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College Readiness in Writing as Determined through Graduates' Qualitative Perceptions

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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

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Rebecca G. Mitchell

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University

2023

Abstract

College Readiness in Writing as Determined Through Graduates' Qualitative Perceptions

by

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MS, Montana State University, Bozeman, 2005

BA, Northwest Nazarene University, 1998

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

August 2023

Abstract

The aim of this study was to determine why, although rigorous standards in English language arts (ELA) have been adopted in a northwestern state and were designed to build toward college readiness, high school students graduating from a college readiness curriculum are not college ready in the area of writing. The purpose of the research was to explore graduates' perception of college readiness, how a college readiness curriculum prepared them for college writing, and ways to improve that preparation. The theory that supported this study was the concept of college readiness. The key research questions for this study addressed how graduates of a dual-enrollment college readiness curriculum describe the ways it prepared them for college-level writing and how graduates of a dual-enrollment college readiness curriculum describe the ways it could have better prepared them for college-level writing. A qualitative methodology was chosen, with in-depth interviews conducted to collect data. The study state's graduating classes were purposefully sampled for both graduating from a high school in the study state as well as attending a higher education institution within the state, and 12 graduates were interviewed via Zoom. After transcripts were created, codes were generated, and themes were established, several areas of improvement for dual enrollment writing curriculum were identified, including, but not limited to, rhetoric and argumentation instruction, synthesis and analysis of research, transfer of writing skills, and the inclusion of soft skills. If the contents of this study, especially the recommendations, make it into hands of dual enrollment writing teachers, their partner institutions, and mentors, it may result in greater success for future generations of college students.

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Dedication

First and foremost, I dedicate the many years of my life represented in this document to my loving family. My husband, David Mitchell, who was there when I wanted to give up. My children, Abigail Blair, Erik Blair, and Luke Mitchell, who always made their mom feel loved and appreciated. My parents, Peter and Clarane Sundin, who invested in anything I did, with late-night editing and finishing projects at the zero hour.

I also want to dedicate this work to my soul sisters, Randi House and Melissa Romano. They started this journey with me, and especially Randi House kept me going through being mired in my prospectus to trying to complete a dissertation during a pandemic.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

College readiness has been a buzz term in education circles throughout the 21st century. With the onset of Common Core State Standards in 2009, educators were told that they were getting their students college ready (Boise State Public Radio, 2014). Students began hearing the importance of college readiness and how that affected the way they learned to read and write. Additionally, assessments such as the SAT and ACT are given to measure college readiness. The topic that this study focused on was college readiness for writing from the perspective of the undergraduate student. The study itself will lead to positive social change in that feedback will be provided to instructors of dual-enrollment courses regarding what their students need in order to succeed in college writing.

High school students are provided with a myriad of opportunities to experience college rigor before higher education starts. Dual-enrollment classes give students college credit while they are earning high school credit. Advanced Placement (AP) courses allow students to advance academically along with the possibility of earning college credits with the right AP exam score. All of these advanced opportunities are designed to build skills and better prepare students for higher education success.

There were many reasons to conduct this study. One was that in the study state, success with advanced opportunities is measured by how many students enter higher education upon high school graduation, which is termed the “go-on” rate. The focus on “go-on” rates is a part of a larger goal for the state, which is that by 2025, 60% of 25- to 34-year-olds will hold a college degree or professional certificate (Richert, 2018).

However, since 2017, “go-on” rates have declined, despite more investment in advanced opportunities such as dual-enrollment classes and AP courses and exams. Could this be a reflection on the college readiness of high school graduates?

Other indicators that this study was needed came from measures of college readiness. College readiness, once students reach 2- and 4-year institutions, is measured by several factors. If students are not quite ready for college-level writing, they are often placed in remedial or developmental education (Leeds & Mokher, 2019). Metrics such as grade point averages (GPAs) are obtained and examined after the 1st year of higher education and upon completion of a postsecondary degree. Completion data such as the percentage of students who finish 2- and 4-year degrees are also gathered. In the study state, these statistics have indicated a lack of writing skills. At the state’s 4-year institutions, 68.5% of first-time, full-time degree- or certificate-seeking students did not graduate within 100% of the expected time, and only 14.5% more graduated within 150% of the expected time. At 2-year institutions, of which the state also has four, the numbers are even less promising, with 77% of first-time, full-time degree- or certificate-seeking students not graduating within 100% of the expected time and only 8.75% more graduating within 150% of the expected time (Idaho State Board of Education, 2021).

Some researchers have gone beyond such quantitative data to explore what skills can contribute to a definition of college readiness. Reliable factors such as goal-driven behavior, persistence, study skills, and self-monitoring were connected with college readiness of high school students, according to Lombardi et al. (2011). These factors are used to go beyond the cut scores on a standardized exam such as an SAT or ACT and

take into account the individualization of the match between knowledge and skills (Conley, 2012). Such factors also address the educational and personal experiences necessary to equip students for the expectations and demands of college (Conley, 2008). This study was needed because in the study state, post-secondary institutions are finding that students do not have the writing strategies, critical reading, or study skills necessary to be successful in ENGL 101, the initial writing course for any degree (College of Western Idaho, 2022).

Finally, this study was needed because it captured a viewpoint not commonly accessed, the perceptions of the students themselves. Although a college-readiness benchmark might place a student as college ready, education attainment says otherwise. Even with postsecondary success, do students feel prepared for the transition to college? A study by Heisdorf (2019) explored further questions as well. Did students' dual-enrollment writing class ready them for college-level writing? What do students perceive they need to know to be prepared as they transition to higher education? Do students feel prepared for the rigor of college?

As of 2021, all graduates in the study state are completing a college-readiness curriculum, but many are still not finding success in college-level writing, either needing remediation or matriculating before completion of a degree (Idaho Department of Education, Idaho State Board of Education, 2021). By interviewing graduates, I sought to gain insight into a gap in practice concerning college-readiness curriculum in the area of writing. Discovered themes through interviewing graduates resulted in an informed expansion of the study state's definition of college readiness, and improvements could be

made to the college-readiness writing curriculum. The positive social change that could immediately result from the publication and dissemination of these findings to those who plan curriculum for dual enrollment writing courses is that they would discover what undergraduates are experiencing in college courses and might be able to improve their curriculum. The eventual positive social change may be an increase of students continuing and completing postsecondary education.

For the remainder of Chapter 1, background will be supplied, showing the progression of college-readiness curriculum and assessment in the study state as well as the research done on the topic. This includes some approaches unique to the study state. Problems concerning the college readiness of high school graduates will then be presented, especially in the area of college-level writing. Then, the purpose of the study, focusing on students' perception of college readiness in the area of college-level writing, will follow, as well as the research questions that guided the study.

A conceptual framework will then be outlined, giving the study a place in the wider scope of college-readiness research. This precludes a description of the nature of the qualitative study, focusing on perceptions, and the definitions that will supply a common understanding of college-readiness-specific terms. The final pieces of scaffolding will round out Chapter 1, including the assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations concerning the academic setting and graduate participants. Finally, the significance of the study will be established, connecting the results to social change.

Background

Advanced opportunities, especially dual-enrollment courses and AP classes have been a priority in the study state for almost a decade. College-level writing is usually taught in an AP class or dual-credit English composition course, both supplemented with Fast Forward funds (Idaho Department of Education, 2019). In the study state, every high school freshman is given \$4,125 in Fast Forward funds to pay for either dual-credit classes or AP exams (Idaho Department of Education, 2019; Thomson, 2017). No state-level guidance is currently given to students concerning the benefit of one course over another. For example, ENGL 101, Writing and Rhetoric, is offered as a dual-credit course in many high schools. As a General Education Matriculation (GEM) course, it is universally accepted across all public universities and community colleges in Idaho. Additionally, while a placement score is necessary to take ENGL 101 on a college campus, no such requirement is in place to take it as a dual-credit class on a high school campus. Therefore, some students can skip the added expense of the prerequisite ENGL 100 course by taking the dual-credit class (College of Western Idaho, 2020).

Also offered by Idaho high schools with Fast Forward funds are AP Literature and Composition and AP Language and Composition courses with accompanying AP exams. After completing the classwork, students can take the program's exams, hoping for a score that will translate into college credit. At the University of Idaho (2020), a score of 3 on the AP English Language and Composition exam earns 3 credits for ENGL 101. A score of 5 earns 6 credits, satisfying both ENGL 101 and ENGL 102. The same

holds true for AP English Literature and Composition; however, additional credits for ENGL 175 can result from a score of 4.

However, College Board (2018) data showed the gamble students take by choosing AP exams as a means of securing college credit. Of the Idaho students who took the AP English Language and Composition exam in 2018, the mean score was 2.88, under the score of 3 necessary for college credit. The mean score for the AP English Literature and Composition exam was even lower at 2.81. Holten and Pierson (2016) revealed that 95% of Idaho students passed the dual-credit courses they enrolled in and subsequently earned credit at both their high school and at the associated college. In 2018, 7,814 students earned 23,418 credits, for approximately 3 credits per student (Idaho Department of Education, 2018).

College readiness is measured in the study state with cut scores in English Language Arts (ELA) on the SAT college entrance exam, given to all students during their junior year (Idaho Department of Education, 2019). The SAT Evidence-Based Reading and Writing (ERW) benchmark is associated with a 75% chance of earning at least a C in first-semester, credit-bearing, college-level courses in history, literature, social science, or writing (College Board, 2020). According to the Educator Brief provided by College Board (2021), in setting the benchmarks, postsecondary grades were used as the criterion for success in specific courses. However, in the study state, little is known about how such a measurement works in an advanced opportunities setting. In fact, the state's board of education, which is over postsecondary schools, voted in 2021 to remove the minimum requirement that students need a college entrance exam, such as an

SAT or ACT, for admission to one of the state's 4-year institutions (Savransky, 2021). The board's chief financial officer gave one reason for such a change, "that there's a growing body of research suggesting that college entrance exam scores don't predict success and that GPA and other factors are more important" (Savransky, 2021).

Some research has been conducted on various areas related to this concern in the study state. Budge et al. (2021) examined college readiness in rural communities, which make up 75% of the districts in the study state. Their study of six such rural districts concluded that college readiness is not a priority for stakeholders in lieu of vocational or technical training. The study state was also mentioned in an Education Commission of the State Policy Brief on Developmental Education Policies (2019) for approving corequisite course models for remedial writing education. This ensured that students who need additional academic support could enroll in college-level classes while receiving the scaffolding needed for success. However, as will be shown through the literature review, more research exists in other states.

The gap in practice, therefore, that this study addressed is that dual-credit instructors are missing this vital piece of information, how well their dual-credit writing instruction meets college expectations, when preparing students in their classes. Although they have been given state standards purported to be college preparatory and guidance from their partner institution and mentor, the validity of their efforts has not been studied.

Problem Statement

The problem that was addressed through this study was although rigorous standards in ELA have been adopted in a northwestern state and were designed to build

toward college readiness, high school students graduating from a college-readiness curriculum were not college ready in the area of writing. Three pieces of evidence that illustrate the magnitude of this problem are described below.

The first piece of evidence is the frequent necessity for students to take remediation courses in writing. According to Richert (2017), 38% of 1st-year college students in the study state were found to need college-level writing remediation. It should be noted that in this state, high school students who pass dual-enrollment courses get college credit for a writing course but may not be proficient in writing skills from the dual-enrollment courses provided in the college-readiness curriculum (Richert, 2018a).

The second piece of evidence comes from SAT projections of success. In the study state, College Board's college entrance exam, the SAT, is used as a measurement of college readiness. Specifically, as of 2021, the study state's Department of Education set a benchmark score of 480 on the ERW section score. Of recent graduates, 44% were unable to meet ERW benchmarks as measured by their ERW scores on the SAT (Idaho Assessment, 2021). These statistics are evidence that students do not have the writing skills necessary for college-level work.

The third piece of evidence is low retention and completion rates from college-readiness graduates. Frischmann and Moor (2017) followed four cohorts of the study state's graduates from the college readiness curriculum, all of whom demonstrated a lack of academic preparedness that influenced the retention and persistence to degree completion. A summer bridge program was instituted in this study, but only an increase in GPA was observed. At the study state's largest university in 2020, only 38% (962 out

of 2,522) of total first-time, full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students graduated within 4 years. In total, the state's 2-year and 4-year institutions had an average completion rate within the projected time of less than 30%, some as low as 19% (Idaho State Board of Education, 2020).

Based on the above evidence and research that noted a frequent need for remediation in writing instruction, a disconnect between standardized scores determining college readiness, and low retention and completion rates from college-readiness graduates, this research was the reasonable next step. It addressed a meaningful gap in practice, the lack of understanding of what factors of the dual-enrollment courses are effective or not effective for preparing students for college-level writing that is supported by the literature, including several references (Idaho Assessment, 2021, Idaho Department of Education, 2019, Idaho State Board of Education, 2020, Richert, 2017, Frischmann & Moor, 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore graduates' perception of college readiness, how college-readiness curriculum prepared them for college writing, and ways to improve that preparation. Dual-enrollment classes in writing, specifically ENGL 101, is one method of preparing students for college writing. Other schools in the study state offer AP English Language and Composition or AP English Literature and Composition as college preparatory curriculum. Some smaller and/or rural high schools in the study state do not offer advanced opportunities at all, but simply follow the college- and career-readiness English standards adopted by the state. However, research

has shown that dual-enrollment courses were more frequently taken than AP or other counterparts (Garcia et al., 2020). Therefore, this study focused on dual-enrollment courses.

The skill set required for college-level writing is an established basis of research. College students are expected to process information from various sources. Organization of this information requires structure, integration, and evaluation skills. Finally, the technical conventions of grammar and usage are needed to use language effectively. Lichtinger (2018) revealed that even when students possess self-efficacy regarding their writing skills, their instructors' perceptions may widely differ. This was incorporated into the focus of the study, to question how prepared students felt for college writing and in what areas.

The intended positive social change impact of this study was to give back to the knowledge of college readiness, specifically in the study state. By collecting the perceptions of recent graduates, I hoped that informed decisions about the future of college-readiness curriculum could be made. Beyond this, the choice to question interviewees about how college-writing preparatory curriculum can be improved could bring about social change for the benefit of future generations.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do graduates of a dual-enrollment college readiness curriculum describe the ways it prepared them for college-level writing?

RQ2: How do graduates of a dual-enrollment college readiness curriculum describe the ways it could have better prepared them for college-level writing?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that supported this study was college readiness, defined as “the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution” (Conley, 2007). A comprehensive definition of college readiness can be a conceptual framework, according to Conley (2007), including the measurement of student capability to find success in postsecondary studies.

In a Conley (2008) article, four aspects of college readiness were introduced: key cognitive strategies, key content, academic behaviors, and contextual skills and awareness. College-level writing touches on all four parts of this definition of college readiness. Most writing required in postsecondary education takes the key cognitive strategy of research, being able to sort through many sources and choose ones to address the issue. This is followed by the key content in English of engaging in texts to create well-written arguments, using proper grammar and organization. Academic behaviors are needed to navigate the writing process within given deadlines and among other coursework. Finally, the specific contextual skills and awareness for college-level writing include the details of writing and submitting a written work on campus while accessing support if needed. This conceptual framework will be explained in greater depth in Chapter 2.

College readiness relates to the study approach, in that I selected high school graduates who completed a dual-enrollment English course. Such courses were created to better prepare students for postsecondary—specifically, college-level—writing. Through the interview questions, the four parts of college readiness were explored and then summarized in the data analysis.

Nature of the Study

A qualitative study was chosen over a quantitative study for several reasons. Initially, a quantitative study seemed the appropriate choice. Numerical data were available for many college readiness measurements, from SAT scores to AP exam results. The College Board (2018) reports the members of the study state’s graduation cohorts who complete the SAT exam, which means that 100% of recent graduates have SAT data (College Board, 2019). The number of AP exam takers is given in the areas of English Language and Composition and English Literature and Composition. AP test taking numbers can be paired with college- and career-readiness accountability indicators compiled by the study state’s Department of Education (2019). The number of students in Grade 12 who participated in advanced opportunities is divided by the total number of first-time seniors enrolled as of May of the cohort year and the data given in the state’s report card.

However, these measurements of college readiness could also skew such a study. A standardized exam such as an ACT or SAT can exclude any student who suffers from text anxiety or who may not have the test preparation opportunities available to another students. Lombardi et al. (2011) identified the discrepancy that a student who may be

college eligible, able to meet college admission requirements such as an ACT or SAT score, may not be college ready, yet may be able to succeed in the course at a postsecondary level. Fina et al. (2018) mentioned the need for college-readiness benchmarks beyond the traditional cut-scores used for accountability reporting, such as college admissions tests and/or state standardized assessments.

Graziano and Aldeman (2020) addressed the peril in relying on advanced course-taking to define college readiness. Such college prep courses tend to be offered more often at larger schools and to higher achieving students. Students can be channeled into paths, and for those off the advanced track, such rigorous coursework is not always presented as an option.

This elimination of quantitative data led to a qualitative study, focused on the perceptions of those graduates who had pursued higher education after graduation. There is no better method of understanding the success or challenges of the study state's graduates than to ask them directly. Yavuz (2019) revealed that student mindsets and behaviors significantly impact the students' perceptions on academic, emotional, and career development. Such perceptions allowed for a better understanding of the transition from high school to college and the knowledge and skills necessary, according to those individuals making the journey.

The key phenomenon investigated was why students who graduate from a program that includes a dual-credit writing curriculum are not finding success in college-level writing. The key concepts investigated all surrounded college-level writing. Preparatory programs include both hard skills (types of rhetoric, aspects of

argumentation, and grammar) and soft skills (organization, time management, and finding support). By including these in the interview questions, I encouraged participants to reflect on which skills were part of their dual-enrollment writing courses and how they might have led to success in college writing. Participants were chosen based on their past or current enrollment in college writing courses and their experience with dual-enrollment writing courses in high school. Their responses were analyzed for common themes and a report given of the results of their perceptions.

Definitions

ACT: Originally an abbreviation for American College Testing; a standardized test used for college admissions in the United States.

“Advanced Opportunities”: When students reach seventh grade, Idaho provides them with \$4,125 that can be used to pay for dual-enrollment courses, Advanced Placement exams, professional certification examinations, "overload" high school courses (above a full schedule), and workforce development and apprenticeship courses (Eden, 2020).

Advanced Placement (AP): A program in the United States created by the College Board that offers college-level curricula and examinations to high school students.

College entrance exam: Either ACT or SAT scores are used to determine college admission.

College and career readiness (CCR): Usually connected with a state’s plan to meet Every Student Succeeds Act requirements.

College readiness: Shown by a student who is ready for college and can qualify for and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing college courses leading to an associate's or baccalaureate without the need for remedial or developmental coursework (Conley, 2012).

Common Core State Standards (CCSS): Standards that cover math and English language arts, which include reading, writing, and related subjects. They were developed by a consortium of states, beginning in 2007 (Boise State Public Radio, 2014).

Dual credit or dual enrollment: Programs and courses offered to high school students for both college and high school credit (Nordquist & Lueck, 2020).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): Signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015. This bipartisan measure reauthorized the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the nation's national education law, and longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all students (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

"Go-on" rate: Percentage of Idaho's graduating classes immediately enrolled in a 2- or 4-year school just months after graduation (Edge, 2020).

SAT: Originally called the Scholastic Aptitude Test, later called the Scholastic Assessment Test; a standardized test widely used for college admissions in the United States.

Assumptions

It was assumed that participants would tell the truth during interviews to the best of their ability. It was also assumed that the participants had reasonable memories of their high school college-writing-level course.

Scope and Delimitations

Delimitations in this study were important to identify students who experienced college readiness courses. Study participants graduated from a high school under a 4-year model (grade 9 to grade 12) or a 3-year model (grade 10 to grade 12). Additionally, participants attended high school during the period in which “Advanced Opportunities” monies were offered, starting with the 2015–2016 school year (Eden, 2020). Finally, students were taught under the Idaho Content Standards in English, based on the Common Core State Standards, adopted in 2010.

The scope of this study extended to students who were in Idaho colleges as undergraduates and who attended a dual-enrollment college level writing course during high school. As Idaho K–12 and higher education are all under the same Board of Education, this kept the scope within one system. Additionally, data are often gathered from Idaho schools and universities, so the results of this study will align with those quantitative data for future research.

Limitations

Limitations of this study included that the small sample would have limited transferability. In addition, it was limited by the variability across courses and instructors that are offered as dual enrollment across Idaho. Dual-enrollment students do not necessarily have identical curricula. Further limitations included potential memory loss of participants.

Significance

This study was significant in that as of 2021, all graduates in the study state were completing college-readiness curricula, but many were still not finding success in college-level writing, either needing remediation or matriculating before completion of a degree (State Board of Education, 2020). According to Leeds and Mokher (2020), over half of community college students are placed into developmental education, resulting in significant financial costs. By interviewing graduates, I gathered evidence of a gap in practice in college readiness curriculum in the area of writing. Discovered themes through interviewing graduates resulted in an informed expansion of the study state's definition of college readiness and led to the discovery of improvements that could be made to college readiness writing curriculum. Positive social change may come to instructors of dual-enrollment writing classes, who can use the graduates' perspectives to inform their college-readiness instruction.

Summary

Perceptions from a qualitative study can lend to a much richer picture than quantitative data alone. A plethora of such quantitative data existed, from SAT scores to GPAs and percentage of remedial classes to completion rates. Although these data could be used to partially explain the deficit of "go-on" rates or the high percentage of remedial classes needed, a key piece of the puzzle was missing. Gaining the perspective of graduates who had traveled the college readiness path, had entered 2- or 4-year institutions, and could determine their perception of college readiness in the area of writing was the missing element from research and practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem that was addressed through this study is that although rigorous standards in ELA have been adopted in a northwestern state and were designed to build toward college readiness, high school students graduating from a college-readiness curriculum were not college ready in the area of writing (State Board of Education, 2021). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore graduates' perception of college readiness, how college readiness curriculum prepared them for college writing, and ways to improve that preparation.

The current literature on this issue was wide and varied. The concept of college readiness had been explored by Conley for over 18 years when published as a complete definition in 2012. He coauthored other articles that highlighted the skills necessary for college readiness but did not include the concept added by other researchers of the college and career readiness (CCR) plans submitted by each state.

As dual-enrollment and AP participation increased, researchers studied and published queries about the programs' success, measured by college enrollment, retention, GPAs, and completion rates. Many of these studies were focused on an individual state and used state postsecondary institutions to gather their data. A portion of these researchers were organizations contracted by the states to evaluate the success of their approaches. Such college-readiness programs included dual-enrollment classes, AP courses, and early college offerings.

Although once just used for college entrance exams, standardized tests such as the SAT began to be used for a prediction of college readiness. Not long after the purpose of

administering the SAT divided into not only college entrance, but also college readiness, researchers began to study the effectiveness of such a measurement. While cut-off scores were related to college readiness, strand scores, such as the ERW, were compared to specific skills such as college-level writing. Primarily, SAT scores were compared to students going on to college and as an indicator of a state's CCR plan success.

A few researchers had addressed the perceptions of graduates traversing college-preparation programs and 1st-year experiences (FYE). These studies tended to focus on specific groups of students, including students with disabilities, and minority groups such as Hispanics, or individual programs, such as an FYE approach.

A synopsis of the current literature revealed that although dual-credit teachers are providing their best estimate of college-readiness writing curriculum, there is little feedback about the success of their efforts. They can use data such as college entrance exams, but they must only assume the connection between those scores and actual practice in college courses. Students themselves do not realize the efficacy of their training until the experience of writing at the college level and identify their strengths and/or weaknesses. Instructors of writing in higher education are left to wonder at their students' educational background, with little chance to collaborate with their secondary-level counterparts.

In this chapter, the progression from dual-enrolled high school writing instruction to college writing instruction will be explored in the literature through the lenses of CCSS and the skills taught in college remedial writing courses. The literature concerning dual enrollment and its relationship to college readiness will be summarized, as well as the

approach that specific states have taken to writing instruction and college readiness. The various measurements used to measure college readiness will be discussed for their application and their efficiency. Then the literature review will turn to the students themselves, specifically looking at underrepresented groups such as those prevalent in the study state, ethnically Hispanic, and demographically socioeconomically disadvantaged. Finally, current literature on students' perceptions of college readiness will be included as the focus of this study.

Literature Search Strategy

Selected articles relating to dual enrollment, college readiness, especially in the area of writing, and student perspective are described here, as well as specific applications to the study. Walden Library was the primary source of research over several years. Databases searched included the Complementary Index, Teachers Direct, Education Source, and ERIC. Although research could be narrowed by choosing the search subject, education, various search terms focused the strategy better. Such terms included *college readiness*, *dual-enrollment*, *Advanced Placement*, *measurement* (specifically *SAT*), *perceptions or experiences or opinions*, *state-specific programs*, including the study state, and *underrepresented groups*, specifically *Hispanic* or *Latino*, the primary minority in the study state and socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, another party of concern.

Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Foundation

The theory that supported this study included college readiness, defined as “the level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a

credit-bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution” (Conley, 2007). A comprehensive definition of college readiness can be a conceptual framework, including the measurement of student capability to find success in postsecondary studies. College readiness can be represented by many measurements. Conley (2007) referenced a set of scores or indicators that would identify where a student was with respect to college readiness. Therefore, examining SAT scores in my study and graduates' perceived and determined college readiness would be supported by this framework. It would also include the writing skills needed to process a full range of academic materials encountered in entry-level college courses, as mentioned by Conley (2007).

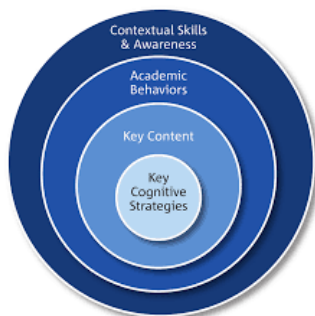
Figure 1 visually represents the four aspects of college readiness as defined by Conley (2008). Centered in the concept are key cognitive strategies that enable students to learn content. The specific key cognitive strategies that relate to college readiness in writing include research, reasoning, and interpretation. In research, students must engage in active inquiry while preparing to write, seeking evidence to defend an argument. Appropriate sources must be evaluated for validity and then referenced in the writing. This leads to reasoning, or the argumentation to explain, defend, or challenge ideas through writing. Finally, the student must employ interpretation, the analyzing and synthesizing of information through an extended description, summary, or evaluation (Conley, 2008).

The second ring of college readiness, key content, is dependent upon the subject matter. In English, students should be able to produce well-organized pieces of writing, engage with texts critically, and employ a high level of vocabulary. When writing in

other subject areas, such as science or social studies, the ability to interpret and challenge big ideas is paramount (Conley, 2008).

Academic behaviors, the third level, can also be referred to as soft skills. Self-awareness, self-control, and self-monitoring highlight this list (Conley, 2008). As an example of metacognition, self-awareness refers to consciously thinking about how one is thinking, in terms of one's level of mastery and understanding. Self-control includes important study-skill behaviors such as time management, task prioritizing, and communicating with teachers. With writing, self-control is an essential component as time must be managed for drafts and meeting deadlines. Finally, stress management and setting goals highlight self-monitoring skills (Conley, 2008).

The final part of college readiness involves contextual skills and awareness. This level of college awareness consists of very specific skills necessary to operate the college system and culture. In writing, this relates to everything from understanding styles (American Psychological Association [APA] vs. Modern Language Association [MLA]) to finding and using writing centers to navigating computer labs and printing codes (Conley, 2008).

Figure 1*College Readiness as a Conceptual Framework*

Hackmann et al. (2017) examined the meaning of CCR, enhancing the Conley definition of college readiness. This was based on the ESSA, which includes a prominent focus on CCR. States were required to submit plans for ensuring that every high school graduate was ready for college and a career, regardless of their income, race, ethnic or language background, or disability status. The authors analyzed the CCR plans submitted to the U.S. Department of Education (USDE).

A differing definition of CCR was one of the authors' findings across the 52 plans. Equity was always addressed but only specifically designated by racial and ethnic subgroups in seven states. The ESSA template provided had the section about specific student subgroups eliminated. Thirty-nine states mentioned a state curriculum that addressed CCR but not how academic and career and technical education (CTE) coursework was integrated into their CCR efforts. The study state was included in the authors' results as well as a comparison to the other 51 plans submitted. This was used as background information to inform interview questions.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variables

Writing Curriculum for College Readiness

Graham (2019) identified writing as the fundamental skill for student success in college. By writing about materials read, students enhance their understanding of the content. What is known about how high school teachers instruct students on college-level writing can be gleaned from teacher surveys, observational studies, and mixed method investigations. Graham gathered and summarized 28 such studies from more than 7,000 teachers. Two thirds of these studies were conducted in the United States while the remaining third provided information on writing instruction internationally, including in Europe, South America, China, and New Zealand.

The findings revealed that where writing is being taught well, the results are exemplary (Graham, 2019). Such secondary teachers used evidence-based practices with a proven record of success. This included conferences between the students and teacher, teaching students how to carry out critical writing processes such as planning and revising, and using writing to support learning across the disciplines. Those teachers who were not giving adequate writing instruction were instead having students write without composing, fill in blanks on a worksheet, or write one-sentence responses to questions. Effective teachers were having students write frequently using a peer-editing process, performing formative evaluation, and addressing motivation for writing. Finally, successful classrooms used digital technology while insufficient classrooms had a notable absence of digital tools for writing (Graham, 2019).

A similar comparative study was conducted by Jeffrey et al. (2018) comparing Scandinavian countries' approaches to writing instruction to those in the United States. Driven by differing standards, all three countries still based the curricula on learning outcomes and key competencies. A major difference between European countries and the United States, however, is the assessment of writing proficiency. Upper secondary exams in Denmark and Norway have little to no multiple-choice questions and instead, a lengthy exam is given where students argue their answers, thus demonstrating disciplinary writing proficiency.

Much of the literature on writing curricula for college readiness surrounds the adoption of CCSS and its implementation in many states. As of a Watson et al. study in 2020, 41 states plus the District of Columbia had adopted the CCSS. Although most educators cited in the study felt favorably about the CCSS, there was still anxiety about the implementation, affected by the availability of resources, the existing culture of the school, and the individual teacher's pedagogy (Watson et al., 2020). Further research revealed that ELA teachers were concerned with the personal impact of CCSS on their teaching, the consequences of poor implementation, and the lack of time to collaborate.

Abadie and Bista (2018) examined the implementation of the CCSS in Louisiana schools. Although the CCSS were touted as robust standards that were relevant to the real world and the knowledge and skills needed for success in college and careers, the authors believed that many states adopted CCSS as a requirement for receiving federal funds from the Race to the Top program (Abadie & Bista, 2018).

For this study, a similar method was adopted to the Watson et al. (2020) research where teacher experiences were the basis for the qualitative data. 124 participants reported their perception of the transition to CCSS in stages from awareness to refocusing. The confident implementation of CCSS seemed to revolve around textbooks and resources aligned to the new standards. When schools waited to adopt CCSS curriculum and provided professional development for its use, participants were far less concerned about the new standards.

According to Covington (2019), the CCSS radically altered expectations for students and teachers. The specific skill mentioned by Covington was the analysis of complex texts from both fiction and nonfiction. In writing, this means that “textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly” is provided, “as well as inferences are drawn from the text” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices [NGA] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010). In doing these tasks, students are distinguishing facts from opinion as well as learning to extract evidence.

The next challenge raised by the standards in writing is the integration of multiple sources (Covington, 2019). Standards 6.7 and 6.9 ask students to compare multiple texts, while Standard 7 includes the use of multimedia sources, and Standard 9 mentions the use of specifically print sources (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). Finally, within the social studies portion of the standards, Standard 1 asks students to analyze both primary and secondary sources. This is a skill inherent to the study of history but can also apply to any nonfiction text used in an ELA classroom (Covington, 2019).

The collection of these skills is sometimes termed *text-based analytical writing* (Olson et al., 2020). The end goal is to be literate in the 21st century, which, according to the CCSS, means, “write arguments to support claims in analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010, p. 18). Olson et al. (2020) described this as a high bar for all students, emphasizing writing as the key to academic success.

Another term for the CCSS standards is *evidence-based writing* (Lee, 2018). Evidence-based writing has been described as a gatekeeper skill and proficiency as an essential component of college-level success. Three steps for evidence-based writing have been created, starting with Toulmin in his book *The Uses of Argument* (1958). Step 1 is for noting or stating facts. This is also taught as making a claim and is a component of a good argument, according to Toulmin (2003). The second step comes from an examination of the facts as the writer states an opinion. Finally, the writer should establish the warrant, linking the evidence to the claim. A warrant should also answer the question of how the evidence makes the claim legitimate (Lee, 2018).

This method of teaching evidence-based writing as the argument was supported by the CCSS, as all secondary grade level bands (i.e., 6–8, 9–10, and 11–12) initiated the standards with the mandate that the student will “write arguments focused on discipline-specific content” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010, p. 18). Rejan (2017) explored the conflicting definitions of argument in the CCSS and how those might affect the high school English classroom. The Toulmin model, previously mentioned, was categorized as a structural understanding of argument. This model firmly rejected the other defined theory of

argument, which is social or cognitive based. Rejan proposed that college students need the social or cognitive perspective on the argument, which allows them to act as though they are colleagues in an academic enterprise.

However, according to Rejan (2017) the CCSS only reflected the Toulmin model of argument, which includes the exemplars given in the standards. Social and cognitive dimensions of argument were found in the CCSS theoretical rationale but not in the nuts-and-bolts information given to teachers. For example, although the CCSS required students to “distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010, pg. 42), little was promoted by the standards to facilitate the social conditions necessary for such an intellectual endeavor. The appendix to the CCSS did include social character as an important aspect of argument but the standards emphasized “organization that establishes clear relationships among the claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010, pg. 45). Rejan (2017) feared that while the CCSS claimed to promote college readiness, instead it encouraged a reductive approach to the teaching, learning, and assessment of writing.

Regardless of the approach, college level writing requires student development of critical thinking skills (Kettler, 2021). As a 21st-century skill, students are asked to use critical thinking when accessing and analyzing a plethora of information. Kettler (2021) connected critical thinking skills to both the argumentation prescribed in the CCSS and the frameworks in College Board’s AP program. The author’s definition of critical thinking includes reflective thinking, using reason, logic and evidence. Then the student must analyze, evaluate, and construct arguments that are consistent and coherent (Kettler,

2021).

Although not explicitly defined, Kettler (2021) proposed that the English Language Arts CCSS articulated critical thinking within the language arts standards. The author identified two college/career readiness anchors from the CCSS as critical thinking in writing. Writing Standard 1 reads, “write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010, pg. 63). Writing Standard 9 states, “Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010, pg. 47). Additionally, Kettler (2021) mentioned addressing counterclaims as put forth in Toulmin (2003) theory. In the classroom, the author promoted a mixed-method approach for teaching critical thinking, involving instruction in critical thinking skills paired with goals and learning experiences in the course content. This included the Cambridge Assessment Taxonomy of Critical Thinking Skills and Processes with the skills of analysis, evaluation, inference, construction, and self-reflection. Such skills were assessed using rubrics focusing on argument analysis and argument construction.

Monbec (2018) addressed the difficulty of learning skills in one area and then transferring them to another. Although students may understand argumentation in the ELA arena, they struggle to apply that learning when writing about other core subjects such as history and science. Skills such as sourcing and citing, paraphrasing and summarizing, should be applicable, regardless of the subject being analyzed through writing, if the knowledge base is sound.

Schmoker (2018) also discussed the difficulty of transfer with writing skills but suggested solving this issue by teaching writing in every content area. Additionally, longer, more frequent, and higher quality writing instruction was also suggested. Schmoker (2018) condensed his suggested approach down to three steps: read and annotate texts for academic purposes, identify parts of the annotation that best suit the analysis, then write to explain how those selected portions support the argument. The integration into multiple subject areas was accomplished through responding to questions, sentence stems, and prompts that lend themselves to an argument. The sentence stems called for students to evaluate, explain, interpret, compare/contrast, and propose solutions.

O'Dowd (2017) addressed the challenges of CCSS writing instruction through a different lens, grammatical choice. By examining the CCSS published exemplars, two from the Explanation genre and two from the Argument genre, the central role that grammar plays in each genre were analyzed. These two genres were chosen as CCSS puts special emphasis on Argument, supported by Explanation as "critical to college and career readiness" (NGA & CCSSO, 2010, pg. 6). The CCSS also emphasized language control, which O'Dowd (2017) stated also put an instructional emphasis on teachers. The author also iterated the responsibility on teachers, that beyond the CCSS exemplars are on their own to provide students with the tools and knowledge to meet the goals set out by the standards.

Katz et al. (2018) connected the instruction of college-readiness writing to reading comprehension and literacy. The study focused on a specific curriculum called the

Expository Reading and Writing Curriculum, designed to prepare high school seniors for the demands of higher education. A set of 14 units was created by a collaboration of California State University instructors and high school teachers. Over the senior year, students were supposed to develop advanced proficiency in expository, analytical, and persuasive reading and writing. This was accomplished through carefully chosen texts that employ rhetorical strategies and integration of reading and writing processes. In the classroom, activities were chosen to model successful practices of fluent readers and writers, give students opportunities to debate, and allow teachers the flexibility to respond to students' needs.

Parr and Jeffery (2021) examined the political influence on writing curricula. In the United States political influence manifested in the conversation around CCSS, where one political party supported the curriculum, and another looked to remove it from states. Parr and Jeffery noted that more attention was given politically to writing scores on standardized tests than the curriculum itself. Performance gaps and resulting inequities were discussed instead of methods that were finding success. Design of curricula in the United States was identified as centralized and top-down, an argument against the CCSS. Although the CCSS was identified for its integration of literacy standards, reading was found to be given more emphasis than writing.

Even with the student sample papers provided by the CCSS, O'Dowd (2017) felt there was no structural prescription for a good paper of either type, Explanation or Argument. Instead, the author suggests some grammatical choices that can be identified by teachers to their students as effective ways to help emergent writers approach a text

analytically. For Explanation, this included clause structure and passive voice. In the Argument exemplars, the use of action processes was explored. According to O'Dowd, this is a different approach than the Writing Process, which is how writing has historically been taught, and even from the conventional argument text type, such as the Tuolmin model described above. The claim-counterclaim form is used in another Argument exemplar, but the result was formulaic rather than based on content or an organic flow of ideas (O'Dowd, 2017). The result of this study did enrich the knowledge base on CCSS-based writing instruction but emphasized the challenge for writing instructors to wade through the conflicting information.

Beyond the exemplars and wording of the CCSS, teachers often look to their state departments of education for resources towards implementation of this external policy in their classrooms. Benko et al., (2020) analyzed 123 state-provided resources, focused on writing, for their type, standards and sponsors. A subset of 40 of these resources were further studied to describe their epistemologies, with clear messages about writing instruction. Such tools were also connected with teacher learning about the standards. Benko, et al. found that only 8% of an initial 160 resources from 28 states focused solely on writing. This data meant that nearly half the states did not provide any writing-only resources at all. Of those states who did provide resources, approximately 25% were practical resources and over half were conceptual. Often the sample student work provided by the resources was merely a link back to the CCSS Appendix C, which provides samples of student work across grade levels. Resources were reasonably divided between the three main genres of writing: argument, informative/expository, and

narrative. 19 states created their resources, encompassing 49% of resources while the other 51% were from 12 different organizations (Benko et al., 2020). There were three types of epistemologies coded: structural, focusing on elements within a type of writing; ideational, focusing on the ideas and content of writing; and social practice, focusing on writing for an audience. Of these types, the social practice epistemology was the least emphasized in the writing resources analyzed. The most common stance was a primary emphasis on ideational epistemology with a secondary emphasis on structure. Overall, this study revealed a dearth of resources available for some teachers and a difficult choice on what resources to use for others (Benko et al., 2020). The lack of consistency showed that although CCSS may have brought college readiness curriculum to a majority of the United States, its implementation is still a widely differentiated variable.

Griffin (2018) reviewed a different approach to college readiness in writing, and transition courses. These learning modules were offered to high school students, no later than 12th grade, to mitigate the risk of those students needing remedial courses in college. Of the seven states, Griffin researched, four transition courses had writing as their main curricular focus as well as reading. The material for the courses was compiled by collaborating secondary teachers with postsecondary counterparts.

This interaction revealed that although college instructors require extended writing assignments, high school teachers were requiring less writing and most of the writing instruction tended to be formulaic (Griffin, 2018). Two of the transition courses used activities both aligned to the CCSS and included elements of the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing. Another important aspect of successful courses was an

interdisciplinary approach to contextualizing learning for students. Finally, a few programs offered nonacademic skills building as well, looking toward college readiness.

Synthesis

Graham (2019) primarily found that the CCSS were only effective if best practices were employed included lengthy, frequent writing assignments, conferences, and the use of digital tools, while Watson et al., 2020, Abadie & Bista, 2018, and Benko et al., 2020 were more focused on teacher confidence and availability of resources as crucial aspect of CCSS success. All three of the aforementioned studies used qualitative research involving interviews with writing teachers. Divergent findings from Olson, et al. (2020), Lee, (2018), Rejan (2017), O'Dowd (2017), Kettler (2021), Katz et al. (2018), Monbec (2018), and Schmoker (2018) noted differing views of important approaches from writing instruction to college-level writing success. Olson, et al. (2020), Lee, (2018), Rejan (2017) focused on argumentation skills, while O'Dowd (2017) identified grammar skills, Kettler (2021) critical thinking skills, Katz, et al. (2018) reading comprehension and literacy skills, and Monbec (2018) and Schmoker (2018) studied transfer skills, yet they all agreed on these skills being included in the CCSS. The only truly divergent study was found in Griffin's (2018) research on transition courses over the CCSS. But this study was relatively small and limitations included one state's programs that are often found in the first year of college versus high school. Therefore, the evidence overall seems to suggest that the CCSS when properly supported and integrated contain the necessary skills for college-level writing instruction.

Writing Curriculum in College Writing Courses

Less has been written about curriculum in college writing courses, and most information must be gleaned from articles about writing remediation. For example, Miller et al. (2017) studied developmental education at the college level in several areas, including the study state. All the states had a state-level coherence in first-year writing programs with “for-credit” classes being offered to those who placed or opted-in for remedial writing courses. This coherence was defined as aligned course outcomes and programmatic goals, regardless of the institution and communicated through a white paper.

The Education Commission of the States (2019) took a broad look at these common elements of remedial education. In the study state, students may take developmental courses as a corequisite, which makes the classes embedded support versus preliminary requirements. This allows students a better pass rate when enrolled in corequisite English course than previously measured (Education Commission of the States, 2019). The study state also employed a competency-based emporium model, which individualized faculty instruction through technology for students who needed additional academic support.

Woods et al. (2019) identified an aspect of writing remediation courses as the development of academic literacy. Therefore, writing curriculum in college writing courses uses an academic language common in textbooks and other learning materials. Such language was defined as having a “high density of information-rich words, complex sentence structures, and an authoritative voice” (Woods et al., 2019). Many colleges

realized this relationship to reading and writing was so crucial to college success that they integrated reading and writing courses, contextualizing material related to college-level English courses.

Kuiken and Vedder (2021) also examined the language necessary for college-level writing. In their study of academic language proficiency students were required to have a mastery of abstract and discipline-specific vocabulary. This was broken down further into a knowledge of lexical and syntactic patterns. Such proficiency was related to the skills needed for and developed in college-level writing courses. Designated as lower order skills were using proper grammar, usage and spelling and choosing an academic vocabulary over informal or colloquial registers. Higher order skills included writing in a concise, neutral and objective manner, while using a logical progression of argumentation with cohesive ties. Such skills are assessed through students reading two source texts and writing various compositions based on their content (comparison, paraphrasing, and argumentation).

Shanahan (2020) further studied the integration of developmental writing and English Composition. Such a corequisite model required close alignment and met with coordination challenges. Foundational writing skills were developed in the context of their use in college English. These skills included sentence-level clarity to paragraphing to essay organization. Although these can be defined as discrete skills, they were not taught through drill practice methods but weaved into presentations, activities, and assignment options. Rhetorical strategies were taught as well as integrated reading and writing in a meaningful context. Finally, noncognitive skills such as grit, mindset,

metacognition, and being culturally responsive were also incorporated into the curriculum.

Paulson and Van Overschelde (2019) studied the curricular shift to integrate developmental reading and writing into one accelerated course. One of two approaches were used in the integration: a deliberate combining of theory from both fields (curricular) or an expedient compiling of two courses into one (structural). Paulson and Van Overschelde analyzed which approach resulted in pass/fail outcomes for students enrolled in courses that followed the different approaches. They found that accelerated and integrated developmental reading and writing is less effective at preparing students for college-level coursework than separate coursework.

Miller and Rochford (2021) emphasized the need for instruction in time management, study skills, and support networks as well as college aligned curriculum in writing remediation. These soft skills are a common feature of many developmental programs, even in a writing course, much the same way they would be presented in a college success course. However, the studied remediation program also included excerpted reading passages from the English 101 and abbreviated writing assignments. These included writing a narrative essay in defense of a thesis, writing with primary source information from a personal interview, and writing an argumentative essay synthesizing sources. Finally, a soft skills analysis was integrated into a formal writing assignment (Miller and Rochford, 2021).

Synthesis

The articles above represent some of the literature on writing curriculum in college writing courses. There were two articles that all found convergent findings on coherence in programmatic goals for remedial courses including Miller et al. (2017) and the Education Commission of the States (2019). Miller et al. (2017) primarily found that the study state aligned their courses through a white paper, while the Education Commission of the States (2019) was more focused on remedial writing courses being a corequisite support for credit-bearing writing courses.

All three studies were strong with large sample sizes for qualitative research. Two further studies, Woods et al. (2019) and Kuiken and Vedder (2021) stated that academic literacy was the focus of college writing curriculum, with a high level of vocabulary. Shanahan (2020) echoed some of the articles on high school curriculum with an emphasis on discrete skills and rhetorical strategy while Paulson and Van Overschelde (2019) promoted an integration of reading and writing skills. There was one divergent finding from Miller and Rochford (2021) that noted soft skills as a more important component of college writing remedial courses than the academic skills listed above. But this relationship between soft skills and college remedial writing education will be shown in the literature review of dual-enrollment classes. Therefore, the evidence overall seems to suggest that college level writing curriculum included similar academic skills to those found in CCSS-based high school courses.

Dual Enrollment and College Readiness

Burns et al. (2019) defined dual-enrollment courses (also referred to as dual-credit) as not just classes which offer college-level material but as college courses. This statement was made in the introduction to web tables created from the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009, which followed more than 23,000 students who were ninth graders in 944 public and private high schools in 2009.

With dual-enrollment, not only were course offerings tracked but also an option to complete a certificate program or Associate's degree as well as automatic acceptance to a partner college (Burns et al., 2019). All of these options were also available in the study state and comprised a portion of the decision-making process when choosing accelerated opportunities.

Morgan et al. (2019) cited a positive relationship between college preparatory coursework participation in high school and college enrollment. In their study of 1464 students who graduated from high school between 2009 and 2014, not only did enrollment improve but also was shown continued progress and eventually higher graduation numbers. These opportunities for college preparatory coursework were found to be "opportunity hoarded" toward schools with students from privileged backgrounds. However, they did not find a causal effect based on student demographic factors of socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and gender, meaning that most groups will similarly benefit from participation in college preparatory coursework in high school. Morgan et al. indicated dual-enrollment in any course as important to college success. However, they

did confirm a disparity between opportunities for privileged groups and those for underrepresented groups.

Hodara and Pierson (2018) positively associated accelerated learning (educational experiences that allow high school students to earn college credit while in high school) with higher rates of college access and readiness. In their quantitative study of Oregon's secondary and postsecondary data, they attributed this positive relationship to higher academic rigor and expectations as well as shortening the time to complete a degree. Hodara and Pierson also discussed the opinion of many educational leaders that accelerated learning would benefit historically underrepresented students by helping them navigate the high school-to-college transition. Specifically, in the study area, 97% of dual-enrollment participants passed their dual-enrollment classes.

Edmunds et al. (2018) explored the issue of those entering post-secondary education not graduating with a degree, even after a period of six years, in a longitudinal experimental study of 12 early colleges in North Carolina. The issues identified included a lack of academic preparation, access to college-credit-bearing courses, and a college-going culture. Dual-enrollment courses have long been the suggested route for both academic preparation and early college awareness (Edmunds et al., 2018). However, dual-enrollment classes were often only utilized by the most academically proficient students.

Edmunds et al. (2018) also selected four populations of interest—underrepresented minority students, first-generation college-goers, low income students, and underprepared students. In the case of dual-enrollment students, all four groups

showed statistically significant positive impacts on postsecondary credential attainment. However, students outside these groups showed higher impacts than the identified groups. Edmunds et al. concluded that early college is achieving its goal of increasing postsecondary education and achievement. Garcia et al. (2020) discussed dual-enrollment programs as aligned with the community college mission of providing access for all students. As high school courses dual-enrollment was shown to introduce students to college-level learning and an environment that better prepares them for postsecondary success. During students' college years, dual-enrollment led to less remediation and narrowed achievement gaps according to Garcia et al.

Keller et al. (2020) looked at dual-enrollment and college readiness through the lens of a pandemic-affected year. Participation in dual-enrollment actually increased at four-year colleges and community colleges where regular enrollment had fallen. The increase was attributed to the high school student-held belief that such an increased rigor will help their chances in college. The authors also felt that encouraging these classes equated to an improved likelihood that the students will enter college. A final note was made that the post-pandemic new normal may mean that much of this coursework could be done virtually and will come with its own issues and scaffolding needed.

Synthesis

The articles above represent some of the literature on dual-enrollment courses, some of them in writing instructions. There were five articles that all found convergent findings with dual-enrollment classes being related to increased college enrollment, access, and success including Garcia et al. (2020), Burns et al. (2019), Hodara and

Pierson (2018), Keller et al. (2020), and Morgan et al. (2019). Garcia et al. (2020) presented dual-enrollment as a method of decreasing students needing remediation classes. Burns et al. (2019) primarily found that a dual-enrollment class needed to be a college class, not just a class with college-level material, while Hodara and Pierson (2018), Keller et al. (2020), and Morgan et al. (2018) were more focused on the increased rigor ensuring college readiness. All four studies were strong with large sample sizes for quantitative research. There was one divergent finding from Edmunds et al. (2018) that noted dual-enrollment classes were only be accessed by academically proficient students, which might indicate that college readiness wasn't directly related to dual-enrollment courses. But this study was centralized in one state and limitations included a focus on early college programs. Therefore, the evidence overall seems to suggest that dual-enrollment can be a factor toward college readiness, including in writing courses.

Dual-Enrollment Programs in Specific States

In the study state, Holten and Pierson (2016) prepared a report for the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) under Contract ED-IES-12-C-0003 by Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest administered by Education Northwest. This report revealed that 95 percent of students passed the dual-enrollment courses they attempted and earned credit at both their high school and at the associated college. Students who take a dual-enrollment English composition class have a 95% chance of passing that class and earning credit at both their high school and at the associated college. The fact that the study state's largest minority group, Hispanic/Latino students, are not as likely to take advantage of these courses could be a topic for future study. This is in sharp contrast to

socioeconomic disadvantaged students who are taking more advantage of these opportunities than their socioeconomic advantaged counterparts.

Taylor and Yan (2018) addressed the issue of college and career readiness by trying to find a correlation between participating in an early college access program and college access and retention in the state of Arkansas. Research into dual-enrollment programs showed that the rigor was not equal to their college campus equivalents. This difference between dual-enrollment programs and college classes has historically been addressed by requiring dual-enrollment high school teachers to have a master's degree or at least 18 graduate-level credit hours in the discipline or specialty area. There was a higher participation rate in dual-enrollment programs, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) at 82% (2013).

Although studies were cited by Taylor and Yan (2018) claiming a positive impact of dual-enrollment participation on college enrollment, performance, and graduation, the authors found no correlation between participating in an early college access program and college access and retention in Arkansas. These conclusions were reached by studying a cohort of Arkansas graduates and their matriculation into Arkansas colleges and universities. With the specificity and narrow scope of this pool, the data might not be generalizable.

Bowers and Foley (2018) studied the effect of dual-enrollment credits on Tennessee university students in areas of college readiness and 1-year retention. Significant improvement in 1-year retention was found with dual-enrollment credits in English and reading. Improved college readiness in both English and reading was found

as well, according to ACT scores. This latter result was due in part to being a small population compared to the numbers used for those findings with significant improvement.

Hunter and Wilson (2019) noticed the correlation between dual-enrollment experience and success in the first year of college in terms of GPA and persistence. It is through this lens of retention that they examined current studies of dual-enrollment experience and retention. Dual-enrollment served two purposes, increasing rigor at the high school level and introducing college-level expectations to future students according to Hunter and Wilson. This represented a good return on any state funds invested in dual-enrollment programs and in Tennessee, free tuition.

The difference in retention between the two groups (those with dual-enrollment experience and those without) was not statistically significant in some research so further study was needed. Hunter and Wilson (2019) found that in Tennessee's institutions, a far more significant disparity was demonstrated between the year-to-year retention of students with dual-enrollment experience versus those without it. Specifically, 76.2% of full-time freshman students with dual-enrollment came back for their sophomore year versus 67.9% without. Limitations included a lack of disaggregated data which made it impossible to definitively identify what factors may contribute to the higher levels of student retention.

In the study state, Budge et al. (2021) examined six school districts that employ dual-enrollment as part of their college and career readiness approach. All six were considered rural districts, which are a majority in the study state as rural districts make up

75% of the demographics. The discussion was primarily around what programs are appropriate for rural school districts. There was a rhetoric in the districts locally that the strength of rural districts should be their vocational programs. Budge et al. cited recent research that CTE programs are eschewing the traditional “college bound” versus “non-college bound” label. Therefore, a vocational or technical program could be a dual-enrollment program, depending on the district. Additionally, even though rural students may be less likely to have parents who hold college degrees, they are just as likely to have postsecondary aspirations (Budge et al., 2021). However, their path to attending college and earning a degree is hindered by socioeconomic barriers and the quality of the high school preparation.

This was in direct juxtaposition to the Advancement Via Individual Determination program or AVID, that has been adopted by the largest districts in the study state. Focused on students who will be the first generation in their families to attend college, the rigorous curriculum found results. Statewide 46% of graduates go on to college, but in an AVID district, 65% of seniors went on in the 2015-2016 school year (Gronewold, 2017). AVID students take dual-enrollment classes as other students but meet daily to help each other, with support in organizational skills and notetaking. Additionally, focused sustained reading was encouraged to prepare students for the intensive reading students encounter in postsecondary education.

Synthesis

The articles above represent some of the literature on dual-enrollment courses in specific states, including the study state, Arkansas, and Tennessee. There were three

articles that all found convergent findings in the study state that dual-enrollment courses led to college success including Holten and Pierson (2016), Budge et al. (2021), and Gronewold (2017). Gronewold (2017) primarily found AVID to be a successful approach, while Holden and Pierson (2017) and Budge et al. (2021) were more focused on dual-enrollment courses passing rates and offerings. Two studies focused on dual-enrollment in Tennessee showing an increase in 1st-year retention and GPA for students who had participated in English dual-enrollment. There was one divergent finding from Taylor and Yan (2018) that noted rigor in Arkansas dual-enrollment courses was not equal to their college equivalents and a lack of correlation between early college and college access. But this study was relatively localized, and limitations included looking only at high school graduates who attended college in the same state. Therefore, the evidence overall seems to suggest that in specific states, including the study state, dual-enrollment courses were linked to college success.

Dual Enrollment and College Readiness in Underrepresented Groups

The pipeline that once funneled students from high school to higher education is no longer appropriate as advanced opportunities such as dual-enrollment allows for additional ways of earning college credit, according to Ortíz and Morales (2019). They focused on the collaboration partnerships between PK-12 and higher education institutions working with underrepresented populations, specifically Hispanic students. These minority serving institutions (MSIs) include Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) and Asian American, Native American, and Pacific Islander Serving

Institutions (AANAPISIs). HSIs represent slightly more than 15% of all colleges and universities yet enroll 66% of all Hispanics in higher education.

Ortiz and Morales (2019) put the responsibility for repairing any issues with Hispanic students on the higher education institutions themselves. They felt that high schools and even community colleges were addressing PK-16 education adequately. The disconnect was in the lack of information, financial resources, conflicting requirements for entry, remediation, and confusing transfer pathways between community colleges and universities and graduation, all under the control of 4-year institutions.

Duncheon and Muñoz (2019) described the role of dual-enrollment as bridging two historically distinct sectors, high schools and postsecondary education. Specifically studied were eight early college high schools, designed to facilitate postsecondary transition. These schools were located on the border of Texas and Mexico and underrepresented students made up a large percentage of students, a population historically left behind. The early college high school model combines the last two years of high school with the first two years of college as a 4-year program in the same institution. These early college high schools can be found within high schools, on the same campus, or at the college campus. The main difference between the early college high school model and traditional dual-enrollment is the population targeted by the program, usually underrepresented populations or those in the academic middle versus high achievers (Duncheon and Muñoz, 2019).

Garcia et al. (2020) discussed that underrepresented students were found to participate more in dual-enrollment than other programs such as AP or credit through

examination. In an analysis of 19 liberal arts institutions only 7% of those with AP credit were from an underrepresented student group, whereas 16% of those who participated in dual-enrollment were from that underrepresented group.

Holten and Pierson (2016) revealed that not all student groups—including Hispanic/Latino and economically disadvantaged students—were equally likely to take advantage of dual-credit opportunities. Specifically, in the area of English courses, districts with the highest percentage of Hispanic/Latino student enrollment had less dual-credit course participation in written communication than schools with the lowest percentage of Hispanic/Latino students. With socioeconomic status the relationship was switched as districts with the highest percentage of students in poverty had more dual-credit course participation in written communication than schools with lower percentages of students in poverty (Holten and Pierson, 2016).

Socioeconomically disadvantaged students were found to participate in accelerated learning less than their counterparts, more commonly with Pacific Islander students and those in urban areas (Holten and Pierson, 2016). American Indian/Alaska Native high-achieving students were less likely to participate in accelerated learning than all other groups of high-achieving students.

Summer bridge programs have been found to be successful for underprepared or at-risk students, according to Grace-Odeleye and Santiago (2019). Such programs are designed to overcome the personal and academic factors inhibiting the success of disadvantaged groups. These disadvantages include socioeconomic differences that result in first-generation college students attending schools with less academic counseling and

college prep coursework than their second and third generation counterparts. The three bridge programs studied ran 2-8 weeks and were held on-campus. Some students were required to complete the summer bridge program for formal admission into the institution (Grace-Odeleye and Santiago, 2019). All programs studied offered opportunities to build connections to peers and support systems as well as training in the soft skills for college success when tackling rigorous coursework.

Synthesis

The articles above represent some of the literature on dual-enrollment and college-readiness in underrepresented groups. There were four articles that all found convergent findings about dual-enrollment and success with college-readiness in underrepresented groups including Duncheon and Munoz (2019), Garcia et al. (2020), Holten and Pierson (2016), and Grace-Odeleye and Santiago (2019). Grace-Odeleye primarily found summer bridge programs to best serve underrepresented populations, while Duncheon and Munoz (2019), Garcia et al. (2020), and Holten and Pierson (2016) were more focused on dual-enrollment during high school and college success. There was one divergent finding from Ortiz and Morales (2019) that noted a disconnect between underrepresented groups and the minority serving institutions that historically serve these populations. But this study concluded that the breach needed to be repaired by the postsecondary institutions and not the high schools offering dual-enrollment. Therefore, the evidence overall seems to suggest that dual-enrollment classes are an effective means of college readiness for underrepresented groups.

Measurements of College Readiness

Morgan et al. (2018) stated the need for high school education to make students college and career ready. Using two measurements of college readiness, the American College Testing (ACT) exam and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), only 28% and 43% of test takers respectively were college and career ready in 2015. Another measurement, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, found only 38% of 12th graders college and career ready. Finally, 19.9% of students entering four-year institutions take remedial courses while 51.7% of students entering two-year colleges take remedial courses, further evidence of students not being prepared for college.

Morgan et al. (2018) cited further discrepancies in minority students versus their European American counterparts. Hispanic/Latino students were the lowest proportion of any minority group to attain a postsecondary degree. African American students have an even lower rate of postsecondary completion. However, when normalized for socioeconomic status and preparation for college, these differences became positive markers for completion. Therefore, increasing the academic intensity and quality of high school course work becomes essential for addressing the inequality between races in postsecondary success.

Reed et al. (2019) examined the California public school K-12 system, which had made a concerted effort to better align to its postsecondary education systems. Certain presumptions were central to the study, including that in addition to a College/Career Indicator (CCI)—the primary measure of high school quality on the California School Dashboard, participation and performance in a standardized college entrance exam, such

as the ACT or SAT was also a key indicator of college readiness. Of the 2017-2018 California public high school graduates, 45% took the SAT exam while 63% enrolled in college after high school. Advanced opportunities coursework, such as dual-enrollment classes were understood to be essential to college readiness as well as being important to an equity agenda. They also found that high inequality exists in college readiness for underrepresented groups, including racial/ethnic subgroups, socioeconomically disadvantaged, and English language learners.

These measures were taken in response to a large retention problem in California's postsecondary institutions. As of 2019, of the over 60% of graduates enrolled in college after high school, only half graduate with a 2- or 4-year college degree, according to Reed et al. (2018). In addition to schools being accountable for more rigorous high school coursework, participation in college entrance exams was encouraged through fee waivers and examination opportunities at the school, during the school day. Another assessment of college readiness is the Smarter Balanced, state-wide assessments given in math and English.

Reed et al. (2019) found that states adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) as a means of better preparing students for college and career readiness. Although this one set of standards was implemented by as much as 90% of the United States, the assessments to measure its success varied widely. Some states used Smarter Balanced assessments created to align with the CCSS, while other states chose exams based on differing state standards or used college entrance exams. Based on three measures of postsecondary success, first year grade point average, course grades in

general education requisites (GER), and state assessment as well as ACT scores, Reed et al. (2019) made a study of the relationship between a high school assessment and performance in postsecondary coursework.

Benchmarks on the standardized assessments were used to separate students into a college-ready group and a not college-ready group. The knowledge, skills, and abilities measured by both tests were found by Reed et al. (2019) to be correlated to students being more likely to earn letter grades of B (or C) or above in the corresponding GER courses than those who scored below the benchmark. Finally, as the number of benchmarks students attained increased, so did the first-year GPA.

Some authors, however, disagree with the Smarter Balanced and other assessments associated with the ELA CCSS. Nagrotsky and Grullon (2020) demonstrated the misalignment of most standardized assessments with evidence from classroom memories. While the CCSS themselves accommodate writing toward a multitude of audiences and for a variety of purposes, the assessments measure only what students produce in a single fixed setting. Additionally, study participants found that the writing prompts seemed disconnected from any real-world purpose.

Therefore, when college readiness is tied to such standardized testing, the data may not reveal the complete picture. According to Nagrotsky and Grullon (2020), Race to the Top computerized testing, with text-dependent questions and essay prompts, may not be the feasible way to assess college readiness in writing. Instead, these standardized tests are designed for district-wide goal setting under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to target school intervention based on the metrics. Literary for college readiness

has been studied and found to encompass a far wider definition than previously understood. However, the authors worried that ELA teachers and the expectations on ELA students have not kept pace with this development.

Another assessment that is commonly used to judge writing proficiency is the National Assessment of Education Process. NAEP assessments are conducted in a range of subjects with fourth-, eighth- and twelfth-graders across the country (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). In 2011, students at grades 8 and 12 completed a writing assessment on laptops and the NAEP concluded that 75% of students were not able to write at a basic level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). According to Dunn (2018) who studied the NAEP data, students were lacking explicit instruction with teacher modeling as well as guided practice and step-by-step processes.

Both Dunn (2018) and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) connected some of the writing assessment performance to the use of technology. If an assessment is given on a piece of technology, for example, laptops or iPads, Dunn (2018) promoted the use of this technology in writing instruction to boost students' ability and understanding. The NCES (2019) examined the use of laptops versus iPads and different software for administration. Although the data did show differences, it was not statistically conclusive to recommend one form of technology over another. However, it could be reasonably assumed that student familiarity with the form of technology could affect success on a writing assessment.

Poe et al. (2019) examined the assessments tied to college readiness in writing and the placement of students in remedial education. Prepackaged tests such as the SAT,

ACT, COMPASS, or ACCUPLACER were said to only be of real use if students are allowed to retake the test and that students can submit other writing samples in support of prior learning. The authors' concern was that high stakes placement tests fail to capture all the domains of writing, including cognitive, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and neurological (Poe et al., 2019). The suggested solution was to give a rapid assessment during the first day of a developmental writing course. Either students in proper placement will get writing on the first day or students who were incorrectly placed can be corrected.

Hooley and Thorpe (2017) discussed the importance of formative assessment versus summative assessment when determining college readiness. Formative assessment allowed for immediate, specific feedback that was of the correct length to be useful to students. Feedback also needed to be written in student-friendly language and supportive of student efforts while identifying areas of growth. The final goal for a college-ready student was a self-regulated learner, one who establishes goals, finding motivation to persist through difficult learning tasks.

In the study state, college readiness has been measured using the SAT school day administration to juniors. Smith and Wheeler (2019) studied the suggested replacement, the Smarter Balanced grade 11 summative assessment, given in 17 states. This assessment has also been used for placement in writing at over 200 colleges and universities. According to the Smarter Balanced blueprint (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, 2018) writing should coherently paraphrase relative evidence from given research. Multiple perspectives should also be addressed, and sources sufficiently

documented. Smith and Wheeler (2019) observed that this included connections within a text but neglected connecting the text to the world.

Synthesis

The articles above represent some of the literature on measurements of college readiness. There were conflicting viewpoints throughout the articles. Two articles found convergent findings on the traditional college aptitude tests, the ACT and the SAT, including Morgan et al. (2018) and Reed et al. (2019). Morgan et al. (2018) concluded that although ACT and SAT could be used as measurement of college readiness, dual-enrollment courses and other rigorous course work were more indicative of success. However, Reed et al. (2019) felt that low test scores on an ACT/SAT were correlated to college readiness through a connection to high rates of remediation. There were two articles that discussed the NAEP including Dunn (2018) and the aforementioned Morgan et al. (2018). Dunn primarily found that performance on the NAEP was dependent upon technology used, while Morgan et al. (2018) lumped the NAEP in with other standardized tests. Nagrotsky and Grullon (2020), Hobley and Thorpe (2017), and Poe et al. (2019) had convergent findings on the misuse of standardized tests for a measurement of college readiness. Nagrotsky and Grullon (2020) demonstrated a misalignment to the CCSS, while Hobley and Thorpe (2017) favored formative assessments to measure college readiness, and Poe et al. (2019) determined standardized tests were not a thorough assessment of writing aptitude. There was one divergent finding from Smith and Wheeler (2019) that noted Smarter Balanced standardized assessments as an appropriate substitute for college entrance exams such as the ACT or SAT to determine

college readiness. But this study was relatively small and limitations included application to only the 17 states who have chosen Smarter Balanced as their assessment provider. Therefore, the evidence overall seems to suggest that findings are inconclusive concerning measurements of college readiness.

Student Perceptions of College Readiness

Garcia et al. (2020) discussed that although dual-enrollment can help students feel academically independent and prepared for higher education, the opposite was also found to be true. Students reported feeling isolated and functioning with inadequate guidance. The authors encouraged underrepresented students toward dual-enrollment but with a caution about some students' perceptions.

Reynolds et al. (2019) considered students' perceptions of academic gains and social engagement following several First-Year Experience (FYE) programs. The existence of such programs supports the idea that high school students struggle with the transition from high school to college, despite college readiness curriculum and experiences. The goal of the study was to identify differences in students' perceptions of first-year experiences. Students were also asked to answer five open ended questions with short responses on their perceptions of course goals and content.

The trends and themes that emerged from the Reynolds et al. (2019) study focused on different facets of the students' experiences, from social to academic. Students appreciated academic rigor and focus as well as class structure. Social components were also deemed important, but only if aligned with course content. Developing academic skills was favored over peer relationships. The most positive

experience mentioned by Reynolds et al. was putting effort into studies and receiving good grades as a result. As only students were interviewed directly after their first year, Reynolds et al. felt different perceptions may have existed as students had more time removed from the experiences.

Francis et al. (2018) studied the perceptions of the increasing number of students with disabilities attending college. Such students graduate at lower rates than their peers, with only 20% successfully graduating 4-year institutions. Researchers investigated the degree in which students with disabilities felt prepared to enter college among other experiences. All participants were receiving services from a college's disability service center.

A Likert-type rating scale was used by Francis et al. (2018) to answer the question, "how prepared did you [feel] for college after you graduated from high school?" If students answered "very prepared" or "prepared", they were further asked for the top three ways their high school prepared them for college. An answer of "neither prepared nor unprepared," "unprepared," or "very unprepared," students were asked to identify three ways that the high school could have better prepared them for college. Some of the 51% who responded as very prepared or prepared related solid writing skills, rigor, and note-taking skills as some of the preparation they had received. The remaining 49% listed time management skills, how to balance life and school, and study skills as ways their high school could have better prepared them for college (Francis et al., 2018).

Heisdorf (2019) focused on the Hispanic students that make up 18% of college students as of 2017. Based on their ACT scores, such students are less prepared for

college based on ACT College and Career Readiness Benchmarks than their white counterparts. Focus groups were held with students in grades 11 and 12 who were college bound and would be first generation college students. Their parents were also invited and participated but interviewed separately. They were asked questions in the Heisdorf study about college readiness and navigating post-secondary education among other topics.

According to Heisdorf (2019), core academics and academic preparation were a common theme with both students and parents. Instead of test scores, they felt good grades were a better measurement of college goals. However, they primarily wished that teachers and coursework would have done more to prepare students for college.

Specifically, more guidance in writing, both for standardized tests and personal essays, was mentioned. Although students were instructed to present evidence, the methods of doing so were not explained. The biggest takeaway from Heisdorf was that Hispanic students feel they do not have the funding or resources of other students.

Chai et al. (2021) researched undergraduate college student's attitudes toward writing. In a study of 718 responses from three institutions, college students identified their level of self-efficacy after considering their struggles and successes with the essential ideas gained from writing instructors. In a narrative form, students also described their experiences when learning to write and how the writing instruction could have been improved. 62.5% identified their self-efficacy level as average, but a large number (92%) believed their writing abilities were average or above average. However, 75.5% disliked writing unless they could choose the subject. Participants had both positive and negative comments about their writing instruction. Past teachers had either

made writing interesting or gave bland writing prompts, delivered thorough instruction or suffered from a lack of expectations. Chai et al. concluded that the large percentage of respondents who disliked writing could be correlated to the writing instruction they received.

Synthesis

The articles above represent some of the literature on student perceptions of college readiness. There were four articles that all found convergent findings on the importance of academic skills to student perception of college readiness including Garcia et al. (2020), Reynolds et al. (2019), Francis et al. (2018), and Heisdorf (2019). Garcia et al. (2020) primarily found dual-enrollment success influenced student perception of college readiness, while Reynolds et al. (2019) and Heisdorf (2019) were more focused on a First Year Experience program and how such resources affected student perception while Francis et al. (2018) found an even split between academic skills and soft skills importance in student perception. There was one divergent finding from Chai et al. (2021) that noted a specific area of readiness, writing instruction, was dependent on the instructor. Therefore, the evidence overall seems to suggest that in student perception, academic skills, including writing are essential to a feeling of college readiness.

Summary and Conclusions

Although a wide base of research exists, the importance of this study as a piece in the puzzle is reinforced through a review of the literature. While a clear connection is made between college readiness and advanced opportunities in earlier studies, the disconnect with college completion has not been as widely explored.

By reviewing the literature on secondary writing curriculum for college readiness, many essential elements were revealed, including frequent and lengthy writing assignments, digital tools, argumentation and rhetoric, critical thinking, literacy, and grammar. Then moving to the studies on college writing curriculum, academic literacy with a high level of vocabulary was forefront as well as rhetorical strategy and an integration of reading and writing instruction. Finally, the importance of soft skills, including time management and accessing writing support was established. Each one of these aspects will relate to an interview question to fully explore participants' college writing preparation.

The literature on dual-enrollment and college readiness, including studies in specific states showed a clear connection between dual-enrollment and increased college enrollment, 1-year retention, and increased GPAs. This seemed to be connected to the advanced rigor of dual-enrollment courses and when that college-level coursework was missing, dual-enrollment classes didn't have such success. Dual-enrollment classes were also shown to be an effective choice for underrepresented groups if students took advantage of this opportunity. Focusing this study on dual-enrollment therefore seemed to be the proper choice versus other college preparation programs such as AP or IB.

Studies on the measurements of college readiness were inconclusive, considering a wide variety of instruments including college entrance exams such as the ACT or SAT and standardized assessments such as the NAEP and Smarter Balanced exams. Therefore, examining student perceptions in a qualitative study versus assessment data in a quantitative study would be the prescribed method. The literature on student perception

of college readiness confirmed that academic skills were highly valued by study participants as well as soft skills. The interview questions in this study will incorporate both types of skills to assess student perception on college readiness.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore graduates' perception of college readiness, how a college-readiness curriculum prepared them for college writing, and ways to improve that preparation. To explore graduates' perceived college readiness in the area of writing, a basic qualitative research design was used. In-depth interviews were conducted to collect data on graduates' perceived college readiness, retention and achievement data, and suggested ways high school college readiness curriculum could be improved. The study state's graduating classes were purposefully sampled for both graduating from a high school in the study state as well as attending a higher education institution within the state.

In this chapter, the research design and rationale involving a basic qualitative study will be introduced. The role of the researcher as the participant will be explained through the methodology. Purposeful sampling will be identified as the participant selection method, ensuring graduates of dual-enrollment writing courses as participants. The instrumentation, an interview guide, will be explored, as well as its use in data collection. Thematic analysis will be discussed as the data analysis method, ensuring trustworthiness through a reflexive journal. Finally, confidentiality was ensured through the ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

Two research questions formed the guidance for this research design:

RQ1: How do graduates of a dual-enrollment college readiness curriculum describe the ways it prepared them for college-level writing?

RQ2: How do graduates of a dual-enrollment college readiness curriculum describe the ways it could have better prepared them for college-level writing?

The conceptual framework that supported this study was college readiness, defined as “the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution” (Conley, 2007). A comprehensive definition of college readiness can be a conceptual framework, according to Conley (2007), including measurement of student capability to find success in postsecondary studies.

This study borrowed from the common basic qualitative design. High school graduates who have continued on to college will have lived experiences. They can then describe their experiences as they perceive them. Through such perceptions, information about a particular phenomenon, how college-readiness curriculum is preparing students for college writing, can be studied. According to Sokolowski (2000), even though such research might not produce new information, its findings provide research toward effective solutions. As the focus was the meaning of experiences to the participants of the study, it contributed to the overall qualitative design. A typical data collection approach was used, and interviews and content analysis were employed to discover patterns and themes.

Role of the Researcher

Because I conducted the interviews as the researcher, I was a participant in the data gathering. Although I had been a dual-enrollment instructor, I did not teach the

participants, so I did not have a supervisory or instructor relationship involving power over the participants. There was a difference in maturity and experience between me and the participants, but this lent to trust between me and the participants and more complete interview answers.

In this basic qualitative study, I identified what I expected to discover and then deliberately put that aside. Therefore, although I had some history with dual-enrollment writing instruction, the interviews were conducted from an objective point of view. This process, called *bracketing*, was completed before interviews began. Then, after the data were collected, research was examined to “dwell with the subjects’ descriptions in quiet contemplation” (Parse et al., 1985, p. 5) until the meaning of the lived experience was uncovered.

Methodology

In this study, interviews were conducted via Zoom, with transcripts produced for analysis. Using a semistructured interview protocol, queries focused on the research questions as well as obtaining demographic information. From the results, the six phases of thematic analysis were used, as described by Nowell et al. (2017), and aligned to the research questions. The first phase involved familiarizing myself with the data. This engagement was accomplished by documenting theoretical, reflective, and potential thoughts about codes or themes. Additionally, records were kept of all notes and transcripts. The second phase, generating initial codes, and the third phase, searching for themes, were achieved by reflexive journaling and diagramming to generate theme connections. Phase 4, reviewing themes, and Phase 5, defining and naming themes,

surfaced from a collaboration and consensus of myself and doctoral committee. Finally, Phase 6, producing the report, included describing the process of coding and analysis in sufficient detail as well as reporting on the theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices throughout the entire study (Nowell et al., 2017).

Participant Selection

The population of participants came from the study state's 53,391 students enrolled in a 2-year or 4-year institution (Richert, 2021). A purposeful sample of the study state's graduates was plausible. It needed to be purposeful because it needed to ensure that these graduates were attending a higher education institution within the study state. Because graduates could have attended any of 297 public high schools in the study state as well as any of the eight higher education institutions within the state, conflicts of interest or other ethical concerns were eliminated. Participants were not chosen if they attended my high school.

The approach for purposeful sampling followed a snowball or chain sampling. In this strategy, information was sought from key informants with details of other information-rich cases in the field (Suri, 2011). I contacted the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the writing course departments from local colleges about participation in this study. Then interested writing course instructors were asked to forward an email invitation to their classes to participate in the study. In the invitation, students were told that they needed to have completed a dual-enrollment writing course in high school to participate in the study and consider themselves to be struggling in the course. For a basic qualitative design, typically the sample size is between one and 10 (Turhan, 2019),

although some authors suggest at least six participants. For a case study approach, a larger sampling size is recommended; therefore, a basic qualitative design was chosen with the goal number of participants between 10 and 15 (Vasileiou et al., 2018) and a resulting number of 12 participants.

Instrumentation

An interview guide, as shown in Appendix A, was used to ensure consistent questioning during interviews as instrumentation. Questions were chosen to establish the parameters of participant sampling, ensuring graduation from a dual-enrollment writing course and current or former experience in a college-level writing class. Further questioning was created using the aspects of college readiness in writing revealed during the literature review. As found in the literature, a successful writing curriculum includes frequent and lengthy writing (Graham, 2019). Students are instructed in argumentation and rhetoric, following the Tuolmin model (Lee, 2018; Olson et al., 2020; Rejan, 2017). Critical thinking (Kettler, 2021), grammar (O'Dowd, 2017), and reading comprehension (Katz et al., 2018) were also explored. Finally, the transfer of these skills to other subject areas (Monbec, 2018; Schomoker, 2018) was examined. In addition to these academic skills, the inclusion of soft skills (Miller & Rockford, 2021) was questioned. After these guided questions, participants were allowed to give feedback on their writing preparation. This included both aspects of the instruction that lent to college readiness in the students' perception and those areas where their preparation could have been improved.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Recruitment was conducted in four phases as suggested by Bonisteel et al. (2021) and iterated below: development, implementation, participation, and postrecruitment assessment. In the development of the recruitment plan, the aforementioned study objectives were established, and eligible participants were identified through the satisfaction of ethical concerns. Many determinations were also made, including what would be asked of participants, how to contact participants, and what participants would receive for their participation. Possible candidates were asked to complete a 1-hour interview via Zoom. This required an email address to send the Zoom invitation. A \$25 Amazon gift card was emailed to compensate them for their time. The email address provided was also used to obtain informed consent from the participants.

Phase 2 involved implementing the recruitment plan. College writing course students were contacted, and compensation was offered to find contact information for willing participants. Again, subjects must have graduated from a high school in the study state and be attending or have attended a postsecondary institution in the study state as well. Once a convenient time was set, participants received an invitation to a Zoom meeting. As mentioned in the guide, they were informed that the Zoom meeting would be recorded to produce a transcript. Once the interview was concluded and all informed consent was received, participants were emailed access to their compensation.

Phases 3 and 4 went beyond what is considered a typical aspect of recruitment. In planning Phase 3, I recognized that participants had given their time and might have a direct interest in the results of the study. Therefore, if there were any issues with the

study, those were to be communicated with the participants along with updates with the study's progress. Finally, in postrecruitment assessment, lessons from this recruitment plan were shared with the research community through this study (Bonisteel et al., 2021).

During the Zoom interviews, I noted initial analysis thoughts, which were used during the data analysis process. This included interpretations, questions, and gained knowledge.

The method of data collection included an interview guide, found in Appendix A, which was given to participants in advance via email in hopes of a higher quality of interview data. In this semistructured format, although the interview guide was followed by each participant, if an iterative interaction was needed to better understand the subject's point of view, it followed. As put forth by DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019), semistructured interviews are effective for exploring a participant's thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about a particular topic, such as college readiness.

Data were collected using the interview guide in Appendix A during the Zoom interviews with each participant. Using the Zoom platform, interviews were recorded for later transcription. Interviews were supposed to last approximately an hour, exploring several aspects of the participants' writing preparation, but lasted around 15–20 minutes. Of the study's goal of 10–15 participants, 12 were purposefully sampled, so the data were collected 12 times, once per participant. Upon completion of the study, the participants were asked about their availability for follow-up interviews, should I need further clarification, all being available via email. Participants were also offered emailed updates

of the study's progress (none accepted) and a copy of the final dissertation if desired (all accepted).

Data Analysis Plan

Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyze, organize, describe, and report themes from the interview transcripts, as described in Nowell et al. (2017). The first phase of this analysis method concerned familiarization with the data. Therefore, I read through the entire set of data before attempting coding. This consisted of transcripts that were provided as a service through the Zoom provider. However, once again, any preexisting beliefs and developing theories were identified and considered in this process. This was conducted for both research questions separately.

Raw data were logged in a document to detail the progress in collecting and converting raw data into text that was analyzed with the qualitative data analysis software Atlas TI. This allowed for Phase 2, generating initial codes. These codes were connected to common themes that emerged from the data. In this process, important sections of text were identified, and a label was attached to index them. Codes were chosen that were neither interchangeable nor redundant. A hierarchy of codes could have been chosen that included broad higher order codes and detailed lower order codes. This would have allowed for necessary distinctions in any emerging themes (Nowell et al., 2017). However, such delineations were not needed as the responses neatly aligned to the research questions.

As a realistic, deductive thematic analysis was desired, a codebook, as suggested by Crabtree and Miller (1999), provided a clear trail of evidence for the credibility of the

study. A codebook was established before the in-depth analysis of the data occurred. Once the codes were established, Phase 3 began.

When all data were coded and collated, searching for themes was the next step. According to Braun and Clark (2006), a theme captures something important concerning the overall research question of college preparedness in the area of writing. In this inductive approach, data suggested that participants' writing skills may not have been college ready, and this analytic preconception provided the lens for any themes that were theorized. However, as advised by King (2004), I was not so strongly guided by the research questions and any preconceived notions as to eliminate themes that presented themselves organically in the analysis process.

The fourth phase, reviewing themes, began after a set of themes was devised. Here, themes were analyzed to see whether they formed a coherent pattern. Each individual theme was considered against meanings in the data set as a whole. Codes were added or discarded as needed to tighten the data set. Attride-Sterling (2001) suggested that the selected themes must be broad enough to capture the perceptions of the graduates but specific enough to be discrete. The end product was a clear picture of the overall story each theme told about the data.

In conclusion, Phase 5 included a detailed analysis of each theme and how it lent to the overall meaning of the study. According to King (2004), this was not accomplished until all of the data had been read through and the coding scrutinized at least twice. Once accomplished, the final phase, producing the report, began. Discrepant cases were identified and reported in the data as such.

Trustworthiness

A reflexive journal was kept during this process to be auditable evidence to support the trustworthiness of the study. This reflexivity is one of six areas of trustworthiness suggested by Nowell et al. (2017). Credibility is another and was achieved through data collection triangulation and peer debriefing. Lincoln and Guba (1985) even suggested involving the participants in the criticism of findings and interpretations, as aligned with Phase 2 of the data collection process.

To achieve transferability, I strove to include enough description that others who seek to use the findings can easily transfer them to their setting. The exacting chronicle of the instrumentation and operationalization of procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection was an aspect of the dependability of the study. Similarly, a clear accounting of the data analysis and results supported the study's confirmability. Finally, relating the decision trail as the study moved from proposal to completion served as a natural audit trail for readers of the work (Nowell et al., 2017).

Ethical Procedures

The most important ethical procedures necessary to a study involve maintaining anonymity and confidentiality (Ngozwana, 2018). To this end, during coding, each participant was assigned a number and all identifying information was kept separate from the interview transcript. If identifying information came out in the interview itself, it was redacted in the interest of confidentiality. Confidentiality was also preserved in that unlike in a focus group, the only individuals during interviews were the participant and myself.

Another important ethical concern is informed consent. For this purpose, each participant was given an explanation of the purpose of the study and all ethical principles in place, including confidentiality and anonymity. Then if they chose to participate in the study, I asked for signed consent via email request. Permission to record and transcribe the interview was also obtained.

IRB Approval was granted on September 2, 2022, under the approval number 09-02-22-0978764. IRB procedure included an ethical self-check form which outlined aspects of the university's ethical standards being met. Some highlights included that a layperson summary will be shared with the National Council for Teachers of English and local chapter as well as with the state department and the study participants, that throughout the study, the state is referred to as the study state (not by name) and the partnering institutions as 2- or 4-year institutions, not by name, and email communication was exchanged with partner organizations that ensured Walden University as the IRB organization of record and permission to for all relevant data access, access to participants, etc. Additionally, the researcher completed the CITI training to obtain her human subjects protection training completion certificate.

Summary

In this research design, a basic qualitative study was used. Participants were sampled using snowball or chain sampling for a purposeful group. Four phases of recruitment were employed to sample and interview graduates of the study state high schools with experience in the study state's postsecondary institutions. A guide with a semi-structured premise was used to interview and the transcripts generated for analysis.

As inductive thematic analysis was desired, a codebook was used to discover codes.

Finally, themes that related to the research questions were explored.

In Chapter 4, results from the previously described methodology will be related.

Chapter 4: Results

Twelve interviews were conducted to address the study purpose, to explore graduates' perception of college readiness, how a college-readiness curriculum prepared them for college writing, and ways to improve that preparation. The prepared interview guide of questions addressed both research questions:

RQ1: How do graduates of a dual-enrollment college readiness curriculum describe the ways it prepared them for college-level writing?

RQ2: How do graduates of a dual-enrollment college readiness curriculum describe the ways it could have better prepared them for college-level writing?

In this chapter, the setting for the interviews will be related, specifically as it concerns the sample population and study state postsecondary institutions chosen. Methods of data collection will be explained as well as the steps of data analysis. Finally, the results and the trustworthiness of the study will be described.

Setting

Two universities from the study state were chosen for participant recruitment. Both institutions' IRBs were willing to allow the study to take place and had students who fit the study criteria, having taken dual-credit courses in English and being currently enrolled in the university. One was a public, metropolitan doctoral research university, and the other was a public land-grant research university in a small community. Both had dual-credit programs that allowed for high school students to enroll in college courses for credit prior to high school graduation, either by taking dual-credit classes at their high

school or by taking classes offered on their campuses or online. They also accepted dual credits transferred from another institution in the study state.

After first reaching out to the English departments at each university and then being referred to 1st-year writing teachers, I finally made connections and found instructors found who were teaching ENGL 102. From there, the invitation was given to students taking the Fall 2022 semester course. According to one instructor, of her 24 students, almost all had taken ENGL 101 in high school.

Data Collection

Five students were recruited from the large metropolitan university and seven students were recruited from the land-grant institution in a smaller community. Participants were still enrolled in classes at that institution, except one student who had transferred to a university in another state. Ten participants were in their freshman year (having just graduated the previous spring) and two were in their sophomore year (having graduated just before starting their freshman year). All had transferred dual credits from their time in high school, including ENGL 101, ENGL 175, and for a few, ENGL 102. Some dual-enrollment courses were offered within a semester, and others had the same curriculum presented over an entire school year. Five participants presented as female, and seven presented as male. They had attended high schools in the study state except one who had dual-credits from a neighboring state. Most participants had attended high schools in the area around the large metropolitan university, but two had come from high schools closer to the land-grant institution.

Initial contact was made via email, supplied in the invitation. The first reply email stated the following: “Attached to this email is a consent form for participation. All you need to do to show your consent is reply to this email with the words, ‘I consent.’” Additionally, an appointment calendar was shared for the 1-hour interview using a Google link. Once I had received a reply of “I consent” and scheduled an interview, the interview questions were sent in an additional email with a confirmation of the interview date and time. Any questions emailed between the initial contact and the interview were answered in a timely manner. A few participants had conflicts and needed to be rescheduled, but all 12 participants who made initial contact and answered “I consent” were eventually interviewed in September through November 2022.

To initiate each interview, the Zoom meeting was started and recorded immediately for transcription purposes. Zoom interviews were chosen as the universities are 300 miles apart in separate corners of the study state. This also allowed for both my and the participants’ busy schedules. After pleasantries were exchanged, the interview guide was read verbatim (see Appendix A). In the introduction, participants were reminded that the interview was being recorded and were allowed to ask any questions and indicate their readiness before questions initiated.

The semistructured interview style chosen allowed for clarifying questions to be answered and prompts made if participants were struggling to answer a question. I made field notes on a printed copy of the interview guide while the interview progressed. This included details to assist with future interviews and impressions from the participant’s answers. For instance, participants found Part B of Question 6— “What

programs/applications were used for the digital part of the process?”—challenging until a clarifying statement, “for example a grammar or plagiarism checker,” was given. Another question that needed additional information was Question 7, “Did your dual-enrollment writing course include instruction on argumentation and/or rhetoric?” When a participant was unsure about the meaning of rhetoric, the example “logos, ethos, and pathos” was given. Part A was especially challenging for participants: “If so, was the Toulmin method ever mentioned?” The explanation of aspects of the Toulmin method such as a claim or warrant was given in every interview, as only one of the participants recognized the term. The final question that needed supplementing was Question 10, “Was the transfer of your writing skills to other subject areas a part of your writing course curriculum?” Participants were unsure about the meaning of “transfer” and were given the example of using these skills in a science or social studies class.

Another change was made because so many of the questions prompted a yes or no answer instead of being open-ended. In the case of a yes answer to Question 8 (“Were research methods a part of your dual-enrollment writing instruction?”) and Question 9 (“Was reading comprehension or literacy taught with writing in your composition course?”), an additional prompt was given, asking what the participant remembered about that topic. For example, when a participant answered yes to Question 8, the following was asked—“What do you remember about how research methods were presented?”—or to Question 9, an additional question—“What do you remember about how reading comprehension or literacy were taught?”—was offered.

Finally, Question 12— “From your perspective, did your high school experience prepare you for college-level writing?”—caused hesitation. There were follow-up questions in the interview guide (“If yes, how so? If not, why not?”), but those did not seem to help participants answer the question. However, when it was offered that the participant’s answer could be both yes and no, answers came more freely. This option was then presented to every participant upon receiving this question.

After the interview ended, I thanked the participants for their time and let them know about the next steps. It was related that a written transcript would be made of the recording and that I might ask follow-up questions via an email if necessary for clarification. I also informed them that within a day, the \$25 Amazon gift card would be send via email to their address.

Data Analysis

In the voice-to-text transcription, both my questions/comments and the participant’s answers were recorded. The first step in data analysis was to remove my content, unless an identifying word from the question was needed to clarify the relationship to a yes or no answer without explanation. Therefore, the transcripts were altered to achieve a clean verbatim, being lightly edited for clarity, but not necessarily readability. This included ensuring that the words transcribed were correct even if difficult to hear in the recording. However, stuttering; the filler words “like,” “yeah,” and so forth; run-on sentences; false starts; and unintentional word repetition were not removed.

The clean-up process created the first layer of familiarity with the themes of the participant responses. It became clear that both character points, something that clearly informed a point or brought forth a new idea, as well as commonalities, areas of consensus and frequent occurrence, existed in the transcripts. Both were identified and coded in the first sorting of the data. Atlas.TI was chosen as the qualitative data analysis software. Material was classified by highlighting a quote and identifying a possible code in vivo. Quite quickly, codes could be reused for common themes.

After this first round of open coding, additional codes were revealed that were missed from the initial coding, and so a second review was conducted. This allowed for a consistency in using the established codes from the round of open coding. Codes were also cleaned to ensure that a common theme was not represented by different codes. Then quotations were reexamined to ensure the proper code had been applied. Finally, themes were established within Atlas.TI by determining code groups within the software and categorizing codes by group and therefore theme. From memory of responses, codes, and prompting questions, an initial set of themes (code groups) were created. Upon assigning codes to groups, most codes fit into the initial list, but a few more needed to be created. Most themes aligned with the interview questions, but some emerged from the participants' responses.

Results

Table 1

Code Groups by Document Frequency

	027	124	241	327	443	528	615	748	772	893	991
Curriculum focus	2	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1
Desired resources	2	0	1	3	1	1	4	2	1	2	1
Digital use and application	4	5	6	4	4	3	4	3	4	2	2
Advancement	5	3	3	3	4	6	10	4	3	2	2
Emotions	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	1	0	0
Preparation	1	3	2	2	1	2	1	2	1	5	2
Parent support	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Perceptions about college readiness	1	0	1	1	1	1	2	0	1	2	1
Reading and literacy	3	7	5	4	5	6	6	3	4	4	4
Soft skills	1	1	1	1	2	0	5	2	2	7	1
Teacher presence	2	2	1	2	2	4	2	1	2	6	2
Transfer to other subjects	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	1	0
Types of writing	2	2	4	3	1	6	9	4	3	11	3
Peer editing	6	3	2	9	4	7	5	4	2	3	3
Writing skills	6	7	5	13	6	12	10	7	7	7	6

The first research question asked how graduates of a dual-enrollment college readiness curriculum describe the ways it prepared them for college-level writing and was answered by nine themes listed in Table 1 with codes and transcripts and one theme that was discovered by a lack of evidence in the responses. The 11 prevalent themes are curriculum focus, digital use and application, advancement, reading and literacy, soft skills, teacher presence, transfer to other subjects, types of writing, peer editing, preparation, and writing skills. The theme identified by its absence was no argumentation knowledge. They will be explained and illustrated below in these results.

The first theme was *curriculum focus*. This was defined as student perceptions about the direction of the coursework toward an established goal. There was significant support in the data. In fact, the theme emerged here of curriculum focus as participants analyzed the time spent by the instructor on various topics, being coded six times across the 12 interviews. *Focus* was additionally coded in conjunction with curriculum topics

such as research, reading (including vocabulary and grammar), transfer, and soft skills. However, the code *focus* on other topics was used with a negative connotation while focus on essay writing was positive. Participant 8 showed this difference. In a positive light, he described a focus on rhetoric that helped his writing:

We also focused on the audience so we would write two different essays for two different audiences, but they were about the same topic and so we focused on the audience portion of rhetoric and on how we use different rhetorical devices to fit that audience.

However, this same graduate stated a lack of focus in the area of vocabulary building:

“You trying to increase your vocabulary wasn’t a focus.” There were several quotes of participants, such as Participant 9, who described focus as upon reading and literacy:

“My school was heavily focused on reading and making sure we could understand these intense books we were reading in upper English classes.” In this case, the participant did not believe this choice of curriculum focus helped with her writing.

An additional theme that emerged was Theme 2: types of writing. When participants elaborated on their essay-writing experiences, they tended to list the types of essays written and how that helped them in future writing. This included the codes *argumentative*, *informative*, *annotated bibliography*, *reflection*, *free writes*, *compare and contrast*, *senior project*, *persuasive*, *opinion*, and *narrative*. *Argumentative* (9), *persuasive* (7), *annotated bibliography* (5), *senior project* (4), and *free writes* (3) were mentioned in multiple interviews, while the other types were character points, mentioned by a single participant.

The next theme, Theme 3: advancement, referred to the participants reflecting on taking dual-credit classes and how that advanced their preparation for college-level writing. The theme *advancement* included the code *writing frequency* because it captured how often students were writing. This code for *writing frequency* was found 18 times throughout the interviews. The quotes identified for this code included Participant 9's mention of "three full-length essays and then lots of smaller assignments," Participants 1 and 7's note of "four or five essays," Participant 3's mention of "one a quarter," and Participant 2's statement of "one every month."

The specific dual-credit course taken was also coded because the frequency of writing seemed dependent on the course taken and over what portion of the school year. For example, most participants wrote more in ENGL 101 than in ENGL 175. Writing one essay a month was for graduates who took ENGL 101 in one semester of their senior year and then ENGL 175 in the second semester. Students who took ENGL 101 over the course of a full school year only wrote one essay a quarter. The final response under *writing frequency* was dependent upon whether the dual-enrollment class was taken their senior year. Then participants related that the essay writing was all first semester and completing the curriculum for senior project made up the second semester. The groundedness results for the code *senior project* showed that four of the 12 or one third of the participants completed their dual-enrollment writing course alongside this graduation requirement.

Question 6 of the interview guide asked participants to recall the steps of the writing process. In discussions of the writing process, two themes emerged from the data.

Theme 4: peer editing was the dominant feature mentioned by participants. Others such as *outline* were mentioned nine times, but *peer editing* was the common step discussed. Peer editing was the most common response, with the groundedness value equaling 19 codes through the 12 interviews. In fact, only four of the interviewees related that the instructor would give feedback on a rough draft. Another two said that such one-on-one time would have to be scheduled outside of class, and one mentioned that the class was encouraged to ask other English teachers in the building for help.

The second theme was Theme 5: teacher presence because each of the participants talked about the different things that teachers did to facilitate the writing process. Participant 11 responded, “she went around to check our outlines,” referring to the instructor’s involvement, and Participant 7 mentioned, “she’d have to approve it [the outline] before we could go on.” Participant 3 commented on being given a *foundation* (3): “she’d give us like general frameworks for how we could work on our outlines.”

One theme was Theme 6: digital writing, indicating that the students wrote their papers on computers. Almost all participants affirmed digital writing, while two said that 90% was digital writing. Some of this may have been due to COVID and online coursework.

While no theme emerged regarding digital use and computer applications, it is noteworthy to mention the different applications that students used because they were required or suggested by the instructor: *Microsoft Teams* (2), *Microsoft Word* (5), *Turnitin.com* (5), *Google* (6), and various citation producers. Participants also mentioned

Grammarly (6), but only once at a teacher's direction, the others choosing to use Grammarly by their own initiative.

For the programs or applications used during the writing process, there were several common answers under the theme *digital writing*. In most cases, these programs were required or suggested by the instructor: Microsoft Teams is a business communication platform chosen by some schools for virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (2021). It is available as a suite of products that also includes the word processor Microsoft Word. Turnitin.com is an Internet-based plagiarism detection service commonly used by high schools and universities, utilizing submissions by permanently storing them in Turnitin's privately held database (Morris & Stommel, 2017). The code *plagiarism* (5) stemmed from this reference as it was commonly used by instructors to check similarity. The code *Google* (6) referred to the use of Google Docs to produce essays digitally and Google Drive to store these essays and share them with peers and/or the instructor. *Grammarly* is a free writing app that checks spelling, grammar, punctuation, clarity, and writing style. However, a Premium account is available that provides advanced services, and one participant mentioned that an instructor provided this account to her students.

Research Question 1 asked how graduates of a dual-enrollment college readiness curriculum describe the ways it prepared them for college-level writing. One answer was Theme 7: no argumentation knowledge (Toulmin). The codes in this case were a lack of codes because participants could not define or discuss argumentation and did not know if it was part of the curriculum. There was one discrepant case in that one student,

Participant 9, was able to describe “different rhetorical devices” being taught, and another, Participant 8, described rhetoric as “the way you present a message and a rhetorical device would be the language you use or the tone you use whether [which] medium that you share.” Nine respondents identified writing an argumentative essay but could not elaborate on the techniques given to do so when prompted. Therefore, the theme concluded that participants had no understanding of argumentation.

Some additional insight on the topic of argumentation was provided when participants discussed the types of essays written. When elaborating on a persuasive essay, for example, an interviewee, Participant 6, related learning about how to present a, “side on a position.” Another student, Participant 8, discussed a similar argumentative process, “we would write two different essays for two different audiences, but they were about the same topic and so we focused on the audience portion of rhetoric and on how we use different rhetorical devices to fit was that audience.” Participant 1 described the learning as building year after year until, “tying in points that other people could have and then also trying to I wouldn't say dominate the argument but try to win the positive side of it.” Therefore, although the terms rhetoric and especially the Toulmin method were not familiar to participants, they had some knowledge of argumentation.

Question eight prompted participants to recall if research methods were a part of their dual-enrollment writing instruction. The theme that emerged from their responses was Theme 8: Writing Skills, as well as a second occurrence of Theme 2: Types of Writing. Some respondents had already mentioned a research essay (*research* (9)) when relating the types of essays written. Again, the prompts were needed to help interviewees

elaborate on an affirmative answer.

Part a of Question 8 asked about instruction on determining the validity of a resource. The answers to this prompt generated Theme 8: Writing Skills with 12 different codes representing writing skills for 50 total occurrences: *credible source* (13), *citation* (9), *source* (5), *plagiarism* (5), *APA* (4), *MLA* (4), *quote* (3), *articles* (2), *.org vs. .edu* (2), *CRAAP test* (2), *in-text citations* (1), and *documentation* (1). A quote from Participant 8 revealed why this knowledge was scattered and sketchy, “Our librarian came in to talk about it [research methods] at least one day.” In fact, this one graduate who recalled direct instruction on research methods was given those lessons by the librarian and not her teacher. Therefore, this theme could qualify as another indication of something missing from answering research question one.

Question 9 considered the inclusion of reading comprehension or literacy with writing in the dual-enrollment composition course, generating Theme 9: Reading and Literacy inclusion. Responses were split based on the course taken. ENGL 101 classes were far more reading-focused with the code *read books* used 22 times. The first mention of reading was often with the essays written, one student, Participant 7 commenting that each essay covered a “piece of literature that we read during class.” Character codes came from specific works of literature mentioned such as *Shakespeare* (1), *Frankenstein* (2), and the *Salem Witch Trials* (2). Participant 9 mentioned that her “school was heavily focused on reading,” while another, Participant 3 had a contradictory experience in that, “it was kind of expected that you had already learned those” [reading skills].

Other than general reading comprehension or literacy being acknowledged as part of the dual-enrollment writing curriculum, few skills were mentioned. The character codes *theme* (4), *author* (2), *Hero's Journey* (1), *symbolism* (1), *audience* (1), and *summary* (2) emerged from discussion of reading as well as writing about literature assignments. All were placed under the theme *Reading and Literacy*.

Parts a and b of Question 9 asked participants about more that emerged under the theme of *Writing Skills* such as vocabulary building and grammar instruction within their dual-enrollment writing course. The code *vocabulary building* occurred 10 times, with some specific approaches mentioned. Vocabulary lists were distributed and a vocabulary assessment given as a pre- and post-test for the course. Participant 5 mentioned multiple activities with the given vocabulary terms, “my English 101 teacher would give us a list, then we'd have to write sentences that would, you know, go with the words. We'd also have to play some games with the words and then we have tests over them.” However, several students stated that vocabulary building was not a part of their instruction as shown through this response from Participant 8, “I guess naturally if you're just writing and you're trying to increase your vocabulary but it wasn't a focus.”

Grammar instruction (under the same theme, *Writing Skills*) had similar feedback, with 11 codes found across the interviews. Two character codes were found with specific grammatical skills mentioned, *commas* (1) and *syntax* (1), with Participant 11 remembering, “for ENGL 175 we went through a lot of PowerPoints on grammar.” Otherwise, the instruction seemed to be based around editing sentences, as Participant 6 described, “we worked on grammar at the beginning of class as bellwork. That was a

graded assignment every day, just trying to find grammatical errors...had to write and fix them and mark what we got wrong if we didn't get it right and turn it in at the end of the week." However, some participants had the opposite experience, such as Participant 4 who said, "not a whole lot [of grammar instruction] 'cuz the professor kind of expected us to have a grammar down."

Question 10, on the transfer of writing skills to other subject areas as a part of the writing course curriculum, was the most sparse response for codes but still produced Theme 10: Transfer to Other Subjects. *Science* (3) was mentioned as a possible course that writing skills were transferred to, specifically *AP Biology* (1). The only other specific course mentioned was *Japanese* (1), but in all cases, interviewees related that the transfer of writing skills was something they determined themselves but was not presented by instructors or part of the dual-enrollment writing curriculum. Additionally, it was recognized that different methods of citation, *APA* (4) for science and social studies versus *MLA* (4) for English or humanities was a kind of instruction in transfer of writing skills.

Question 11 produced Theme 11: Soft Skills, taught as part of a dual-enrollment writing course. Part a gave prompts such as time-management, goal setting, writing center support, or organization. All four of these soft skills were affirmed as part of the dual-enrollment writing course by one or more of the interviewees, all coded under the theme of *Soft Skills*. *Time Management* (9) tied for the most amount of codes as participants discussed the direction given by instructors to complete an essay. Participant 10 related, "I remember my teacher would always publish our schedule for the week and

encourage us to get our work done...either before the time limit or on time.”

Organization (9) was the other code with a high level of groundedness, as shown by this quote from Participant 1, “definitely the organization and having pieces put together first and then...in steps.” Participants 6 and 7 mentioned putting together a *portfolio* (2) of their essays throughout the course as an example of organization, “for your final you had to make a portfolio with all your essays in it, and it is good to be organized to keep track of all your rough drafts and your final papers.”

The final codes that emerged for the theme *Soft Skills, goal* (1) and *writing center* (3) were not as common. Participant 8 remembered, “during free writes mainly, we would set a goal.” The three participants who mentioned writing centers, either had a writing center in their own school or access to one in the dual-credit partner institution. Participant 4 said about the teacher, “Every essay he would mention to us to use the writing center.”

Question 12 revealed each participants’ perspective if the dual-enrollment writing course(s) prepared them for college-level writing, revealing Theme 12: Preparation. Each of the 12 participants felt that at least in part, their high school experience had prepared them for college-level writing. Participant 2 summed up his feelings as, “So I think I know pretty well how to do essay work in college.” A few thought they had even gained an advantage, like Participant 10, “I guess [I’m] either on par or a little bit ahead of my current course in college,” and Participant 6, “I was pretty grateful that I could take a dual-credit class and get ahead in college.” However, one interviewee, Participant 3 had a different perspective, “a lot of what I was able to accomplish in my English classes was

due to...reading a lot on my own and so building up my own vocabulary and syntax.”

The second research question was, how do graduates of a dual-enrollment college readiness curriculum describe the ways it could have better prepared them for college level writing? The themes for this research question included Desired Resources, Emotions, Expectations on Students, Perceptions About College Readiness, and Parent Support. Those interviewees that mentioned Theme 13: Parent Support either had a parent that was an English teacher or relied on their parent as another editor of drafts. Those that answered affirmatively, that their high school experience prepared them for college-level writing, provided Theme 14: Perceptions about College Readiness. Participants felt that their perceived readiness was due to skills being worth a *grade* (6) and categorized curriculum into that which was assessed versus activities that were not. This level of *rigor* (1) was mentioned by Participant 9, “yes, I feel very prepared, but I don't know if it's because I was in kind of an environment of tough academics.”

The theme *Perceptions About College Readiness* included an appreciation of taking dual-enrollment writing courses in high school. Participants who had completed ENGL 101 related the advantage this gave them when entering college. Participant 8 commented, “having that base definitely helped...having it in high school did help me prepare for what a college class looks like, especially a college writing class.” Participant 6 commented that because of the dual-enrollment writing credits, “I don’t have to take an English class in college and if I had to write a paper I know what to do and am not afraid to do it.”

Theme 15, Desired Resources came from both Question 12 and Question 13, which asked for if the participants' high school could have done something to make postsecondary goals easier to obtain. The code *Counselor* (3) emerged from participants who wished they had more *Academic Advising* (2) moving into college. A character code resulted from one student wishing for more instruction on using *gender-neutral terms* (1). Under *resources* (2) was the option of building a study hall into a high school schedule for the extra workload of a dual-credit course.

A final theme, Theme 16: Emotions rounded out the perceptions shared by the participants of the study. Participants reported feeling that college would be *intimidating* (4) based on the portrayal given by their high school instructors. Participant 7 shared, "they made it sound like college was going to be a lot harder. It was definitely scary to start. I'm sure it is for everybody, but it turned out to be a lot less scary than I thought." However, one student, Participant 5, felt that this misrepresentation was detrimental to post-secondary goals. "[They] set up this mentality that college was going to be not your best experience. So I wish they would have been like, you'll still have fun...throw in some happiness in there."

This same participant related that the dual-credit writing class resulted in bringing her *self-esteem down* (1). This was due in part to her perception that her instructor "was pretty judgmental and pretty biased with his writing. Like if he didn't like your writing style you kind of had accommodate to him." This left the participant feeling *frustrated* (1) and intimidated. A character code that emerged from this question of perception was the concept of *competition* (1).

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The question (#1 in the Interview Guide) asked about participants' high school attended ensured that no conflict of interest or ethical conflict existed between the researcher and the participants. None of the 12 participants had attended a school where the researcher taught or been a student of the researcher.

The researcher kept a reflexive journal during the interviews, using a blank copy of the interview guide. This allowed for trustworthiness as suggested by Nowell, et al. (2017). Credibility was established through member checking during the interviews. This involved giving the data back to the respondents to cross-check the initial collection by repeating their answers during the interview for confirmation. Participants were also notified that further emails might be necessary for clarification of interview responses, although this was not necessary due to recorded interviews and the reflexive journaling.

Results were relayed with intense detail to achieve Stahl and King's (2020) definition of transferability. Using the description "a thick description providing a rich enough portrayal of circumstance for application to others' situations," the goal was to include a level of specifics, including character codes, that would allow the research to be comparable to a wide range of personal contexts (Stahl & King, 2020). Such attention to minutiae also allowed for dependability or the trust in trustworthy. By describing the involvement of the researcher in the decisions made in the research processes, reflexive auditing was achieved.

For the final area of trustworthiness, confirmability, the researcher kept the research as objective as possible through precision and accuracy. The same script of

questions was asked in each interview and the results were recorded in the same manner.

Summary

Of the 12 graduates interviewed, all were in the first or third semester of their time at a four-year public institution in the study state, transferring in credits from dual-enrollment classes including ENGL 101 and/or ENGL 175. They were either currently enrolled in ENGL 102 or had finished it before our interview. From their responses, a total of 410 quotations were given 91 codes under 16 themes using Atlas TI qualitative analytical software. These were related to the interview guide questions, beginning with question four concerning remediation classes taken in the area of writing (0-1). The research method was considered for trustworthiness after all the quotations, codes, and themes were related to each interview question.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to obtain graduates' perceptions about their college readiness in the area of writing and any suggestions for improvement in that preparation. 12 college freshmen and sophomores were interviewed via Zoom with a guide of 13 questions. These students came from two public universities in the study state, both offering degrees up to the doctoral level. The interviews were transcribed and then coded for themes using Atlas TI software.

The summary of the key findings includes 16 themes: curriculum focus, digital writing, advancement, reading and literacy, soft skills, teacher presence, transfer, types of writing, peer editing, writing skills, preparation, no argumentation knowledge, desired resources, emotions, parent support, and perceptions about college readiness. The first 12 addressed research Question 1 concerning graduates' perceptions about their college readiness in the area of writing. The final four emerged from suggestions about improvement in that preparation.

In this chapter, the codes and themes will be used to communicate findings, based on the research questions. I will then make recommendations, keeping in mind the implications of the study.

Interpretation of the Findings

Therefore, when revisiting the research questions, several findings can be communicated. To the first question—How do graduates of a dual-enrollment college readiness curriculum describe the ways it prepared them for college-level writing?—participants were able to communicate a myriad of ways they felt prepared. Using the

themes gathered from the qualitative analysis, graduates were able to iterate the *writing process*, including peer editing, drafts, and feedback. They described gaining *writing skills* such as the importance of a thesis statement, considering an audience, and aspects of proper grammar. Participants could name familiarity with several *types of writing*, from argumentative writing to annotated bibliographies. When researching, they understood *citation types and sources*, including the use of MLA versus APA formatting and the necessity of avoiding plagiarism. 100% of participants felt comfortable with *digital use and applications* when writing, including the suite of Google and Microsoft platforms. *Reading and literacy* had an obvious role in their college-level writing preparation, not only recalling specific texts, but also how to use literacy aspects such as the hero's journey, symbolism, and theme. Even *soft skills* were recalled as embedded in course expectations or the source of free writes. *Perceptions of college readiness* were summed up as dual-enrollment courses helping them get ahead in college and having an advantage over their peers.

When addressing the second question—How do graduates of a dual-enrollment college readiness curriculum describe the ways it could have better prepared them for college-level writing?—graduates had ready answers as well. Several participants discussed the *expectations of students* to bring existing grammar knowledge, be ready for rigor, or endure competition for resources. Many described *emotions* felt by not being properly prepared, from frustration to intimidation that resulted in a lack of self-esteem. The graduates frequently mentioned the *teacher role* as essential to their success, being an academic advisor, counselor, and accountability partner. Some even reported that the

librarian or *parent support* was more prevalent than any found in the dual-enrollment class. *Desired resources* included more academic advising from the instructor, instruction on gender-neutral terms, and spreading semester courses out over an entire school year.

The findings below sometimes confirm, disconfirm, or extend the knowledge in the literature. Each theme will be discussed in terms of relevant literature and compared.

Theme 1: Curriculum Focus

Many authors were consulted on the curriculum focus of secondary writing instruction (Benko et al., 2020; Covington, 2019; Griffin, 2018; Katz et al., 2018; Parr & Jeffrey, 2021) and how the adoption of the CCSS affected writing curriculum. The codes discovered under this theme matched the curriculum aspects mentioned in the literature, including research, reading (specifically vocabulary and grammar), transfer, and soft skills. These topics became so prevalent that they were established as separate themes.

Theme 2: Types of Writing

In coding the data for themes, it became evident that the types of writing and their frequency were important to the graduates' perception of their college-writing readiness. This was echoed in the literature of a few authors (Benko et al., 2020; O'Dowd, 2017) who found that learning many types of writing was essential for student success. Participants were able to name the specific genres mentioned by researchers, including explanation, argument, and narrative.

Theme 3: Advancement

Participants suggested this theme by commenting on how taking a dual-enrollment writing class advanced their opportunities and success in college. This was

backed up in the research as shown through several authors (Budge et al., 2021; Duncheon & Munoz, 2019; Garcia et al., 2020; Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019; Holten & Pierson, 2016) who consistently found that dual-enrollment classes led to postsecondary success.

Theme 4: Peer Editing

There was one study that specifically mentioned this topic (Graham, 2019), although peer-editing was a common practice among the participants' classes.

Theme 5: Teacher Presence

The role of the teacher in the dual-enrollment classroom was a topic not only for participants, but also found in literature. Just as a positive teacher presence produced better results in student success in research (Graham, 2019; O'Dowd, 2017; Watson et al., 2020), so too was the perception of the participants. They found teacher interviews and guidance helpful during the writing process. However, the dearth of such interaction was also chronicled in literature (Chai et al., 2021; Dunn, 2018; Griffin, 2018; Heisdorf, 2019). Participants also lamented inadequate or ineffective teacher presence in the classroom, coming under another theme, Theme 15: desired resources.

Theme 6: Digital Writing

Theme 6 had its origins in the importance of digital use and application in college-level writing to student success (Graham, 2019). 100% of participants reported almost entirely using digital resources in their writing and complete comfort on the platform.

Theme 7: No Knowledge of Argumentation

Theme 7 was sadly consistent with the literature. In this study, the concepts of logos, ethos, and pathos, common persuasive strategies, could be recognized but not recalled. Arthur et al. (2008) also found that students were unfamiliar with these terms even after three courses in writing. However, very few, if any participants, had a real knowledge or recognition of the Toulmin method, the suggested approach for rhetorical writing instruction from several authors (Kettler, 2021; Lee, 2018; O'Dowd, 2017; Olson et al., 2020, Rejan, 2017,).

Theme 8: Writing Skills

Those graduates who had written research essays confidently answered Question 8, indicating that research methods were a part of Theme 8: writing skills. In fact, they could identify specific skills, such as the CRAAP test, that were learned to determine the validity of a resource. Most participants answered affirmatively that they were given instruction on how to analyze and synthesize a source in their writing but were unable to give any detail on those lessons. Both Covington (2019) and Miller and Rochford (2021) recognized the ability to analyze and synthesize a source in one's writing as a pivotal skill toward college-level composition.

Theme 9: Reading and Literacy

Theme 9 moved from writing to reading instruction, with participants relating how literacy, vocabulary, and grammar were taught in their dual-enrollment writing courses. The response was mixed; sometimes all three featured prominently in the graduates' recollection, whereas others remembered one more prominently over the

remaining two. Specific approaches to instruction were best given to this question. Participants described pre- and posttests, presentations, and activities all leading to grade accountability. These aspects were mentioned in literature as well (Katz et al., 2018; Kuiken & Vedder, 2019; O'Dowd, 2017; Paulson & Overschelde, 2019), with Woods et al. (2019) indicating that a lack of literacy skills gained in high school usually meant their inclusion in remediation courses.

Especially in ENGL 101 classes, essays were tied to literature, responding to a text after reading and studying the contents. Graduates mentioned specific classics such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, authors such as Shakespeare, and literature from historical events such as the Salem Witch Trials. Writing was on literary elements such as theme and the hero's journey. Responses indicated that the other three tenets of ELA beyond writing, literacy, vocabulary, and grammar were evident and memorable aspects of the participants' dual-enrollment writing courses.

Theme 10: Transfer

Theme 10 addressed the transfer of writing skills to other subject areas. The concept of "transfer" was unknown and had to be explained to every participant. Once it was explained as using their writing skills in subjects such as science and social studies, students still struggled to recall its inclusion in their dual-enrollment writing courses. Although Monbec (2018) and Schmoker (2018) disagreed as to the approach of writing transfer in instruction, both agreed that it was essential to success in college-level writing. Participants did not seem to indicate any difficulty writing for courses outside of the English department, but as many were in their 1st year, perhaps such assignments had yet

to be completed. Regardless of the approach or reason, the transfer of writing to other subject areas seems to be an area for improvement in dual-enrollment writing instruction.

Theme 11: Soft Skills

Theme 11 reflected the importance that Miller and Rochford (2019) gave to the subject in dual-enrollment writing courses. Participants could recall certain soft skills when prompted, such as organization, the use of a writing center, and goal-setting, but did not recognize the term. For the most part, writing instructors weaved these skills into the writing process without separate identification.

Theme 12: Preparation

An abundance of affirmative answers to Question 12 (“From your perspective, did your high school experience prepare you for college-level writing?”) prompted Theme 12: preparation, indicating that dual-enrollment writing courses do have a positive impact on graduates' college readiness from their perspective. Either these dual-credit writing courses eliminated their need to take many English courses once they reached college or they felt prepared for writing assignments in those classes they did take.

Themes 13–16

The final question, about if the participant’s high school could have done something to make postsecondary goals easier to obtain, revealed several themes: Theme 13: parent support, Theme 14: perceptions about college readiness, Theme 15: desired resources, and Theme 16: emotions. Parent support was mentioned by two researchers (Budge et al., 2021; Heisdorf, 2019) for successful college students, even if first generation. However, only two participants mentioned having any, but they felt it was

one of the more important factors in their success.

Theme 14: perceptions about college readiness was mentioned in an entire section of literature (Chai et al., 2021; Francis et al., 2018; Garcia et al., 2020; Heisdorf, 2019; Reynolds et al., 2019), with similar results from participants. Their responses had to be combined with Theme 15: desired resources, supported with the same literature. Yavuz (2019) supported the emotional nature of student perception as related in Theme 16: emotions.

Many graduates answered that their high school prepared them well for college and beyond. However, the remaining participants had specific advice for their alma maters. One graduate remarked, “they probably shouldn't have been as lenient as they were ... I know one teacher my junior year, he kind of would accept late work like no matter what.” This participant seemed to recognize that some of the soft skills of time management and organization were thwarted by a teacher’s kindness. A few interviewees mentioned a lack of communication, either from the counselor in charge of dual-credit courses or from other academic advisors. Another insight was gained about the impression high school teachers can make about college. By constantly remarking how much more difficult college will be than high school, students can begin their journey in a state of fear. A participant commented, “so they made it sound like college was going to be a lot harder.” Another graduate answered, “I came in intimidated as well ... maybe I don't want to write.” Unfortunately, instead of giving students skills, they were emerging with stigma.

Limitations of the Study

The sample size and conditions of recruitment led to some limitations of the study. Only 12 participants were interviewed from just two of the 13 postsecondary institutions in the study state. Most of the graduates were early in their college education, in their first or third semester. Because the study state still lags behind the national average in young adults who complete a postsecondary degree or certificate (Richert, 2023), perhaps those who are not college ready are not even making it to college or dropping out after the time periods of those interviewed.

This study was also limited by self-reported data. Answers were reliant on the selective memory of the participants as they remembered or did not remember experiences or events that occurred at some point in the past. The graduates also seemed to experience telescoping or recalling events that occurred at one time as if they occurred at another time. They could not recall whether instruction occurred in their dual-enrollment course or another ELA class. The final aspect observed in self-reported data was attribution, with participants claiming positive events and outcomes as their own agency but attributing negative events and outcomes to external forces. Not one participant took responsibility for any struggle experienced. Instead, the fault lay with the instructor or the school.

The final limitation of this study opens the door for future research on the perceptions of college students on their college readiness in the area of writing. Different and more specific questions could be included in future interviews and would help address issues that emerged later in the study. For example, why did individuals who

identified as the struggling students recruited for the study not report more difficulties? Perhaps a question directly addressing any obstacles in their current courses of study would have revealed further findings.

Recommendations

My hope for this study is that the contents, especially these recommendations, make it into hands of dual-enrollment writing teachers, their partner institutions, and mentors. As curriculum becomes a hotbed of the political sphere in many states, this research can lead to a data-driven approach to any revisions made to dual-enrollment writing curriculum.

Rhetoric and argumentation instruction was revealed as an area that could be addressed in existing dual-enrollment writing curriculum. Although persuasive essays are a common assignment in such classes, graduates do not seem to retain specific strategies for rhetorical writing. The University of Iowa (2023) even recognizes rhetoric as essential to academic and career fields, listing it as the top skill employers are looking for, claiming, “Clear thinking, good argument, and logical discussion are essential to academic student success in any discipline and field.” Such claims certainly give rhetoric a prominent place in any college-writing preparation program.

Although research was a memorable part of each participant’s writing instruction, this was another area that could use a focus on specific skills. No graduate could recall strategies for analyzing and synthesizing quotes. National University (2023), a private postsecondary institution in California, provides a matrix for students to use, organizing sources by theme to see similarities and differences as well as any important patterns.

The university's library department also holds group seminars to guide students on the matrix's use in analyzing literature and utilize the concepts of synthesis and analysis in academic writing, including understanding the outlining process starting with a main research topic. A tool as tangible as a matrix could follow students in their postsecondary studies and remain a useful strategy for any future research.

Another area of deficit was instruction in the transfer of writing skills to other subjects. In every case, students could not recall direct lessons or often even the mention of a transfer of skills. Graham et al. (2020) found that writing about content reliably enhanced learning. In fact, it was equally effective at improving learning in science, social studies, and mathematics. Such studies confirm the importance of learning to write across various disciplines. The transfer approach suggested by Schmoker (2018) is that writing be taught in the other subjects to facilitate the transfer of knowledge. However, until that practice becomes widely accepted, it is imperative that dual-enrollment writing teachers introduce transfer skills into their curriculum.

Soft skills, although present in some participants' recollection, were not as prevalent as would be expected. The University of Turin recognized the importance of soft skills, not only to academic success but also future careers (Emmanuel et al., 2021). They developed tools (called a Passport platform) for the promotion and the assessment of 12 soft skills. First-year students were studied and found to demonstrate academic success after completing the Passport platform's program (Emmanuel et. al., 2021). This program or one like it could be adopted into dual-enrollment writing curriculum, enhancing the natural organization, goal-setting, and time management inherent in a class

with writing deadlines. Simultaneously, the comments about the leniency of one teacher and the detriment to the participant when encountering college-level expectations, revealed that firm deadlines and expectations should be a unflinching part of dual-enrollment writing classes.

A final recommendation comes directly from a misconception that created a lasting perception. A recent study revealed that most high school graduates (75%) do not feel prepared to make college or career decisions after graduation (PR Newswire, 2022). This same study determined that 62% of graduates felt that it is one of schools' responsibilities to help them make these decisions. Multiple participants reported to question 13, what could their high school have done to make postsecondary education goals easier to obtain, that their schools let them down in this area. Either they succumbed to the competitive nature of their school, felt excluded by an academic advisor, or felt intimidated by the ways college-level expectations were conveyed. This could explain why students said they felt prepared for college-level writing yet related the opposite when asked. This was a somewhat surprising result as the invitation to the study did ask for students who were struggling in their current writing class. However, it could indicate that students felt they were lacking in areas other than writing, such as the soft skills that invariably make a real difference in grades.

The role of a dual-enrollment writing course could be bridging the gap experienced by the graduates. With a natural connection to a partner institution, advisors could be brought in to answer questions and give guidance. A writing assignment could be a college admission essay or scholarship request letter. Although not an obvious aspect

of a dual-enrollment writing curriculum, such an addition could be essential to future postsecondary success.

Implications

According to Reysen et. al (2019), fewer than 35% of students attending public institutions graduate within five years of enrolling and private universities are barely reaching 50% completion rates. One of the possible obstacles could be confidence in college-level writing skills. This study added to the canon on student perception of college-readiness writing. Although the overall perception was positive, students self-identified as struggling in their first-year writing course. Therefore, even such memorable preparation must have some gaps in curriculum that could be addressed by dual-enrollment instructors and partner institutions.

In the study state, the legislature in 1997 created dual-credit classes to provide the option for students to earn college credits at a low cost by enrolling in college classes, offered through a partnership between the high schools and universities and colleges. They followed it with a 2010 goal of 60% of the state's 25- to 34-year-olds completing some form of postsecondary education. As of 2021 only 51% young adults had met the state's goal, still below the national average of 56% (Richert, 2023). And the rates are much lower for two sizeable and chronically at-risk demographic groups, Hispanics and American Indian and Alaskan natives, at 23.8% and 21.8% respectively. Now, 13 years later, the state is abandoning its 60% goal, calling it neither a fair or useful education metric. Perhaps other such metrics of college readiness and success, such as the ACT and SAT benchmark scores, should also be reconsidered.

Instead of using standardized test scores, perhaps state departments of education should be examining the dual-credit programs they have put in place as a measurement of college readiness. Partner institutions could provide additional data on remediation numbers for writing courses, which should be reduced by participation in dual-enrollment writing classes. In fact, the participants of this study reported 100% being able to avoid such remediation by taking and passing ENGL 101.

Conclusion

It can be confidently stated that the perception of the interviewed graduates was that their dual-enrollment writing course(s) did prepare them for college in the area of writing. In fact, many related feeling ahead of their peers in their writing ability and confidence. They also understood that taking dual-credit writing classes in high school had eliminated the need for writing remediation courses once entering college. However, that preparation was for most participants reportedly incomplete. This might explain why those interviewed identified as struggling students, according to the study invitation.

In response to the first research question, how do graduates of a dual-enrollment college readiness curriculum describe the ways it prepared them for college level writing, much information was given, spanning eight themes and dozens of codes. Students could reiterate rich detail about their dual-enrollment writing curriculum and instructor(s) even though the experience was several years ago. Just a few areas for improvement emerged from the participant responses as recommendations. Dual-enrollment writing curriculum could be enhanced with specific skills and tools in the areas of rhetorical analysis, especially using the Toulmin method, using sources and synthesizing research, and the

transfer of writing skills to other disciplines. Somewhat outside the scope of most writing curriculum but deemed essential by participants was the addition of soft skills as a focus of skill building. Specific soft skills mentioned were time-management, organization, writing center support, and a strict adherence to deadlines.

The second research question, how do graduates of a dual-enrollment college readiness curriculum describe the ways it could have better prepared them for college level writing, seven themes emerged from responses as well as a multitude of codes. Recommendations included more requested involvement from teachers and academic advisors toward college and career decision making. Emotions ranged from intimidation to frustration, indicating the true nature of why participants identified as struggling students. Although some graduates reported that their schools did all they could have to prepare them for college, others felt lacking in one or more areas. All perceptions were included in the interpretation of findings or recommendations in this chapter.

Finally, the implications of this study were explored, including its role in the classroom and with policy makers. College and career readiness has been a focus of education departments both nationally and at the state level since the Common Core State Standards entered the ring in 2009, encouraged by the No Child Left Behind accountability measures. Race to the Top grants in 2009-2010 furthered states' focus on measuring and adopting CCR standards until the Every Student Succeeds Act was passed in December 2015. The study state chose to measure college readiness for ESSA provisions with the SAT given to juniors in the spring of their third year of high school. Benchmarks from this assessment were used to determine college readiness in the area of

writing. However, such measurements are increasingly found to be inaccurate and inconsistent with measurements of college success such as completion rates and GPA. Perhaps the results of this study can enrich the picture of college readiness, especially considering the dual-enrollment writing programs that exist in many states.

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Appendix A: Instrumentation—Interview Guide

Date:

Time:

Interviewee Code #:

Zoom Interview

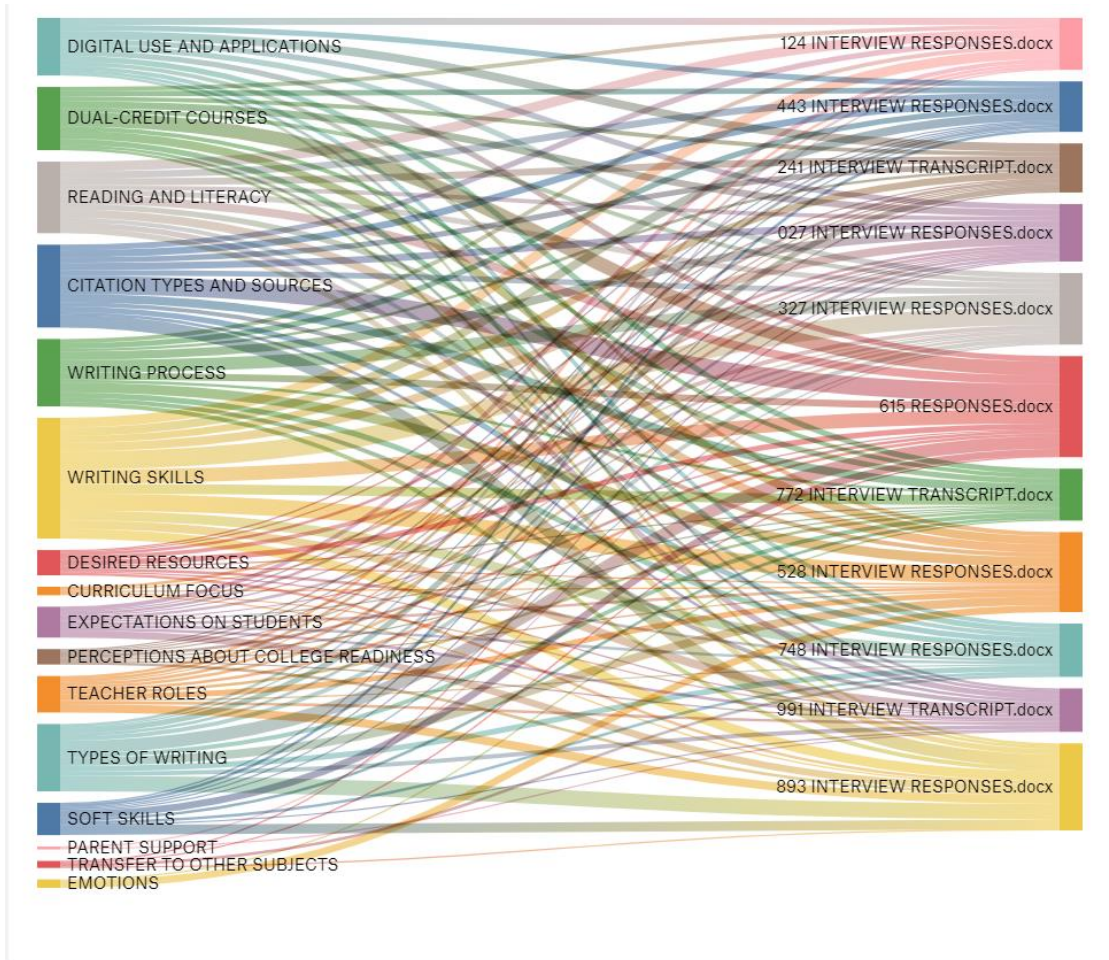
Parts of the Interview	Interview Questions
Introduction	Hi, this is Rebecca Mitchell. The purpose of this interview is to explore the experience 1-6 years out of high school and see if it could be improved within the high school years. This should last about 10 minutes. After the interview, I will be examining your answers to identify themes and some of your answers will be shared within my dissertation. However, I will not identify you in my documents, and no one will be able to identify you with your answers. You can choose to stop this interview at any time. I also need to let you know that this interview will be recorded for transcription purposes.
Introduction	Do you have any questions?
Introduction	Are you ready to begin?
Question 1:	1. Did you attend a high school in Idaho?

	1. If not, where did you attend high school?
Question 2:	0. Did you take dual-credit classes in the area of writing? (Possibilities are ENGL 101 and/or ENGL 175) . If so, which course(s) did you take? a.
Question 3:	0. Are you currently completing or have you ever completed postsecondary education? (vocational school, community college, university) . Is/was this postsecondary education in Idaho?
Question 4:	0. Did you have to take any remediation courses in writing? (Examples are ENGL 100 Writing and Rhetoric Plus or ENGL 101+) . If so, why did you take the class? a. If not, how did you avoid a remediation course?
Question 5:	0. In your dual-enrollment writing class, did you write essays? . If so, how many essays did you write for the course (how often did you write essays)?
Question 6:	6. What steps were part of the writing process? (student/instructor conferences, peer editing, formative assessment through drafts) a. How much of the writing process was done digitally?

	<p>b. What programs/applications were used for a digital part of the process?</p>
Question 7:	<p>7. Did your dual-enrollment writing course include instruction on argumentation and/or rhetoric?</p> <p>a. If so, was the Toulmin method ever mentioned?</p>
Question 8:	<p>8. Were research methods a part of your dual-enrollment writing instruction?</p> <p>a. If so, were you taught about how to determine the validity of a resource?</p> <p>b. If so, were you giving instruction on how to analyze and synthesize a source in your writing?</p>
Question 9:	<p>9. Was reading comprehension or literacy taught with writing in your composition course?</p> <p>a. If so, was vocabulary building a part of your instruction?</p> <p>b. Was grammar a part of your writing course curriculum?</p>
Question 10:	<p>10. Was the transfer of your writing skills to other subject areas a part of your writing course curriculum?</p>
Question 11:	<p>11. Were soft skills taught in your dual-enrollment writing course?</p>

	<p>a. If so, which soft skills were included? (time-management, goal setting, writing center support, organization)</p>
Question 12:	<p>12.From your perspective, did your high school experience prepare you for college level writing?</p> <p>. If yes, how so?</p> <p>a. If not, why not?</p>
Question 13:	<p>13.Could your high school have done something to make postsecondary goals easier to obtain?</p> <p>. Can you give me some examples?</p>
Closing	<p>Thank you for your answers. Do you have anything else you'd like to share?</p>

Appendix B: Code Frequency Sankey Chart



Appendix C: Codebook

Name	Grounded-ness	Code groups
ENGLISH 100	1	ADVANCEMENT
WRITING FREQUENCY	18	ADVANCEMENT
OUTLINE	9	WRITING SKILLS, WRITING PROCESS
PEER EDITING	19	WRITING SKILLS, WRITING PROCESS
ROUGH DRAFT	9	WRITING SKILLS, WRITING PROCESS
ONLINE	5	DIGITAL USE AND APPLICATIONS
MICROSOFT WORD	5	DIGITAL USE AND APPLICATIONS
CREDIBLE SOURCES	13	CITATION TYPES AND SOURCES
CITATION	9	CITATION TYPES AND SOURCES
FOCUS	6	CURRICULUM FOCUS
READ BOOKS	22	READING AND LITERACY
VOCABULARY BUILDING	10	READING AND LITERACY, WRITING SKILLS
GRAMMARLY	6	DIGITAL USE AND APPLICATIONS
WRITING SKILLS	4	WRITING SKILLS
TIME MANAGEMENT	9	SOFT SKILLS
WRITING PROCESS	6	WRITING PROCESS
THEME	4	WRITING SKILLS, READING AND LITERACY
SENIOR PROJECT	4	TYPES OF WRITING
FOUNDATION	3	WRITING SKILLS
MICROSOFT TEAMS	2	DIGITAL USE AND APPLICATIONS
TURNITIN.COM	5	DIGITAL USE AND APPLICATIONS
DOCUMENTATION	1	CITATION TYPES AND SOURCES
AUTHOR	2	READING AND LITERACY
GRADE	6	EXPECTATIONS ON STUDENTS
APA	4	CITATION TYPES AND SOURCES
MLA	4	CITATION TYPES AND SOURCES
ORGANIZATION	9	SOFT SKILLS
LENIENT	1	TEACHER ROLES
LATE WORK	2	EXPECTATIONS ON STUDENTS

Name	Grounded-ness	Code groups
PERSUASIVE	7	TYPES OF WRITING
ANALYZING SKILLS	2	WRITING SKILLS, READING AND LITERACY
SHAKESPEARE	1	READING AND LITERACY
FRANKENSTEIN	2	READING AND LITERACY
SYMBOLISM	1	READING AND LITERACY
TEACHER'S PURPOSE	20	TEACHER ROLES
GOOGLE	6	DIGITAL USE AND APPLICATIONS
OPINION	1	TYPES OF WRITING
REASONING	3	WRITING SKILLS
CRAAP TEST	2	CITATION TYPES AND SOURCES
QUOTE	3	CITATION TYPES AND SOURCES
SOURCE	5	CITATION TYPES AND SOURCES
SUMMARY	2	WRITING SKILLS, READING AND LITERACY
NARRATIVE	3	TYPES OF WRITING
RESEARCH	9	TYPES OF WRITING, CITATION TYPES AND SOURCES
EXPECTATIONS	12	EXPECTATIONS ON STUDENTS
FEEDBACK	2	WRITING PROCESS
PLAGIARISM	5	CITATION TYPES AND SOURCES, WRITING SKILLS
ARGUMENTATIVE	9	TYPES OF WRITING
COMMAS	1	WRITING SKILLS
SYNTAX	1	WRITING SKILLS
MY MOM WAS AN ENGLISH TEACHER	1	PARENT SUPPORT
ARTICLES	2	CITATION TYPES AND SOURCES
WRITING CENTER	3	SOFT SKILLS
COUNSELOR	3	DESIRED RESOURCES, TEACHER ROLES
INFORMATIVE	2	TYPES OF WRITING
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY	5	TYPES OF WRITING
THESIS STATEMENT	1	WRITING SKILLS

Name	Grounded-ness	Code groups
FRUSTRATED	1	EMOTIONS
GRAMMAR	11	WRITING SKILLS
REVISE	1	WRITING PROCESS
INTIMIDATING	4	EMOTIONS
SELF-ESTEEM DOWN	1	EMOTIONS
DIGITAL	12	DIGITAL USE AND APPLICATIONS
RHETORIC	3	TYPES OF WRITING
“.ORG” OR “.EDU”	2	CITATION TYPES AND SOURCES
SALEM WITCH TRIALS	2	READING AND LITERACY
HERO’S JOURNEY	1	READING AND LITERACY
SCIENCE	3	TRANSFER TO OTHER SUBJECTS
SEMESTER V. YEAR-LONG	11	ADVANCEMENT
GET AHEAD IN COLLEGE	11	PERCEPTIONS ABOUT COLLEGE READINESS
REFLECTION	1	TYPES OF WRITING
JAPANESE	1	TRANSFER TO OTHER SUBJECTS
TRANSFER	1	TRANSFER TO OTHER SUBJECTS
GENDER-NEUTRAL TERMS	1	DESIRED RESOURCES
TUOLMIN	1	WRITING SKILLS
PORTFOLIO	2	SOFT SKILLS, WRITING PROCESS
FREE WRITES	3	TYPES OF WRITING
IN-TEXT CITATIONS	1	CITATION TYPES AND SOURCES
AUDIENCE	1	WRITING SKILLS, READING AND LITERACY
LIBRARIAN	1	TEACHER ROLES
GOAL	1	SOFT SKILLS
COMPETITION	1	EXPECTATIONS ON STUDENTS
ACADEMIC ADVISING	2	DESIRED RESOURCES, TEACHER ROLES
COMPARE AND CONTRAST	1	TYPES OF WRITING
RIGOR	1	EXPECTATIONS ON STUDENTS

Name	Grounded- ness	Code groups
ENGL 175	5	DUAL-CREDIT COURSES
ENGL 101	12	DUAL-CREDIT COURSES
LITERACY SKILLS	1	READING AND LITERACY
RESOURCES	2	DESIRED RESOURCES
ENGL 102	2	DUAL-CREDIT COURSES
PARENT EDITS	1	PARENT SUPPORT