react to SCLCs. As I enter the job market, I am open to returning to community colleges, as it will give me the opportunity to do more teaching, but my ability to research these questions will be dependent on where I go from here.

While my institutional research will be focused on colleges and universities, I would also be interested in seeing how SCLCs work in high school courses. Again, this assessment method was designed to be used in a variety of courses, and to help learners at many different levels. While I am interested in exploring SCLCs in the context of high school courses, I know their curriculum is a lot stricter, so I am not sure how, or even if SCLCs could be used at high schools. With that said, I am a big fan of collaborative research, and would be very interested in working with high school instructors to see how SCLCs function in those settings.

Research Across the Curriculum

Finally, I am also interested in the utility of SCLCs in a broad spectrum of classes. While SCLCs were designed to be used in writing courses, I feel this assessment method can be useful across the curriculum. As mentioned in chapter 2, learning contracts have proven to be an effective assessment method in a variety of disciplines including business (Boak, 1998), counseling (O'Halloran & Delaney, 2011), engineering (Frank & Scharf, 2013), and technical writing (Littero, 2016). Regardless of the subject, I feel learning should be the primary instructional outcome, and I feel that SCLCs can be a useful tool to facilitate learning. Much like my interest in SCLCs and high

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school courses, this kind of research will be difficult. I do not have the efficacy or experience to teach math, biology, or most courses outside of an English department. So, this will again need to be a collaborative process.

Conclusion

At the start of this dissertation, I cited a passage from Asao Inoue (2015) that inspired me to research writing assessment. Inoue (2015), discussing the intersection of pedagogy and writing assessment, stated that "thinking through one's assessment comes before (or at least simultaneously with) thinking through one's pedagogy and curriculum," (p. 283) and this quote instantly changed the trajectory of my research agenda. Though I have been teaching for nearly a decade, I never paused to seriously consider my writing assessment practices, or how my assessment practices influenced my pedagogy. Now, after having completed a dissertation on writing assessment, I feel that Inoue's (2015) view on assessment is even more relevant after multiple years of writing, research, and countless hours writing this dissertation. As we develop courses it is critical to consider how pedagogy and writing assessment interact at all times. This approach is important to me, because as an academic I identify first and foremost as a teacher, and pedagogy has been at the very heart of this project from the start. As I move on to the next phase of my career, I will never lose track of how important writing assessment is to every aspect of effective pedagogy.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Prior to taking this course, have you ever been enrolled in a course that used contract grading?

[a] Yes, I have been enrolled in a course that used contract grading.

[b] No, I have NOT been enrolled in a course that used contract grading.

2: How did the use of grading contracts, and setting your own learning goals, change your approaches to writing throughout this semester?

2. Did the use of grading contracts change your approaches to writing this semester?

[a] Yes, the use of grading contracts changed my approaches to writing this semester. CONTINUE TO 2A

[b] No, the use of grading contracts did NOT change my approaches to writing this semester

    2A. How did the use of grading contracts change your approaches to writing this semester?

3: What were the benefits of using contract grading in this course?

4: What were the limitations of using contract grading in this course?

5. What skills and concepts did you learn using contract grading?

    5A. Do you think these skills and concepts will help you in the future?

    5B. In what ways do you think these skills and concepts will help you in the future?

6. Some educators use contract grading because they feel it gives students more freedom to do the kinds of writing that are important to them. Do you feel that the contracts gave you more freedom?

    [a] Yes, the contracts gave me more freedom. CONTINUE TO 6A

    [b] No, the contracts did NOT give me more freedom. CONTINUE TO 6B

        6A. How does this compare to courses that do not use contracts?

6B. What could educators do to give you more freedom?

7. Some students find contract grading confusing. Did you find contract grading confusing?

7A. What was confusing about the contracts?

8. Reflecting on your time in this course, do you prefer traditional grading or contract grading?

8A. Why do you prefer this grading method?

Participant Information Sheet and Informed Consent

English 145.13 Learning Contract Study

Joyce Walker, co-principal investigator

Matthew Schering, co-principal investigator

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Matthew Schering and Dr. Joyce Walker from Illinois State University.

The purpose of this study is to examine how learning contracts work in writing courses. In this project I will be researching contract grading, and how they help students complete the kind of work that is important to them. Your participation in this study will help contribute to the field of writing assessment, and improve the quality of assessment for future students. I believe contract grading can improve the quality of writing classes, and the data collected this semester will help me make that case to other scholars and instructors.

<u>Why are you being asked?</u>

You have been asked to participate because you are students over the age of 18 enrolled in a course using contract grading. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You will not be penalized if you choose to skip parts of the study, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any time.

<u>What would you do?</u>

If you choose to participate in this study, your in-class work will be collected and analyzed to test the efficacy of learning contracts. In addition to this, you will also be asked to complete a survey.

In total, your involvement in this study will be minimal, and will last approximately 10 minutes while taking a survey.

Are any risks expected?

We do not anticipate any risks beyond those that would occur in everyday life. It is conceivable that you might experience some stress or embarrassment from some of the questions and issues, but you will have the opportunity to decline to answer any questions. You also have the option at any point in the process to withdraw from participation in the study

Will your information be protected?

We will use all reasonable efforts to keep any provided personal information confidential. The information collected may be used for conference presentation, journal articles, and my dissertation. In any presentations and publications that emerge from this study, you and your role would be described in general terms (teacher, student, employee), but you would not be identified by name or by any other identifying characteristics.

The survey will be completed anonymously, and the site used to administer the survey will not be able to track any of your data that could identify you. We will not know your name, and in writings if your responses are used you will also be given a pseudonym to further keep your identity hidden from others.

Information that may identify you or potentially lead to reidentification will not be released to individuals that are not on the research team.

However, when required by law or university policy, identifying information (including your signed consent form) may be seen or copied by authorized individuals.

Could your responses be used for other research?

We will not use any identifiable information from you in future research, but your deidentified

information could be used for future research without additional consent from you.

Who will benefit from this study?

You may benefit by having the opportunity to reflect on your experiences of writing. You may also

benefit from seeing your views treated as objects of serious study and by having some of those views

published as part of scholarly work. We believe that we as researchers, and others who read reports

on this research, will gain fresh knowledge about how people act and develop as readers and

writers.

Whom do you contact if you have any questions?

If you have any questions about the research or wish to withdraw from the study, contact Joyce

Walker, E-mail: jwalke2@IllinoisState.edu, or Matt Schering, E-mail: mwsche1@ilstu.edu

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If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel you have been placed at

risk, contact the Illinois State University Research Ethics & Compliance Office at (309) 438-5527 or

IRB@ilstu.edu.

Documentation of Consent Sign below if you are 18 or older and willing to participate in this

study.

Signature _____   Date _____

APPENDIX C: PRE-UNIT BREAKDOWN

Deliverables

- Semester-long SCLC

  o 3 broad learning goals for the semester

  o Outline on how students plan to achieve these goals

- Genre studies CHAT presentation

Supplemental Materials

- SCLC handout: Matt Schering

- University of Waterloo Contract Grading Article

- Do Schools Kill Creativity?: Ken Robinson

- Just Chatting: Joyce Walker

- Understanding Language with Cultural Historical Activity Theory: Tyler Kostecki

Unit Schedule

Week 1:

Class 1: Introduction to course, syllabus, contract, Reggienet.

 Homework: Read article on learning contracts

 Read SCLC handout

 https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/tips-

 students/self-directed-learning/self-directed-learning-learning-contracts

Class 2: Discuss how to build learning goals, semester-long learning goals, and final exam.

Week 2:

Class 1: TED Talk: Ken Robinson Do School's Kill Creativity?

 Discuss learning contracts, workshop learning goals for the semester.

Activity: What does ISU mean to you?

Homework: Read "Just Chatting" by Walker, and "Understanding Language

with Cultural Historical Activity Theory" by Kostecki on ReggieNet.

Class 2: Discuss CHAT, assign genre research groups

Week 3:

Class 1: Learning contract/CHAT group workshop

Class 2: CHAT presentations

ENGL 145.13

Writing in business and gov't organizations
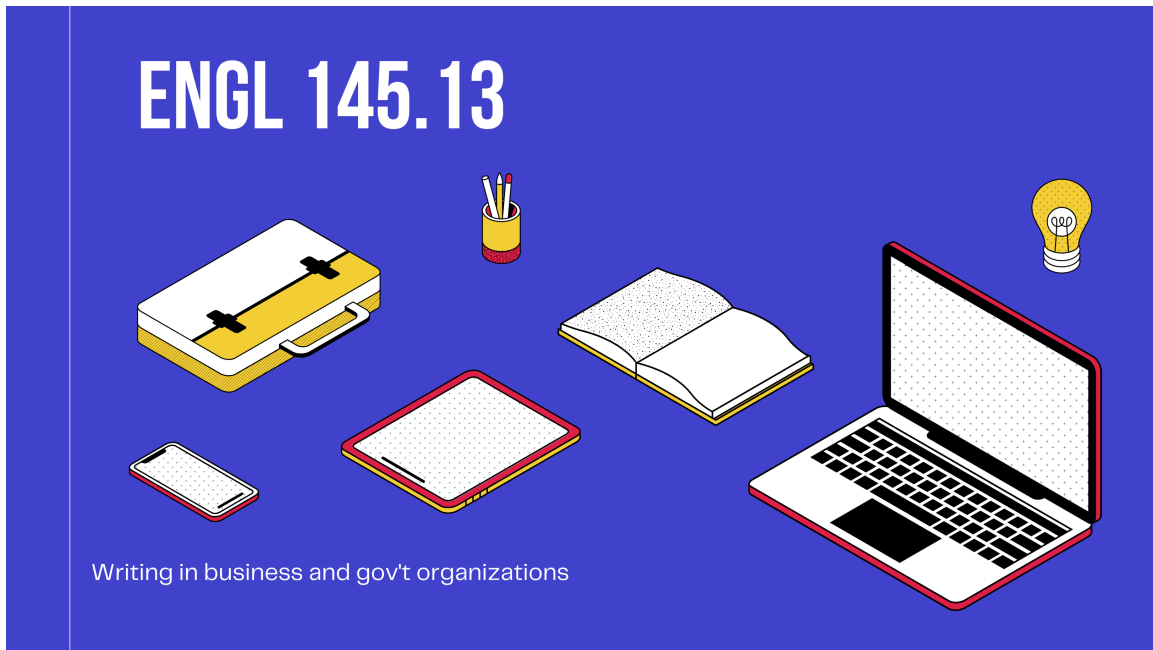
Instructor Information:

Matt Schering

Office: Stevenson Hall 201 G

Office Hours: Wednesday/Friday 9:30-10:30

Email: mwsche1@ilstu.edu

Course Information

Course: ENG 145.13: Writing Business & Government Organizations

Location: Stevenson Hall, 250B

Section 3 & 4: 11-11:50, 12-12:50

Course Objectives and Learning Goals

Catalogue description: Writing Business & Government Organizations - Introduction to research-based writing for multiple academic audiences. Computer-assisted. Formerly LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION II.

Due to an ongoing global pandemic (you may have heard) this course will, by necessity, be a bit different. Though we are slated to have this class in person, with the spread of the Delta variant, we may switch online at some point in the semester. I hope this is not the case, but it may happen. In that case, we will go fully asynchronous, and I will upload videos to our Reggienet page.

Pandemic aside, this course is designed with a very pragmatic scope, aimed at providing you with the tools to build an effective portfolio for your future. Throughout the semester you will not be writing for abstract exigencies, but rather situations you see yourself encountering in the future. I want this course to help you sharpen the skills you need for success, while also providing you with real-world situations that will be helpful outside of the college setting.

Over the semester we will work on these following skills:

- Learn to research, assess, and evaluate writing in your field (accounting, management, finance, etc.)
- Develop a concise writing style
- Develop an understanding of the audience for business writing
- Develop skills in reading and creating multimodal projects as a means of inquiry and scholarship
- Examine the different processes that occur when compositing projects using different media

- Begin to understand the affordances and limitations of various types of media

Finally, this course will utilize student-centric learning contracts - see the end of the syllabus for the contract. Each major project will have a rubric outlining the labor requirements for each grade (page count, sources, etc.). In addition to the labor, you will also write out a list of goals of what you want to learn, and what you wish to accomplish for said project. This will give you agency in the assessment process and allow you to focus on the skills that are important to you, your education, and your future.

Projects

Researching You Discipline
To write effectively in any situation we first must understand the genre, style, tone, expectations, and audience for our work. As such, the first project will task you with researching your specific discipline to find out what kind of writing/communication occurs. You will fine 3-5 samples of writing in your field, and write annotations for these sources breaking down their key features. Additionally, you will write a 1-page memo discussing your findings, and what you learned about writing in your discipline.
Personal portfolio

Our second project of the semester will be a portfolio consisting of some of the more common pieces of business writing. For this project, you will create a resume, cover letter, press release, and a portfolio cover letter for a company/organization of your choice. I would suggest using this project as an opportunity to research a company you want to work for after you graduate, and use this project to get some feedback on your application materials.

Web page

Our final project will task you with creating and building your own web site. Digital spaces offer a lot of freedom in terms of design, and spatiality. With a website, you can easily integrate audio, visual, and linguistic modes of communication that we discussed throughout the semester. So, with this project, you will need to think of organization and development in different ways due to the genre of a website. Your web content is negotiable.

Forum Responses

To help facilitate a sense of community you will be responsible for writing forum posts. These posts will be 200-250 words in length. You will need to write a total of 8 posts (max of 1 per week) throughout the semester. You will write 4 posts discussing your own thoughts on course topics (I will periodically provide topics, but you can write about whatever is of interest to you), and write 4 responses to posts made by your peers.

Course Policies

Attendance Policy

You may miss three class periods without penalty. The fourth through ninth absences will each earn a penalty of one-half of one letter grade deducted from your final course grade. **A tenth absence will result in a failing grade in the course, as this would mean missing approximately 20% of classroom instructional time.** For example, a student who would otherwise end the course with an 85% but missed four class periods would receive a C, not a B, as their final grade.

Obviously, with COVID, people may have to miss time, and that is fine. **If you are sick, please stay home!** Given the circumstances of a still raging pandemic, we may be overcome by other obligations: recovering from illness, taking care of a sick family member, etc., so I will do my best to be flexible.

Absences related to school-sponsored activities will be excused, pending completion of make-up work to be determined by the instructor in consultation with the student. Notification of school-sponsored absences must occur in writing at least two weeks *before* the absence. Retroactive notification will not be accepted by the instructor.

The instructor reserves the right to count excessive tardiness or excessive lack of preparation as an absence. For example, failing to bring a completed assignment to peer review or a presentation day would result in an absence, and you will be asked to leave.

Grading Policies

As this course will utilize contract grading, grading will be dependent on your own work, and your own goals. You will articulate what you want to learn for each project, and I will use that material to

assess your work. This course is designed to be practical and pragmatic, so do take your contracts seriously.

All assignments will be submitted via Reggienet, which would be the case pandemic or not. If you submit your assignment late, even by a second, you will lose 10% of the points you have earned for that assignment, and another 10% for every 12 hours your assignment is late thereafter. Work that is over 72 hours late will not be graded, and will not be eligible for points.

Classroom Policies

I like to foster a relaxed environment in my classes, as I feel this is conducive to an effective learning environment where students feel free to speak their minds. With that said, it should go without saying that any racist, sexist, homophobic, ableist, xenophobic, or any other manner of pejorative comments will not be tolerated. Students making such comments will not be allowed to continue this course.

- Be in class on time

- Have all work/readings done before class

- Be respectful of your peers

- Hate speech will not be tolerated

Mask Policy

As we are in the middle of a pandemic, masks will be REQUIRED AT ALL TIMES in this class. This is the university's policy and will be enforced without exception. Masks must cover your nose and mouth; if you are not wearing a mask that covers your nose and mouth you will not be allowed in this classroom. Please, demonstrate respect and empathy by observing the mask policy. Below you will find CDC guidelines on mask usage.

How to Select

When selecting a mask, there are many choices. Here are some do's and don'ts.

DO choose masks that	DO NOT choose masks that
Have two or more layers of washable, breathable fabric	Are made of fabric that makes it hard to breathe, for example, vinyl
Completely cover your nose and mouth	Have exhalation valves or vents which allow virus particles to escape
Fit snugly against the sides of your face and don't have gaps	Are prioritized for healthcare workers, including N95 respirators
Have a nose wire to prevent air from leaking out of the top of the mask	

Special Considerations

Gaiters & face shields	
Wear a gaiter with two layers, or fold it to make two layers	Not recommended: Evaluation of face shields is ongoing, but effectiveness is unknown at this time.

Children

University Resources

Student Counseling

Student Counseling Services at ISU provides students with a variety of support systems to manage everyday life issues. Students can receive help from trained professionals on topics such as individual and group counseling, self-help and assessment, career and life choices, sexual assault, outreach workshops, and help for friends and family. Emergency walk-in service is available at Student Services Building, room 320. They may also be contacted via phone 309-438-3655 or online via http://www.counseling.ilstu.edu.

Student Access and Accommodation Serviceshttp://www.disabilityconcerns.ilstu.edu/

Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability and/or medical/mental health condition should contact Student Access and Accommodation Services at 350 Fell Hall, (309) 438-5853, or visit the website at StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu

Academic Assistance

The Julia N. Visor Academic Center is a division of University College that provides services and programs designed to assist students in their pursuit of academic excellence at Illinois State University. Services and programs include group tutoring in general education courses, one-on-one writing assistance, workshops designed to enhance student study techniques and academic skills, one-on-one academic coaching, a computer lab that provides a quiet and supportive environment for study and the Mary F. English Technology Award program, which provides a new laptop computer and professional development opportunities for selected teacher education majors.

Located at 12 Vrooman Center (between Manchester and Hewett Halls). Phone (309) 438-7100, http://ucollege.illinoisstate.edu/about/visor

Diversity Advocacy

Diversity Advocacy helps multicultural and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students find their way at Illinois State University through a variety of resources, programs, activities and advising. Diversity Advocacy also works to facilitate a supportive campus environment in which multicultural and LGBT students can flourish academically and socially.

To contact Diversity Advocacy visit 87 Student Services Building room 87, phone (309) 438-8968 or email Diversityadvocacy@ilstu.edu

Extended Absence/Bereavement

The Office of the Dean of Students can provide notification to instructors when students have been/will be absent from class(es) for three or more consecutive days or for absence in the event of a death of a spouse, domestic partner, parent, child, grandparents, grandchild or sibling, uncle, aunt, niece, nephew, first cousin, in-law, or step-relative. Call (309) 438-2008 if you would like to make use of either of these services.

Sexual Assault Survivor Resources

All university faculty and staff are mandated by Federal law to report acts of sexual violence/assault, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and sexual harassment so the University can respond and investigate. Only Student Counseling Services staff and the university psychiatrist are not required to report. Victims of such incidents are free to choose their level of involvement in University and/or police investigations. There is an extensive network of support resources for survivors of such incidents; talking with someone about what happened aids recovery and adjustment. Reporting options: ISU Police 911 or (309) 438-8631. Non-criminal reporting options: Equal Opportunity Office (309) 438-3383. Or, EqualOpportunity.IllinoisState.edu

Course Calendar (subject to change)

Fall 2021

Week 1

Monday, August 16: Introductions, syllabus overview, Reggienet

Wednesday, August 18: What does good academic writing look like? Discuss 5 aspects of effective

college writing.

Friday, August 20: What does ISU mean to you?

> Read: Learning contracts

Week 2

Monday, August 23: Introduce unit 1, discuss learning contracts

> Read: Rhetorical situations: https://pressbooks.ulib.csuohio.edu/csu-fyw-

rhetoric/chapter/rhetorical-situation-the-context/

Wednesday, August 25: Rhetorical situations, why we write

Friday, August 27: Learning contract/general workshop

Homework: Read selection on rhetorical appeals

https://pressbooks.ulib.csuohio.edu/csu-fyw-rhetoric/chapter/rhetorical-strategies-building-compelling-arguments/

Friday, August 27: Last day to drop course with no withdrawal grade

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Week 3

Monday, August 30: Discuss rhetorical appeals

Wednesday, September 1: Discuss rhetorical fallacies, and their danger.

Friday, September 3: Annotations activity

Week 4

Monday, September 6

Labor Day holiday - no classes

Wednesday, September 8: Discuss Library tools/research

Friday, September 10: Open lab, library day

       Homework: Read kairos, and memos

Week 5

Monday, September 13: Discuss rhetorical timing, memos

       Homework: Ready materials for peer review

Wednesday, September 15: Peer review

Friday, September 17: Open lab, **unit 1 due by midnight**

Week 6

Monday, September 20: Introduce unit 2, unit 1 uptake activity

       Read: Resumes and cover letters

Wednesday, September 22: Discuss reading, Ted Talk on resumes.

Friday, September 24: Public speak Ted Talk, assign groups for genre research

       Homework: Read the Rhetorical Stance

Week 7

Monday, September 27: Rhetorical stance quiz

      Read: Skeptics may object

Wednesday, September 29: Discuss counterarguments/naysayers

      Homework: Read selection on rhetorical fallacies

      https://pressbooks.ulib.csuohio.edu/csu-fyw-rhetoric/chapter/logical-fallacies/

Friday, October 1: Open lab, work with your groups

Week 8

Monday, October 4: Discuss rhetorical fallacies

Wednesday, October 6: Group presentations

      Read: Read: Is google making us stupid?

Friday, October 8: Workshop day

Friday, October 8: Last day to withdraw from a full semester course with a Withdrawal grade

Week 9

Monday, October 11: Discuss Google, algorithms, quiz

Wednesday, October 13: Peer review

Friday, October 15: Unit 2 due at midnight

Week 10

Monday, October 18: Introduce unit 3, unit 2 uptake

Wednesday, October 20: Website genre studies

Friday, October 22: Open lab, genre studies work

      Homework: Read "How we read online"

Week 11

Monday, October 25: Discuss reading online

      Homework: Read CRAP design principles

Wednesday, October 27: Discuss CRAP design

Friday, October 29: Open lab

      Read: Towards a theory of visual argument

Week 12

Monday, November 1: Discuss visual rhetoric

Wednesday, November 3: Weebly tutorial

   Read: how we read online

Friday, November 5: Last day to withdraw from the university

Week 13

Monday, November 8: How we read online

Wednesday, November 10: Is Google making us stupid?

Friday, November 12: Introduce extra credit assignment

Week 14

Monday, November 15: Open lab to work on extra credit

Wednesday, November 17: Brummett presentations (digital)

No classes - Thanksgiving Break - Saturday, Nov. 20 to Sunday, Nov. 28

Week 15

Monday, November 29: Unit 3 recap, open lab.

Wednesday, December 1: Peer review for unit 3

Friday, December 3: Workshop, unit 3 due at midnight

Saturday, December 4: Last Day of Classes

Final Exam Week

No exam for this course.

For a full academic calendar, visit https://events.illinoisstate.edu/academic-calendar/.

Class,

This course will utilize contract grading. For this class, the primary learning outcomes are focused on finding the tools that will help you find success in the world of business. As you are looking towards your future, I want your focus on what will help you find and master the tools for your future in business.

To allow you the freedom for this experimentation, I have created the grading contract listed below. This contract will take some of the focus off of your final deliverables, and allow you the chance to try new things without an overwhelming fear of grades.

Aspects of this contract are negotiable, so take the time to read through, and feel free to start a discussion about the merits, and limitations of this contract.

By continuing to attend this class, you accept the terms of the contract listed below. I, as the instructor also agree to the contract, and will administer it fairly for all students.

Contract Criteria

To Earn an A	· Turn in all major assignments on time. · Meet requirements for all assignments (length, media, citations) · Turn in all minor assignments · Post a minimum of five (5) times to your Reggienet work journal with your progress on all major course projects, and post a minimum of five (5) responses to your peers throughout the semester.
B	· Turn in all major assignments · Meet requirements for all assignments (length, media, citations) · Miss no more than 1 minor assignment · Post a minimum of four (4) times to your Reggienet work journal with your progress on all major course projects, and post a minimum of four (4) responses to your peers throughout the semester.

C	· Turn in all major assignments
	· Some assignment requirements are not met.
	· Miss no more than 2 minor assignments
	· Post a minimum of four (4) times to your Reggienet work journal with your progress on all major course projects and post a minimum of four (4) responses to your peers throughout the semester
D	· Miss no more than 1 major assignment
	· Most assignment requirements are not met
	· Miss more than 2 minor assignments
	· Post a minimum of three (3) times to your Reggienet work journal with your progress on all major course projects, and post a minimum of three (3) responses to your peers throughout the semester.

F	· Miss multiple major assignments
	· Most assignment requirements not met
	· Miss more than 3 minor assignments
	· No updates on your class Reggienet feed with your progress on all major course projects.

Blank SCLC

Name:

Course and section:

Due Date:

Unit Learning Contract		
	What do you want to learn?	How will you learn it?
Learning goal 1		
Learning goal 2		
Learning goal 3		

- Answer the following in around a paragraph each:

- Project specifics: what is your topic, and genre?

- Exigence: why are you writing?

- Audience: who are you trying to reach?

- Voice/tone: what kind of communication will help you reach your audience?

Sample SCLC

_____

Name: Joey Jo-Jo Junior Shabadoo

Course and section: English 239 001

Due Date: ∞

Unit Learning Contract		
	What do you want to learn?	**How will you learn it?**
Learning goal 1	I want to learn to write better interview questions that engage people, and give me substantial answers.	- Read <u>articles</u> on writing interview questions. - Listen to interview podcasts - Do mock interviews to test questions on club members.
Learning goal 2	Since this is a podcast I need to learn how to record and edit sound.	- <u>Watch Audacity tutorial</u> - Complete Audacity module
Learning goal 3	I want to learn to be a better public speaker. To present myself better, and use fewer filler words.	Watch YouTube clips of public speakers

| | | • Record myself talking, relisten and mark down any patterns I notice. |
| | | • Read chapter on public speaking |

Project specifics: what is your topic, and genre?

This unit focuses on aural communication, so I be an interviewing members of the Trees and Hiking

Club to help promote the RSO. I will be using the genre of podcast for this project.

Exigence: why are you writing?

I am writing because I really like this RSO and want to spread the word to other people on campus.

I am also a marketing major, so this kind of project will help me learn how to promote.

Audience: who are you trying to reach?

I am trying to reach ISU students that might be interested in nature, hiking, and exercise. Other

members of the Bloomington-Normal community might also be interested I guess.

Voice/tone: what kind of communication will help you reach your audience?

I plan on using a very casual tone in this project. If you use a very formal and academic tone people

might be turned off. This is a casual organization, so it's like hanging out with your friends. You

wouldn't be super formal in front of your friends.

**English 145:
Writing in the
Academic
Disciplines**

Instructor Information	Course Information
Matt Schering	**English 145:** Writing in the Academic Disciplines
Office: Stevenson Hall 201 G	**Location: Stevenson Hall, 250B**
Office Hours: By appointment only	**Section: 00X**
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Course Objectives and Learning Goals

Catalogue description: Introduction to research-based writing for multiple academic audiences. Computer-assisted.

Modern technology has opened many new avenues for communication beyond pen and paper and word processors. As you enter your selected field after college you will likely need to be familiar with multiple methods of communication. In this class we will spend time investing and developing our ability to communicate using multiple modes of communication including text, visuals, audio, and multimodal methods for communication.

In addition to exploring the possibilities offered by these modes, we will also spend time discussing how these modes change our rhetorical situations. As writers, we must be aware of how our selected media completely changes the ways we write. For example, when we write an essay, record a podcast, give a speech, or design a website our entire approach to writing changes. We will use this semester as a chance to explore how different modes and media changes the way we write.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
English 145 001: Multimodal Composition

Throughout this semester we will focus on four groups of learning objectives: understanding multimodal rhetorical situations, research methods, critical literacy, and writer researcher identity. Keep these learning objectives in mind and use them as potential inspiration as you build your own unique learning goals throughout the semester.

1: Understanding multimodal rhetorical situations

- Discuss and understand the affordances and limitations of a variety of media and tools for composition
- Examine how various

2: Research methods

- Learn and build effective research strategies for academic and professional contexts
- Examine how different

3: Critical literacy

- **Develop critical reading skills across a variety of modes and media**
- **Create a foundation for visual, linguistic, audio, physical, and spatial literacies**
- **Learn how multimodal** compositions can function not only be a creative outlet, but an avenue for strong rhetorical communication as well
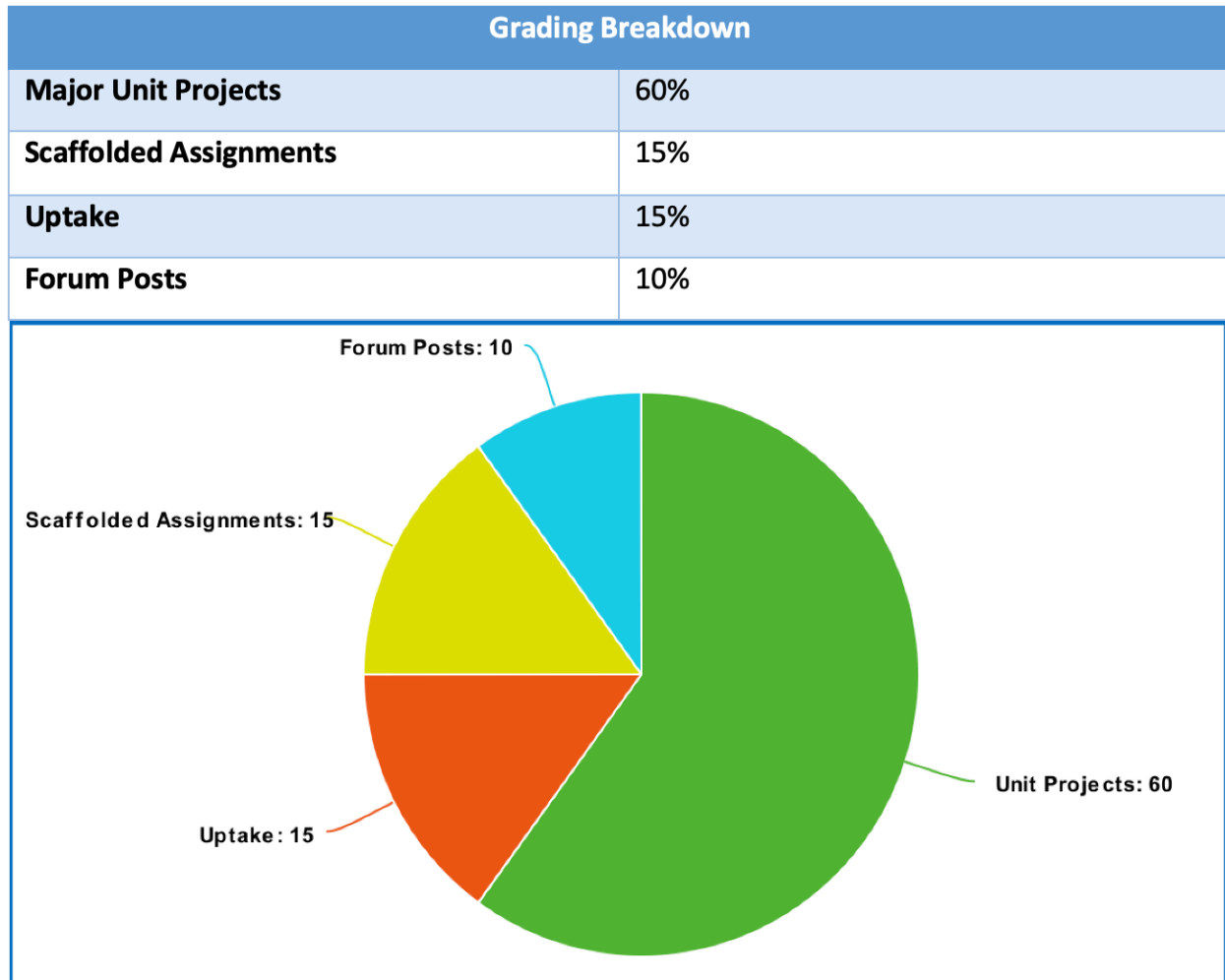
4: Writer Researcher Identity

- **Learn how our identity influences our writing**
- **Examine how our audience, and rhetorical goals influence the ways we use language, and the kinds of language we use**

Assessment Practices

In this course we will make use of student-centric learning contracts (see the end of the syllabus for more details.) Instead of having you conform to an arbitrary rubric, this innovative approach to assessment is designed to help you improve the writing and researching skills that are important to you and your future. Throughout the semester we will work together using this collaborative form of assessment to ensure this class is as helpful to you as possible.

In this course there will be 100 total points available. The grades for the semester are divided up as follows:

Grading Breakdown	
Major Unit Projects	60%
Scaffolded Assignments	15%
Uptake	15%
Forum Posts	10%

Grading Policies

All assignments will be submitted via Reggienet. This way you don't have to pay for printing, and we can easily keep track of all submitted work. In addition to posting your assignments to Reggienet, submitting your work on time is critical for your success in this course. While there are firm due dates for every assignment, I know that life happens, often at inopportune moments, so I will do my best to work with you and help find solutions to any potential issues that may occur.

Throughout the semester make sure that you:

- Submit all work to Reggienet

- Submit your work on time

- Contact me ASAP if you need an extension

- Late work will incur a letter-grade penalty for every day an assignment is late

- Work over 3 days late will earn a 0

Attendance

You may miss two class periods without penalty. The third through eight absences will each earn a penalty of one-half of one letter grade deducted from your final course grade. **A nineth absence will result in a failing grade in the course, as this would mean missing approximately 20% of classroom instructional time.** For example, a student who would otherwise end the course with an 85% but missed four class periods would receive a C, not a B, as their final grade. Please note that excessive or frequent tardiness will be counted as absences as well.

General

I like to foster a relaxed environment in my classes, as I feel this is conducive to an effective learning environment where students feel free to speak their minds. With that said, it should go without saying that any racist, sexist, homophobic, ableist, xenophobic, or any other manner of pejorative

comments will not be tolerated. Students making such comments will not be allowed to continue this course.

University Resources

Paste University resources template here.

Class,

Throughout this semester we will be using student-centric learning contracts (SCLCs). As this assessment method is likely a new experience for everyone, I want to briefly talk about what this assessment method is, what will be expected of you, and how SCLCs will benefit you.

What are SCLCs?

SCLCs are a hybrid of labor and learning contracts that emphasizes learning as the key course outcome. These contracts are designed to help you focus on the skills that are important to you, as an individual learner. SCLCs features two parts – a labor section and a learning section. At the end of this letter you will find a SCLC template to use throughout this course, as well as a sample contract.

The labor section of this contract contains simple goals that focus on the work that you will complete naturally throughout each project, so while there is a labor section in SCLCs, this will not create any additional work for you. These metrics include submitting drafts, meeting assignment goals (such as wordcount, documentation, and mechanics), and submitting revisions when necessary. The labor goals will be listed on the assignment sheet for each major unit.

In the learning section you will write 2-3 learning goals, and your plans for accomplishing these goals, for each major projects. I will use these goals to assess your work, and guide my feedback on your projects. Building effective and achievable learning goals is an important aspect of SCLCs but creating effective learning goals can be difficult. Throughout the semester we will work together to create effective and achievable learning goals that will help you hone the skills necessary to find success in your future.

What is expected from me as a learner?

As a learner you will be expected to complete the following while using SCLCs

- Reach the labor goals outlined for each project

- Complete all work on time

- Write achievable learning goals

  - Outline your strategies for achieving these goals

- Submit drafts of your learning contracts, and revise if necessary

- Complete uptake assignments for each unit

How will SCLCs benefit me?

The biggest benefit of using a SCLC is the increased freedom you will have to pursue your own unique learning goals. Everyone in this class has different experiences, expectations, and goals for this semester. So instead of asking every student to meet the same goals outlined in an arbitrary rubric, with goals that may or may not be relevant to you, SCLCs will let you pursue the kinds of learning and goals that are important to you. While this may seem a bit intimidating, I feel SCLCs offer tremendous benefits that are worth the additional effort. As this course continues, we will discuss how SCLCs contracts work, and we will work together to build effective learning goals to maximize the benefits you get from this course, and this contract!

Blank Contract

Name:

Course and section:

Due Date:

Unit Learning Contract		
	What do you want to learn?	How will you learn it?
Learning goal 1		
Learning goal 2		
Learning goal 3		

Answer the following in around a paragraph each:

- Project specifics: what is your topic, and genre?

- Exigence: why are you writing?

- Audience: who are you trying to reach?

- Voice/tone: what kind of communication will help you reach your audience?

Sample Contract

Name: Joey Jo-Jo Junior Shabadoo

Course and section: English 239 001

Due Date: ∞

Unit Learning Contract		
	What do you want to learn?	**How will you learn it?**
Learning goal 1	I want to learn to write better interview questions that engage people, and give me substantial answers.	- Read articles on writing interview questions. - Listen to interview podcasts - Do mock interviews to test questions on club members.
Learning goal 2	Since this is a podcast I need to learn how to record and edit sound.	- Watch Audacity tutorial - Complete Audacity module
Learning goal 3	I want to learn to be a better public speaker. To present myself better, and use fewer filler words.	Watch YouTube clips of public speakers

		• Record myself talking, relisten and mark down any patterns I notice. • Read chapter on public speaking

Project specifics: what is your topic, and genre?

This unit focuses on aural communication, so I be interviewing members of the Trees and Hiking Club to help promote the RSO. I will be using the genre of podcast for this project.

Exigence: why are you writing?

I am writing because I really like this RSO and want to spread the word to other people on campus. I am also a marketing major, so this kind of project will help me learn how to promote.

Audience: who are you trying to reach?

I am trying to reach ISU students that might be interested in nature, hiking, and exercise. Other members of the Bloomington-Normal community might also be interested as well.

Voice/tone: what kind of communication will help you reach your audience?

I plan on using a very casual tone in this project. If you use a very formal and academic tone people might be turned off. This is a casual organization, so it's like hanging out with your friends. You wouldn't be super formal in front of your friends.