The Power of the Virtual Pen and the Development of College Freshmen:
Exploring the Impact of University Website Messaging on the Situated Identities
of First-Year College Students

by

Carol A. Sumner

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

James A. Rund, Co-Chair
Kris Ewing, Co-Chair
James Paul Gee

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

As enrollment in postsecondary education increases, colleges and universities increasingly rely heavily on the use of the Internet as a means of communication with their students. Upon students’ admission, institutional webpage messaging shifts to messages about students’ new affiliation with the institution in their situated identity – a college student. Unlike continuing-generation students, first-generation college students are not institutional legacies and must learn how and what it means to be a college student through other means. This study examined the situated identity construction and website experiences of 23 first-year first- and continuing-generation college freshmen attending a summer transition program at Western University (WU).

Using a multifaceted approach, this study analyzed how first-generation students made meaning of and used institutional website messaging as they constructed their college student identities. The following steps were used to collect data: a questionnaire, eight observations, a focus group with first-generation participants, one-on-one interviews with two focus group participants, and three interviews with WU staff members responsible for their college or unit webpages for first-year students.

Findings utilizing critical discourse analysis revealed answers to several guiding questions focusing on situated identities construction and enactment; multiple and salient identities are at work; the Discourses and impact of WU webpages on first-generation students; how first-generation students experience, make meaning of, and use WU website messaging as they construct their situated
identity; and feelings of belonging, marginalization, and mattering experienced by first-generation students through website messaging.

Results highlighted differences between the first-generation and continuing-generation students’ perception and enactment of the situated identity. Although first-generation students used the website as a tool, they used different ways to gain access into the WU Discourse. Both students and staff members enacted multiple salient identities as they enacted their situated identities, and the multiple salient identities of the WU website designers were highly influential in the website Discourse. Findings have implications for WU institutional practices that could facilitate earlier and more simplified access to the WU Discourse, and findings generated a new model of situated identity construction in Discourse.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family - my children, my husband, my mother, father and grandmothers.

To my children, Samuel Alexander, Morgan Camille, and Brandon Christopher Lamont, thank you for all the “quiet” time you allowed me, all of the loving support your have given to me, and for all of the joy and laughter you have shared with me. I love you with all the love this universe can hold. May your lives be filled with as much love, joy, richness, and laughter as you have brought to mine and more…

To my husband, Samuel Keith, the world would never know how many times you carried me upon your shoulders when I thought I could walk this path no more. You are the one who said I could earn my doctorate before I knew it myself…

To my mother, Carolyn Ann Harrison, “Mommy”, my Soror, and the first to model for me that intelligence truly is the torch of wisdom. You taught me in our Discourse to love learning, to not turn away from doing what is right and good, to rise and be great, to value all people, to serve and serve again, and the power of words…

To my grandmother, Phebelle Davis, you have been on the couch with me as I sat up many-a-night, writing. For all the challenges overcome, for the bedpans you had to clean, for all love you gave…
To my father, Robert Lamont Harrison, you have shown me that it is never too late, the value of great shoes, and to know that it is our relationships that matter more than things….

To my grandmother, Delegate Dr. Hattie Neal Harrison, you are a living legacy, a woman of unparalleled strength, and our family matriarch who has made the world a better place…

…to you all, thank you, my love for you all knows no bounds. I promise no more rides in the car, trips to the store, free rides to the movies, or warnings of care for the computer. Dizzy is finally done!! I love you, and WE DID IT!
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I have so many people to thank for their support as I completed this doctoral process – from coursework through the completion of my dissertation. Their care and support for me during this journey has been a significant part of this marvelous process.

To my dissertation committee, all mentors and role models, my indebtedness to you all is … well, immeasurable. It was through your care, encouragement, and support I can walk the walk and talk the talk. To my chair, Dr. James Rund, you have been a stalwart force in my life for many years, thank you for keeping your promise and so much more. You promised me when we began this process that you would help me get through. You never told me my aspirations were too high or my ambitions too great. To my co-chair, Dr. Kris Ewing, I have never been so glad to have had someone answer the phone than the day you answered my call. Thank you for all your advice, support, and for the personalized introduction to this Discourse. Thank you for all the words of encouragement in those moments when I needed a push; Finish Strong was your gift to me and I thank you for all those special Facebook nudges. Thank you to my committee member, the indomitable force Dr. James Gee, who introduced me to this way of being and doing. I was mortified to have arrived late to my very first day my class with you but those moments changed the trajectory of my life, and I am all the better for having had the opportunity to work under your tutelage. Again, thank you to each of you.
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I want to especially thank you, Olivia, Paris, Rose, and Violet, and all of the summer transition program students who shared their lives and experiences with me so that I could share this study with the world. I am all the better because of you.

I wish to close by saying to all of the young women and men out there who are waiting for someone great to come into their lives – stop waiting because you are who you have been waiting for. This was my greatest gift to myself.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

A Vignette

As I write this culminating research study, my dissertation, I find myself yet again sitting at my desk (or maybe in front of the television watching *The Wiz* and feeling guilty in doing so) in my pajamas – or, when I dress up, in my sweat pants and university T-shirt. My desk is strewn with sticky-note-filled books written by Blumer, Heider, Freire, Kress, and Gee. Other books written by Morrow and Brown, Willis, Charmaz, Lareau, hooks, McLaren and Putnam, books I purchased for my doctoral courses, are strategically placed at arm’s distance in the event they are needed for reference. And just in case these are not quite what I need, I have other books, sitting readily positioned for quick reference, written by Bourdieu, London, Rendón, and articles written by Burke and Tully and Rock. Of the dozens of journal articles I had printed, some were strewn about my office and some were still in the rolling computer bag I had purchased to tote around my articles, highlighters, books, laptop, and other resources I thought necessary to take with me whenever I left house. I kept my bag ready and packed having considered that, in the event I had five minutes to write or think about writing my dissertation, I could take advantage of that precious time. There hadn’t been a day or evening that this work had not been on my mind. Sometimes, those days turned into extremely late evenings that required an extra shot or two of espresso in my coffee drink so that I could focus on all that had to be accomplished.
I had become obsessive about saving every draft version of my dissertation in multiple locations – even sending the latest version to myself in emails … just in case. I had been told stories by some and had heard the stories of others who said this was advice they wished another had given them. Unfortunately, they had fallen victim to a failure of technology or an unfortunate Save error, and as a result, they were a part of the group of students for whom far too many dissertation chapters had been lost. This was a group to which I did not want to belong. I would not leave my computer in my car or out of eyesight for fear that something might happen to it. I knew I was not alone in doing this – my fellow doctoral friends were behaving the same way. When I had to leave my data, I always tried to leave it in a safe and secure location.

My nighttime dreams were of characters that either represented an element of my dissertation or the theorists whose work I had referenced that evening. Seemingly benign conversations somehow referenced, at least in my mind, some element of my research topic as I sought answers to my research questions. My family felt writing my dissertation had become an obsession, my friends equated it to a new partner, and I had dedicated space in my home to “Dizzy”, as it had become known. My life, at that point in time, was all about successfully mastering this new role. For, you see, in the role of a doctoral candidate and dissertation writer, it was my task to produce a work that demonstrated to my highly regarded dissertation chair and co-chair and world-renowned committee member that I could, as a result of their mentoring and tutelage, talk the talk and walk the walk.
I worked to be the kind of doctoral student and candidate they expected me to be and with whom other doctoral students and candidates could identify.

But for all the big things that happened – attending classes and completing assignments and attending lectures and completing an internship – it was really the small things that made a difference along the way. It was the advice given by other students or by faculty members during or after a class, or it was in conversations experienced during end-of-semester gatherings at faculty members’ homes. It was from the friend who shared the steps he had taken to complete the online course of study or from another who forwarded the email from the former program director that provided the only available copy of our graduate program course requirements. It was the moments during the Tuesday night writing group three of us had formed so that we could inspire one another to finish what we had begun many years prior. One member of the group had recently earned her doctorate and was staying simply to inspire and coach. One evening, as I was struggling to find an article, it was she who showed me how to access the interlibrary loan system, and for this small but incredibly helpful piece of information, I felt eternally indebted. We supported one another through the loss of loved ones and the birth of new ones; through family struggles and exercise classes; through mental blocks, breakdowns, and breakthroughs. We understood one another’s struggle, we spoke the same language, we felt the same pressure, we were of the same Discourse.
Years previously, as I considered applying to my doctoral program, I looked at the doctoral program’s website to gather information and research the program’s admissions requirements. Not feeling as though I was finding the information I needed and in my attempt to be prepared and to submit the strongest application, I knew enough to know that I knew very little about the application process and consulted with a person whom I knew was able to give me some insight into this very unfamiliar, even foreign process. I called the one person I knew who could and would give me the insider’s perspective. She was someone I had come to trust, a woman with whom I felt I could identify. She was respected by her colleagues, by others in the Discourse, and by other students. She greeted me with a smile and warm regard every time she saw me. She took the time to talk to me, and all of this was before I felt I was someone for whom she needed to care. I felt that, if she was the kind of person she was, that I would feel comfortable stepping into the unknown world of doctoral studies. She knew not just about the journey I was about to begin but also about the journey of other women and men who had also been where I was seeking to go. She had been a doctoral student, a higher education administrator, a faculty member, a dissertation chair, and a connection for many others.

Finally, I mustered up the nerve to call her. I was not nervous because I felt she would reject me but because the call required me to expose what I had only privately allowed others to see: my uncertainty. Nevertheless, I made the call asking her to help me understand the best approach to completing my application for admission into the program. She shared what I felt were lifeline-like words, a
peek into a world I did not understand and one in which no one in my family had ever forayed. I wrote down everything she said – how to approach my personal statement, the commitment this experience would require, some insight into the thinking of the committee, and several other recommendations that only one who had been there before would have understood to share with another who aspired to go there. She knew that the process of becoming a doctoral student required understanding this experience, to some degree, before it had even begun.

Although this has been my experience, it is not my experience that I am writing to share. All that I have experienced, all that I have studied, all that I have researched and learned has been done to know how to best explore, observe, detail, and interpret, through theory and praxis, the experience of another or others. I have been trained by some of the most respected faculty in my field in preparation for the day that I could only dream of achieving many years prior. I sit here at 6 o’clock on a Saturday morning, having awakened from another dissertation inspired dream, to tell you about Olivia, Paris, and the other 32 students who were so willing to allow me to share their experience in becoming college students with you.

It is through research and this dissertation that I hope to take each reader with me as I explore identity formation among first-generation college students and the way in which college and university webpages play a role in students’ identity development. By developing and fostering environments where first-generation students can identify that they are a part of the community and where they are able to reconcile their idea of the role of a college student with the
expectations for that role, first-generation students will experience an increase in their sense of belonging and connection to the community. This has the potential to affect student retention; however, to create this environment, those who work in higher and postsecondary education must understand what factors affect the identity formation of first-generation students and how a student’s multiple identities influence his or her identity development. With the increased use of the World Wide Web, more attention must be paid to the impact website messages have on first-generation students’ identity formation.

An Introduction to the Research Problem

Olivia and Paris,¹ first-generation college freshmen attending Western University (WU), a university in a large metropolitan southwestern United States (U.S.) city, never met Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), but his words represent their lived experience:

The representation of action … a *repertoire of rules*, or of what sociologists consider, at best, as a “rôle”, i.e. a predetermined set of discourses and actions appropriate to a particular “stage-part”. It is significant that “culture” is sometimes described as a map; it is the analogy which occurs to an outsider who has to find his way around in a foreign landscape and who compensates for his lack of

¹ To protect the participants’ identities, all proper names referencing participants (e.g., given or surnames, places) have been changed.
practical mastery, the prerogative of the native, by the use of a model of all possible routes. (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 2)

Bourdieu’s words represent the lived experience of many first-generation college students. Their new “rôles” or “stage-part” is that of a college freshman; the referenced “culture” and the “foreign landscape” is that of their particular college or institution; and the “native” is any individual who has familiarity, experience or affiliation with the institution. Freshman college students, for example, “compensates for his [their] lack of practical mastery … by the use of a model of all possible routes” by using a variety of sources of information to better understand how to be successful. Among the routes and sources they use are family members, high school counselors, friends, and the Internet.

Incoming college students use institutional websites in a variety of ways – from viewing an electronic version of the course catalog to completing applications for admission and financial aid to scheduling campus tours and completing housing applications (Noel-Levitz, 2008). The website is also a resource that allows students to begin determining if they believe they will fit in. A significant part of the process to determine the college or university one will attend involves the sense or feeling that the college is the right fit or a feeling that one will belong, (i.e., Will the student feel comfortable in the spaces and among the people at the institution?).

More first-generation students are attending colleges and universities in the U.S. First-generation students moving from secondary education to postsecondary education will experience different people, cultures, and
expectations. Their role of being a high school student will give way to their newest role – that of a college student. “Continuing generation” (Pratt & Skaggs, 1989, p. 31) college students who are transitioning from one role to the next experience a process that can often be taken for granted– they have the benefit of their parents’ experience with college upon which to draw. First-generation students do not have this benefit; therefore, they require other sources to provide this insight.

As students matriculate through the university experience, they must understand the university – its language, its rituals, its expectations, its Discourse. While traversing this new landscape, using their identified routes and sources as guideposts or checkpoints, students will have among these routes a familiar resource with new expectations – an Internet resource, in the form of the institution’s website and webpages. This new resource will be found in a familiar location, the Internet, but the institution’s practices may be unlike any other source college freshmen have previously used to connect and remain connected to their educational experience.

At the same time, Internet websites have become a major access point and resource for many colleges and universities (Noel-Levitz, 2008). Institutional websites allow the institution to interact with students in a variety of ways. The website has become another marketing tool for colleges and universities (Noel-Levitz, 2008), and for some, it has become their first route of marketing and communicating with prospective students, as well as of staying connected with continuing students. As a marketing tool, colleges and universities are using their
websites to convey information, also considered Discourses (Gee, 2004).

Discourses are distinctive ways of speaking/listening and often, too, writing/reading coupled with distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing, with other people and with various objects, tools, and technologies, so as to enact specific socially recognizable identities engaged in specific socially recognizable activities. (Gee, 2008, p. 155)

Consequently, institutions use their webpages to engage students in a particular Discourse – a Discourse in which the institution and the reader engage in a particular sort of “dance” with words, deeds, values, feelings, or other people, objects, tools, technologies, places and times so as to get recognized as a distinctive sort of who doing a distinctive sort of what. Being able to understand a Discourse is being able to recognize such “dances”. (Gee, 2008, p. 155)

It is this Discourse that will allow alumni to be alumni, undergraduates to be undergraduates, freshmen to be freshmen, and others to be others.

As a marketing tool and as a way to increase their student enrollment, more colleges and universities are paying particular attention to their Internet admissions and enrollment webpages – some spending upwards of $100,000 annually to maintain their presence (Noel-Levitz, 2008). The fundamental purpose of the marketing information is to persuade students to attend a particular institution, but once a student has transitioned from being a prospective student to
being a newly admitted freshman, the purpose and content of the messages on the website are different.

When colleges and universities admit a student, they are, by virtue of granting admission, saying that the student is now a member of their community – that the student now belongs. These actions are a signal to the student that he or she is now entitled to all the rights and privileges afforded students who are matriculating through the institution. These newly admitted students will have access to all resources and expertise the institution can provide. This sense of belonging is encouraged through the use of the institution’s language and action – sending emails and letters of welcome, granting access to private social media groups specifically for their entering class, invitations to specific new student events (i.e., either in their local community or at the institution itself), with high-profile administrators and faculty members giving welcome remarks in celebration of students’ choice to become a “insert institutional mascot”.

More colleges and universities are increasingly using their websites to convey a multitude of messages for a host of reasons for an ever-expanding and diverse populous of users. As first-generation college students are entering postsecondary institutions, how are they developing a new “situated identity” (Alexander & Weil, 1969, p. 122) – that of a college student? With millions of first-year students entering these institutions in an era where the Internet is quickly becoming a primary institutional resource, it is critical to understand how first-generation college freshmen make meaning of the messages found on webpages directed toward first-year college students. Additionally, how does
website messaging factor among their other *routes* and *sources* as students develop this new situated identity? It is also important to understand what messages an institution’s website content may construct beyond its intended purpose. For example, are the issues “of power and social inequality expressed, constituted, legitimized, and so on by language use (or in discourse)” (Weiss & Wodak, 2003, p. 15) on the institutional website?

Considering each of these issues makes it necessary to consider how the students reconcile, through their own situated identities, the messages within the text on the university website. From the students’ perspective, for whom do they perceive the messages to be intended? Do they perceive that the messages speak to their experience as first-time, full-time freshmen who are also first-generation students? How do they perceive themselves to be a part of the community that is addressed in the messages?

University representatives (e.g., designated administrators, faculty members, staff members) are in positions of authority (i.e., they have the ability to make decisions about who is admitted into the university, its colleges, its programs, and its on-campus community, as well as the responsibility to develop and implement all university programs and services, oversee the assignment of grades, and determine satisfactory progress toward graduation). Therefore, it is also critical to recognize how the university representative’s positions situate college students. How do institutions create and foster a sense of belonging for students, particularly incoming first-generation freshmen? To what degree, if any, do an institution’s website messages “reproduce power and inequities” (Perakyla,
within the university community? Additionally, what factors influence the process by which designated institutional representatives develop website content? These questions require my attention and exploration.

**Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the identity development of first-generation, freshman college students attending WU. Through the use of social science theoretical perspectives grounded in discourse analysis theory, I assessed the impact of messages on the institutional website as a factor in the development of the situated identity of these students. In particular, I chose to examine webpages of three institutional units (i.e., two college units and one student affairs unit) that were directed toward incoming freshman. The research questions that guided this study were these:

1. What are the Discourses of the institutional webpages that are directed toward the freshman population?
2. How do the Discourses of the institutional webpages communicate or convey the ways in which students are expected to demonstrate that they are members of the community?
3. What are the situated identities of my research participants, and what salient identities are at work in their development of the situated identity of a college student?
4. How do these students experience and understand the institutional messages?
5. How do the institutional Discourses on institutional webpages make manifest the issues of marginalization and mattering?

6. How are multiple identities enacted as roles are being performed?

This study incorporated several factors for consideration: postsecondary education enrollment trends, college and university utilization of the Internet in light of the increasing numbers of students who are enrolling in college, incoming college freshmen’s use of the Internet in their college search and enrollment practices, enrollment and retention issues of first-generation college students, the concept of belonging, student development theory, situated identity theory, and discourse analysis as a theory and practice.

In the next four chapters, I present my research study and findings. In Chapter 2, I provide a review of the relevant data (i.e., higher education enrollment, institutional and student Internet use, first-generation college student enrollment and retention data) and theories. In addition to recent data on the enrollment trends in higher education and the technological practices of incoming freshmen and postsecondary institutions, I explore the larger theoretical concepts of student development theory, identity, discourse/Discurso, information technology, and situated identity – as separate issues as well as in particular combinations. Issues of language, interaction, role, and identity are also defined to provide a contextual understanding as to how these concepts have been used for this study. In Chapter 3, I provide a detailed accounting of my methodological approach to the study. In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, I provide my research findings.
Chapter 7 is a synthesis of the combined data and findings; the goal of this synthesis is to bring together the multiple issues explored in this study so that those who work in the field of higher education can consider their relevance and impact.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

This study began with what was thought to be a very simple question: How do new incoming first-generation college students make meaning of and experience the messages within institutional websites that are directed toward incoming freshmen as they develop the situated identity of a college student? It turns out that this question involved the blending and weaving of several social science theoretical perspectives, including critical applied linguistic theory for discourse/Discourse and social psychology and sociocultural theories (e.g., student development theory, identity theory, situated identity theory, and identity within information technology). The lens, theory, and method on which this study is grounded may be summed up in discourse analytic theory. In this chapter, I explore the theoretical framework and current data sets that establish the premise for this study.

Language

Language is more than the mere use of words that represent a term that, when put together, provide a point of information or idea or thought. Language is “always something that is actively constructed in a context, physically present or imagined, by both speaker/writer and hearer/reader through a complex process of inferencing that is guided by, but never fully determined by, the structural properties of the language” (Gee, 1985, p. 27). More simply stated, people understand what a language is from the “practices” of which it is a part, and these practices “are always ways of saying, doing and being” (Gee, 2011a, p. 5).
Discourse and discourse: Primary Discourses and Secondary Discourses

Among discourse analysts, discourse is a sociolinguistic term associated with the study of language and action in context. It has been the work of James Gee that has offered a differentiated definition of discourse as “connected stretches of language that make sense” (Gee, 1989a, p. 6) or “language-in-use” (Gee, 2011a, p. 205) and that describes Discourse as a particular way of using language in context that is socially constructed to enact particular roles and identities. Gee initially parsed discourses between uppercase-“D” Discourses (now known as big “D” Discourse) and lowercase-“d” discourses (i.e., little “d” discourses) (Gee, 1989a, p. 6). Although big “D” discourses are comprised of little “d” discourses, big “D” Discourses are “distinctive ways of speaking/listening and often, too, writing/reading coupled with distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing, with other people and with various objects, tools, and technologies so as to enact specific socially recognizable activities” (Gee, 2008, p.155). Big “D” Discourse is a composition of all the requisite items necessary for an individual to use to be recognized by others as “one of that group” – as “one of them,” or as a person of that kind (Gee, 1989a, 1989b, 2008, 2011a, 2011b).

Over time, Discourses are created and sustained. They are created through personal interactions and by generations of those who are part of that particular group. The reality is that Discourses are used as a determinate for who does and does not gain access to certain groups or places in society. As Gee (1989a) stated, “Discourses are used as ‘gates’ to ensure that the ‘right’ people get to the ‘right’
places in our society” (p. 11). Again, Gee reminded the reader that Discourses, like *capital* and *identity*, are socially constructed and are used in various combinations and iterations as gate-keeping mechanisms. To add to an understanding of Discourse, Gee (1989a) equated a Discourse to a type of “identity kit” which comes complete “with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize” (p. 7).

Gee (1989b) also introduced the terms “primary discourse,” to be later known as “primary Discourse” (1989b, p. 7; 2011a), and “secondary discourse,” to be later known as “secondary Discourse” (1989b, p. 8; 2011a), to the practice of discourse analysis. It was in the midst of this introduction that he tied together the development of a *primary or core identity* in the process of learning or acquiring a primary Discourse through oral traditions with the “society of intimates” – the “family (or the primary socialization group as defined by the culture)” (Givón, 1979, p. 294).

Gee later expanded this definition of *primary* Discourse. His expanded definition was based on the concept of “lifeworld Discourse”, first used by Habermas (1985), to recognize the way that “we use language, feel and think, act and interact, and so forth, to an ‘everyday’ (non-specialized) person” (Gee, 2008, p. 157). A primary Discourse is what gives us our initial and often enduring sense of self and sets the foundations of our culturally specific vernacular language (our “everyday language”), the language in which we speak and act as
“everyday” (non-specialized) people, and our culturally specific vernacular identity. (Gee, 2008, p. 156)

A secondary Discourse is acquired or learned in communication with and “in association with and by having access to and practice with” others, “non-intimates”, or “secondary institutions (such as schools, workplaces, stores, government offices, businesses, or churches)” (Gee, 1989b, p. 22) or “interest-driven groups” (Gee, 2011a, p. 202). Secondary Discourses are public Discourses that help create public identities. In essence, examining a continuum of identity would show that one’s primary Discourse would be a zero- or center-point and would show all secondary Discourses as either being positively or negatively positioned, or as intersecting, in relation to the primary Discourse; over time, however, primary Discourses and secondary Discourses can change. They can blend with other Discourses or can no longer exist (Gee, 2008).

**Literacy and New Literacy Studies**

An important element of the learning, acquisition, and mastery of a Discourse is literacy (Gee, 1989b). As researchers adopted a sociocultural approach to examine literacy, the definition of literacy has changed. Over time, the definition of literacy progressed from being narrowly defined as the ability to read and write to being defined more complexly to mean that an individual must be able to understand or make sense of a language in context to correctly use the language to read and write (Gee, 2008; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, 2006; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007; Street, 2003). The sociocultural definition of literacy broadened the definition to “mean that reading and writing can only be
understood in the contexts of social, cultural, political, economic, historical practices to which they are integral, of which they are a part” (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p.1), or, as Gee (2008) so aptly titled this new approach, the “integrated social-cultural-political-historical literacy studies” (p. 150), which is more famously known as New Literacy Studies (Gee, 1996).

Although there is a considerable amount of literature on New Literacy Studies, there are two dominant perspectives within the many different approaches within the New Literacy community. The first perspective may or may not consider the medium through which information is conveyed but focuses more on new literacies that have developed over time. Through the first perspective, scholars recognize that societies, communities, and groups of individuals, through various affiliations and through their languages, change over time; thus, individuals require new literacies of those who seek to begin participating or continuing to participate as a member.

The second perspective focuses on literacies associated with “digital electronic apparatus” (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p. 7). From the second perspective, scholars and researchers recognize “cyberspace as a fact of the new world, to be taken into account along with the physical world, but believes that cyberspace operates on the basis of different assumptions and values from physical space” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 80). Although the second perspective acknowledges literacies involving digital media, the use of a digital medium is not required. Regarding the difference between the two perspectives as they relate to technology,
One mindset approaches the contemporary world as being much the same now as it has been in the past, only a bit more “technologized” – it has had digital technologies added to it, but is nonetheless to be understood and related to more or less as we have done for the past 200 to 300 years. This involves approaching the world from the standpoint of what may be called a “physical–industrial mindset” (Lankshear & Bigum, 1999; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). The other mindset sees the world as having changed very significantly from how it was, necessitating a different approach from the one used in the past. This second mindset can be thought of as a kind of post-physical and post-industrial mindset. (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 80)


The differences between the two mindsets are located in several areas. The differing positions include the fact that the ethos perspective treats value as being greater when information is less available, whereas the new technical perspective treats value as being greater because of wider availability; ethos “focus[es] on individual intelligence (e.g. individual test scores as markers of knowledge/proficiency” whereas new technical “focus[es] on collective intelligence (e.g. Wikipedia.org)” ; ethos positions “expertise and authority [as being] located in individuals and institutions (e.g. university degrees, teaching
certificates)” whereas new technical positions “expertise and authority [as being]
distributed and collective; hybrid experts (e.g. Citizens journalism blogs)”
(Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 81). Within higher education, both ethos stuff and
the new technical stuff are in practice. Moreover, the use of new technical stuff
(e.g., the uses of social networking; student blogs; digital technology, such as
iPods, laptops, Smartphones; and institutional websites and college and
department webpages) is changing the manner in which students, faculty
members, and staff members understand and experience new literacies.

These changes in practice once again construct two communities or
“mindsets,” “natives” and “immigrants,” or, to be more politically correct,
“outsiders” (or “newcomers”) or “insiders” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 34).
Even though some have used the terms to distinguish between those who are
familiar with the technologies being used, one might also consider these mindsets
in relation to the use of the Discourses at work. While students might be more
familiar with the use of a particular type of technology based on their previous
Discourses, it is both the use of technology and Discourses of postsecondary
education that are new and even foreign, particularly to first-generation students
(i.e., newcomers). Although institutional Discourses are well-known by some
members of the community, there are those within the institutional community
responsible for creating or maintaining institutional Discourses who may be just
as illiterate as the students; being multi-literate is as essential for those who work
in higher education as it is for the students.
Identity

Identity and Discourse. An individual’s core identity is developed through his or her primary Discourse, and that individual’s set of multiple identities are either negatively or positively correlated to their core identity. A core identity and primary Discourse are the lenses by which individuals relate to and understand the world around them.

Secondary Discourses are comprised of are two distinct types of Discourses: dominant Discourses and nondominant Discourses. Dominant Discourses have the potential for an individual, who has in a specific situation “mastered” the secondary Discourses, to gain “‘goods’ (money, prestige, status, etc.)” (Gee, 1989a, p.8). In contrast, the individual who has “mastered” the nondominant Discourses gains “solidarity with a particular social network” (Gee, 1989a, p.8). Here, we bring together the fact that identity and Discourses are socially constructed and both have social and material costs and benefits (Gee, 1989a; Howard, 2000).

Within the dominant Discourses are the potential material consequences, whereas within the nondominant Discourses are the potential social consequences, of a failure or success in mastering those Discourses. Therefore, it is within an institution’s webpages that one can gain insight into the secondary Discourse of the institution and can gain insight into how the institution constructs Discourses in ways that enact the construction of particular or specific roles and identities. Building upon my previous statement regarding core and multiple identities, it is my belief that individuals have a core identity developed through their primary
Discourse that is in the midst of multiple identities developed through secondary Discourses.

Through childhood interactions and experiences at home, with parents or other primary caregivers, and in their childhood communities students develop their core identities. They understand who they are as unique individuals, as members of their families and childhood communities. Through their interactions with society, the individual learns and acquires the skills necessary to act, think, believe, behave, dress, speak, interact, and perform in their multiple roles and identities when interacting with others in society, whether at work, in groups or organizations, in school, or with any other individual outside their family or community.

To illustrate the difference between acquisition and learning in practice, Gee (1989b) stated: “Any discourse (primary or secondary) is for most people most of the time mastered through acquisition, not learning …. Time spent on learning and not acquisition is time not well spent if the goal of mastery is performance” (p. 23). If this is the case, then how do first-generation college students acquire the Discourse of being a college student? How do they learn that, in their role as a college student, they must live a certain way, think a particular way, bring certain things to class, wear certain things while on campus, say certain things, use certain resources, and accept particular individuals as authority figures, all to reflect the identity associated with that specific role? Furthermore, how do students acquire literacies in the Discourses? I address these questions in the following chapter.
Identity and Information Technology

Identity and Information Technology (IT) is a relatively new area of scholarship and is the third element of this study. The use of technology has revolutionized the way in which the world socializes, conducts business, learns, and participates in commercial exchanges; technology has left relatively few areas untouched. The use of technology has, in some ways, reduced the distance between parts of the world with the tap of a few keys and a monitor to vividly display pictures of both grand locations, as well as contrasting impoverished communities.

The study of identity development through the use of technology has shown that the use of technology in the workplace and in other settings affects the individual in many ways. Hamid and Lejeune (2009) drew upon the work of 11 existing empirical studies to examine the impact or effect of using IT on the identity of the individual (p.1). Drawing particular attention to instances when an individual’s identity was challenged by the use of IT, Hamid and Lejeune shared that individuals display a variety of responses –cognitive and corporeal – to the voluntary or obligatory use of IT, which ranged from anxiety to stress to discomfort to depression to fear. In responding to these cognitive and physical feelings and emotions, individuals experienced challenges to their identities that were then expressed in different ways. The examples the authors provided included individuals whose workplaces required them to use particular programs in the course of performing tasks for their jobs.
Hamid and Lejeune (2009) acknowledged that individuals responded to experiences in which the individual was either focused on the “situation” or “emotion” (p. 4) and in which the response was either a mental switch in the individual’s way of thinking or a change in actions. These responses then resulted in individuals’ responding in one of four ways when they were not able to reconcile their identity with IT: Responses included (a) act on the situation, (b) adjust the self, (c) catharsis practices, and (d) distancing. Hamid and Lejeune determined that individuals would use these first two strategies that were “situation focused” strategies to resolve their “challenges to identity”: “act on the situation” through “active resistance, complete rejection of the technology, partial use of its functionalities, changing technology features, changing procedures and routines, system misuse, system workarounds or even sabotage” (Hamid and Lejeune, 2009, p.6) and “adjust the self” through resisting certain elements of IT use while adjusting certain personal behaviors to meet other mandated actions.

The second pair of strategies an individual might use were “emotion-focused” strategies: “catharsis” through sharing their feelings or frustrations with others through a variety of means and “distancing”, which allows the individual to create distance between him- or herself and the situation causing their stress when they feel there is no remedy for the situation. The “defense mechanism” acts as a separator between the individual and the negative emotions they are experiencing (e.g., anger or “unalterable stress”). The mechanisms include “avoid thinking about it; divert attention away from the problem; use humor, making light of the situation; or mentally disengage from the goal with which the stressor is
interfering (Stone, Kennedy-Moore & Neale, 1995, p. 7). This strategy has been determined the most negative effect as the individuals level of “frustration is likely to increase if the situation remains unchanged” (Hamid & Lejeune, 2009, p. 7).

Although Hamid and Lejeune’s (2009) study examined the use of technology when an employee performed tasks related to his or her position, there are similarities to this study of first-generation college students. As individuals construct identities, they will use the tools associated with a particular role. As the first-generation students are constructing the college students’ identity, use of technology and the WU website will be among their required tools. The mastery of this resource is an element of identity development and role enactment. The better individuals are at using a resource – and making meaning of the use of that resource – the more confident they are in their identity perceptions and behaviors. If individuals feel – and emotions are important to identity – that the identification of who they are is called into question by the use of IT, then individuals will work to resolve the conflict in particular ways; however, if their perceptions of who they are validated by the use of IT, then an individual “experiences positive emotions such as satisfaction, enthusiasm, enjoyment and excitement … given technology provides a creative way of doing his or her job, one that may add a desired role that confirms, supports and reinforces his or her identity” (p. 5).

Using word substitution to the above findings, it could then be believed that students who feel their identity is called into question by the use of IT will experience conflict and will work to resolve that conflict, which will affect the
construction of the college student identity. If the students are *validated* by the use of technology then they will experience *positive emotions* and which will, in turn, positively support the students’ construction of a college student. Although this study seeks to examine the messages in the text within institutional websites, there is an underlying assumption that the students will be able to use the technology, access the technology, or make meaning of what they are to do with the technology in use at WU.

Based on their research findings, Hamid and Lejeune (2009) modified the Identity Control Theory (ICT) model created by Burke (1991), which is presented below in Figure 1. They located “disturbances” to an individual’s identity development as occurring just after they have made meaning of the situation which in turn impacts their feelings toward the experience (e.g., “stress, depressions, frustration ... [or] self-esteem, self efficacy, excitement, joy, and a sense of mastery (Cast and Burke, 2002)” (p. 3).
To understand each student individually while simultaneously as members of particular groups, the utilization of situated identity theory allows researchers to look beyond the bound parameters that conventional higher education theory have created in the past. Until recently, studies of postsecondary students have considered student development from the perspective of one particular identity, but this approach denies the researcher an opportunity to explore the many identities and roles a student may be experiencing while developing this new role and new identity. Before I discuss situated identity, it is necessary to share how I
frame the concepts of interaction, identity, and Discourse; the key concepts within each; and how they intersect, resulting in the development of a situated identity.

**Interaction**

The working definition of *interaction* I have operationalized was never more clearly defined than by George McCall in his foreword to the book *Identity Theory* by Burke and Stets (2009). Interaction is “taking place among identities rather than among persons and centering on the meanings of the behaviors rather than the behaviors themselves” (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. xii).

**Core Identity and Multiple Identities**

Identity and identity development are fundamental to this study. Identity theory is the result of many years of work by Sheldon Stryker (Stryker, 1994; Stryker & Burke, 2000) and is the foundation on which many of the theoretical premises for this study have been based. Stryker (1994), basing his definition on the work of William James, first gave definition to the self “as made up of many parts, including as many social selves as there are categories of other persons with whom one interacts” (p. 16). He defined identity as “a potentially important part these parts take is as internalized cognitions of positions held in distinctive organized sets of social relations and the behavior expectations associated with those positions; and it calls these internalized representations ‘identities’” (p. 16).

It was with this definition of identity in mind that Stryker developed Identity Theory, “an attempt to explain why, under circumstances where choice is a possibility, one role-related behavioral choice is taken rather than another” (Stryker, 1994, p. 15). Stryker recognized that identities were salient and that
individuals had multiple identities (e.g., college student, student employee, volunteer, business major). Ultimately, Stryker developed a formula that expressed the key elements of identity formation, development, and expression: “Society shapes Self shapes Social Behavior formula that reads Commitment shapes Identity Salience shapes Role Choices” (Stryker, 1994, p. 17; Stryker & Burke, 1994). A key element to both his theory and to his resultant frame of structural symbolic interactionism was social structure. His acknowledgement set in place the importance of social structures of all types, “age, gender, class, occupations, organizations, institutions” (Stryker, 1994, p. 19), as boundary-setting structures which would increase the likelihood that, given kinds of persons with given kinds of material and symbolic resources will come together in given kinds of networks for given kinds of purposes, and by increasing the probabilities that other kinds of persons will be kept out of those networks. Social structures also affect the probabilities that networks of given kinds will form, be maintained, or dissolve. In either case, social structures are important in circumscribing commitments (impacting the level of identity salience), thereby impacting identities and through identities role choice. (Stryker, 1994, p. 19)

Whereas Stryker has focused his work on the structural influences that influence identity formation and role taking, Peter Burke (2007) developed a different theoretical approach to identity: Identity Control Theory. ICT examines an individual’s internal processes, which impact how he or she will enact

30
particular roles and take on particular identities (Burke & Tully, 1977). The fundamental premise of this approach is the “meaning around which identities are formed” (Burke, 2007, p. 1).

ICT is based on the idea that there are several components of an identity. One of the components, “identity standard” (Burke 1991, 2007; Burke & Stets, 2000, p. 43), establishes that there are four particular elements of an identity. Burke (2007) provided the following explanation of identity standard:

an identity contains perceptions of meanings in the situation that are relevant to our identity (most of which comes from the feedback from others about how we are coming across in the situation), a comparator that functions to compare the perceived meanings with the meanings in the identity standard, and an output function of the comparison, sometimes called an error or discrepancy that represents the difference between perceptions and the identity standard. Finally, as a function of the error or discrepancy, there is meaningful behavior enacted in the situation that conveys meanings about our identity. (p. 2)

If individuals are in a situation where they have the potential to be observed or interact with others and they realize that their perception of “identity-relevant meanings” (Burke, 2007, p. 2) are the same as those around them, then there is no discrepancy, and they continue behaving in the same manner as they have been behaving. Alternatively, if they perceive there is a difference between their perception and that of others then the individual will either work to change their
behavior or change the situation so as to have no discrepancy, thereby changing their understanding in the given situation and implementing an identity-imposed “control system” (Burke, 2007, p. 2).

Both approaches, Identity Theory and ICT operate from the premise that an individual’s behavior reflects an identity or identities. The structural identity method “arrives at behavior by moving from social structures to commitments to relationships through consequent salience of the identity to behaviors” (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 288). The internal cognitive identity method arrives at behavior “from internalized identity standards and perceptions of self-relevant meanings, through a comparison of the two that either verifies the identities or indicates a discrepancy, to behavior that repairs the discrepancy by altering the situation or creating new situations” (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 288).

When an individual is developing a new identity, he or she is not developing this identity or acting in the role and leaving all other identities and roles behind or setting them to the side. He or she is incorporating this role and developing this identity amidst other multiple roles and identities. Various schools of thought hold to different beliefs regarding identity formation. Some view it as a hierarchical process in that certain identities have “precedence”, “prominence” or “importance” (Stryker & Serpe, 1994) over others. Other schools of thought hold to the belief that there is a “psychological centrality” at work, whereby identity functions from a core identity and all others are acted out from there. Finally, other schools hold to the notion that identities are “salient” – of which there are differing definitions and considerations given. “Identity salience is defined as the
probability that an identity will be invoked across a variety of situations, or alternatively across persons in a given situation” (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 286). For example, an college student will use the knowledge she learned in her computer course to help her carry out the duties of her job in a retail store and in her position as publicity chair for her sorority. It is my belief that individuals have a core identity in the midst of additional multiple identities.

An individual may hold many different roles and develop multiple identities, but it should not be assumed that an individual accepts the prescribed roles in the manner in which society has positioned them. For example, a low-income student may reject the notion that being poor also means he or she is intellectually less than those who are not poor. James Gee (2000-2001), whose work in the area of critical discourse analysis and identity formation I discuss later in this chapter, penned the following, regarding the way in which individuals make meaning of various identities in action,

One cannot have an identity of any sort without some interpretive system underwriting the recognition of that identity (Taylor, 1994). The interpretive system may be people’s historically and culturally different views of nature; it may be the norms, traditions, and rules of institutions; it may be the discourse and dialogue of others; or it may be the workings of affinity groups. What is important about identity is that almost any identity trait can be understood in terms of any of these different interpretive systems. People can actively construe the same identity trait in different ways, and they can
negotiate and contest how their traits are to be see (by themselves and others) in terms of the different perspectives on identity. (pp. 107-108)

Ultimately, the goal of Identity Theory is to explain the specific meanings that individuals have for the multiple identities they claim; how these identities relate to one another for any one person; how their identities influence their behavior, thoughts, and feelings or emotions; and how their identities tie them in to society at large. (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 3)

**Role**

*Role* is an outward expression of who an individual is, while doing a particular action. In operationalizing all of the terms above, I developed the following statement: Identity is who a person is (i.e., identity-internal) when he or she is doing particular things (i.e., actions or behaviors) in a particular context (i.e., socially situated) that have socially established expectations. The expectations have been established by others who identify or recognize the particular actions (i.e., socially constructed) with particular positions, group affiliations, or personal attributes (i.e., roles), whereby the individual in the role determines the appropriateness of his or her actions or behaviors by measuring actions or behaviors against the actions or perceived thoughts of others in the same position, the same group, with the same attributes, or the larger society.
Situated Identity Theory

The theory of situated identity is one that takes its fundamental premise from that of symbolic interactionist theory and attribution theory. Mead (Herman & Reynolds, 1994, p. 25) is the theorist credited with laying the foundation for symbolic interactionism theory, through his explication of the concepts of Society and the definition and development of Self (i.e., the “I” and the “Me”, the development of the Mind, Objects, and the Act). Mead’s approach to symbolic interaction centered on the fundamental and establishing premise that viewed “human behavior as social behavior [and] human acts as social acts” (Meltzer, 1994, p. 39) through “symbolic interaction, role-taking, meaning, mind and self” (Meltzer, 1994, p. 50).

Herbert Blumer (1969), who coined the phrase “symbolic interaction”, was a student who worked under the tutelage of Mead. Blumer defined symbolic interaction as

the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings. The peculiarity consists of the fact that human beings interpret or “define” each other’s actions instead of merely reacting to each other’s actions. Their “response” is not made directly to the actions of one another but instead is based on the meanings which they attach to such actions. Thus, human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation or by ascertaining the meaning of one another’s actions. (p. 79)
The *speech act* may be the use of words that are the spoken or uttered representation of a human being’s thoughts but interpretation is made through the combined use of words and inference, action, and symbols. It is not only what an individual says, but it is the combination of word selection, tone of voice, physical demeanor, individual experiences, and context in which the interaction occur. Meaning making might also be further affected by the medium through which the interaction occurs (e.g. face-to-face, video-conference, Internet website messages, telephone conversation, Internet chat room conversations). Interaction through mediated forms that do not allow those who are interacting to visually observe one another as they are interacting are not able draw additional meaning from non-verbal cues such as eye contact, physical posture, hand gestures.

The second theoretical premise of situated identity is that of attribution theory. *Attribution theory* incorporates both cognitive and behavioral theoretical approaches to understanding human behavior. A concept introduced by Eric Heider (1958), attribution theory seeks to understand the way in which individuals view an event or action and how they make a connection to the cause of the event or action. In other words, “[a]ttributions can help us to understand what causes people to behave the way they do” (Munton et al., 1999, p. 8). As Heider (1958) stated, “In everyday life we form ideas about other people and about social situations” (p. 5). Individuals interpret others’ actions and predict what they will do under certain circumstances.

When understanding an attribution, there are three elements that should be defined: “the cause (C),” “the outcome (O)” and “the link between C and O”
(Munton, Silvester, Stratton, & Hanks, 1999, p. 9). There are two factors that cause a person to do something or results in an outcome “an event or outcome and some factor that we identify as the cause of that outcome” (p. 9). An example would be what factors played a role (causes) in a student’s decision to attend a four-year university (outcome). Attributions seek to identify the connection between the cause and the outcome.

Heider (1958) was able to deduce the power of belonging, the power of perception, the power everyday language, and the multiple ways in which individuals relate and make meaning. He demonstrated that what is written can be interpreted in different ways. Although an individual could intend to communicate what appears to be an obvious message, either written or verbal, the other could interpret the message differently than it was intended to be perceived by the individual. Heider described the process of one person perceiving others: “He not only perceives people as having certain spatial and physical properties, but also can grasp even such intangibles as their wishes, needs, and emotions by some form of immediate apprehension” (p. 22).

An individual could perceive an interaction as direct contact with the other or the object, known as the “phenomenal description in perception” or the “causal description of perception” (Heider, 1958, p. 22). In the former, an individual was considered to have had direct contact with the object or other person (“the distal object” or “the object of perception” (Heider, 1958, p. 21). In the latter, an individual would interact with the distal object through a “mediated” process known as the “perceptual arc” (Brunswik, 1952 as cited by Heider, 1958, p. 23).
At one end of this arc was the “contents of the environment on the one hand and the phenomena” (Heider, 1958, p. 35) also known as the “object” (p. 23), and at the other end “the they way these contents appear to us on the other” (p. 35) also known as the “percept” (p. 23). The object (or the other person) was called the “distal stimulus” (p. 23) was external. The person experienced the distal stimulus through “mediating factors” (p. 26), such as “light or sound-wave patterns that excite [their] sensory organs. These stimulus patterns, impinging as it does directly upon these organs, has been designated the proximal stimulus; it is this stimulus that is physically in direct proximity to the person” (p. 23). Other proximal stimuli include the other physical sensory factors (i.e., touch, taste, smell, feel), as well as “gestures, tone of voice, and similar expressive gestures” (p. 26). Although individuals are not cognizant of the mediating experience, it is through mediation that the distal stimulus becomes the proximal stimulus. It is also the experience through which perception occurs (i.e., the placement of an item would indicate to the perceiver how much motion is required to reach it or that based on an item’s cylindrical shape it would only roll in a particular way).

When the proximal stimulus has been mediated in such a way as present less than optimal conditions for a person to experience the distal object, the characteristics can still be perceived as they are. The characteristics of an object could include its “color, brightness, size, and shape”, and the characteristics of an individual could include his or her “wishes, needs, beliefs, abilities, affects, and personality traits” (Heider, 1958, p. 28). Examples would be that the moon could still be viewed as a full moon through a cloud-filled sky or the “wish” or desire of
another could be understood through “by an innumerable variety of word combinations” (p. 28) from short three-word statements or protracted speech. This experience was called the “constancy phenomena” (p. 28). Although this was a phenomenon held more strongly for an individual’s perception of an object, there was evidence that this could hold true for an individual’s perception of another.

The constancy phenomena was one way Heider (1958) and others recognized that there were certain characteristics of objects and individuals that would be perceived regardless of the mediating conditions. Another consideration that was to be presented was that of “dispositional properties” for an object and “dispositional characteristics” (p. 30) for an individual.

The term dispositional properties is applied to those properties that ‘dispose’ objects and events to manifest themselves in certain ways under certain conditions. Dispositional properties are the invariances that make possible a more or less stable, predictable, and controllable world. They refer to the relatively unchanging structure and processes that characterize or underlie phenomena. Instances of relatively unchanging structures are such object properties as color and size, such person properties as character and ability. We feel, for example, that John’s good grades make sense when we refer his achievement, a relatively momentary event, to his high intelligence, a more or less permanent property, and we then believe we are safe in predicting a successful college career. (p. 80)
It is a human need to then explain the “underlying reason for [a] circumstance” (p. 80). Individuals want to be able to understand and explain the actions of another or of an interaction with object or other person. They also want to be able to attribute the actions or result of an action to something,

first, that man is usually not content simply to register the observables that surround him; he needs to refer them as far as possible to the invariances of his environment. Second the underlying causes of events, especially the motives of other persons, are the invariances of the environment that are relevant to him; they give meaning to what he experiences and it is these meanings that are recorded in his life space, and are precipitated as the reality of the environment to which he then reacts. (p. 81)

It is critically important to understand that the “representation or image of the object…also referred to as the percept” (p. 24), meaning-making, and understanding are all done to respond or react to the situation or experience.

Once an individual is able to make meaning and understand a situation, he or she will make attributions about the outcome of an action or the action of the other.

[The] result of an action is felt to depend of two sets of conditions, namely factors within the person and factors within the environment…Consider he example of a person rowing a boat across a lake. The following is but a sample of expressions used to refer to factors that are significant to the action outcome. We say,
‘He is trying to row the boat across the lake,’ … ‘He wants to row the boat across the lake,’ … ‘It is difficult to row the boat across the lake,’ ‘It is sheer luck that he succeeded in rowing the boat across the lake.’ These varying descriptive statements have reference to personal factors on one hand and to environmental factors on the other. (p. 82)

If an individual successfully finishes an action or a task, he or she is perceived as having greater personal force over the environment. If an individual is unsuccessful in finishing an action or was the only person to fail, the failure is attributed to his or her lack of ability; if, however, he or she is one of many who fails, then the task is attributed as being difficult. If everyone or almost everyone succeeds at the “task” then the success is attributed to the “task” (Heider, 1958, p. 89). The amount of energy a person puts forth to complete a task “is the dominant clue for inferring task difficulty” (p. 90).

Heider (1958) identified three sets of conditions that influenced perception:

those pertaining to the object, and those pertaining to the mediation
… [and] a third set of conditions those that exist within the organism itself. A nearsighted person without glasses attributes the blurred outlines of objects to his poor eyesight and not to the objects themselves or to his distance from them…Thus when he undergoes surgery for scotomas, or removes a particle of dust from
his eye, he is doing nothing to the object or to the mediating conditions. (p. 67)

Heider also noted that when an individual cannot be perceived to have a physical limitation, this affects others individual’s perception of his or her ability to complete a task. If a person is unable to complete a task and it “is attributed to a person’s sensory tools or brain functioning he is not held responsible in the same way as” the incomplete task had been “attributed to his motivation” (p. 68).

The theory of situated identity was introduced by C. Norman Alexander, Jr. and Harrison G. Weil (1968). Through a symbolic interaction lens, their study examined the way individuals developed situated identities as they played the Prisoners Dilemma Game. A few years later, C. Norman Alexander Jr. and Mary Glenn Wiley (1971) acknowledged that the work of symbolic interactionists assists in understanding the influence of others’ presence on an individual – “real, imagined, or anticipated” (p. 272). Alexander and Wiley (1971) hypothesized that situated identity theory is the result of the thought that the development of an identity is due to the “fundamental process of social perception and the cornerstone of interaction” (p. 274). Situated identities are not possessions which belong to an individual nor are they put upon an individual or found in some “externalized environmental structure” (p. 274). Situated identities establish the parameters of the relationships between the individual, or actor, and the environment at any given time.

Alexander and Wiley (1971), in keeping with the work of Heider (1958), re-emphasized the importance of individual dispositional characteristics. They
further added that in the development of a situated identity that “the dispositional qualities that lend stability, coherence, and predictability to the interpersonal environment involve judgments of aims, wishes, desires, emotions, motives, and other qualities not imputed to the impersonal environment” (p. 271).

Alexander and Wiley (1971) recognized the unmistakable importance of “others dispositional attributions” in an individual’s day to day experience. It is the “acceptance, affection, approval, and so forth” that others directly share and what is not shared directly is “mediated by them”. It is during an individual’s childhood, or “developmental years” that experience is more greatly focused.

It is during that period that, through the process of role-taking, the self emerges, and the person learns to control and evaluate his or her behaviors. In the same way, the person learns the processes that are effective in self-monitoring and self-evaluation. (p. 272)

One of the key terms bridging symbolic interaction theory to situated identity theory is “role-taking” (p. 271). From Alexander and Wiley’s point of view, the overriding item discovered by an individual who engages in role-taking is how others will react to him or her. As the individual comes to “anticipate, much less control and manipulate, these responses, the individual must come to view his or her own activity from others’ (dispositional) perspectives” (p. 272). The individual will deduce that, because he or she uses dispositional qualities to understand the perspective of others, then it would be fitting that he or she would again look internally to understand their own personal milieu. It is through this viewpoint that “transform mere behavior into conduct” (p. 272).
Situated identities take place during situated activities. Situated activities have particular characteristics to be considered as such. To be considered a situated activity, it must be grounded outside of the individual person and restricted by the actor’s belief that he or she is being observed (Alexander & Wiley, 1971). Second, in a situated activity, there must be an agreed-upon set of behaviors or characteristics, and the actors must agree on how to portray the event as it occurs – hence establishing “that the activity is normatively structured” (p. 275). The actor comes to understand his or her role through the responses of others. The responses of others will give an indication to the actor of the appropriateness of his or her identity in relation to the role (Burke & Tully, 1977).

It is important to understand that “role/identities are initially situation-specific” (Burke & Tully, 1977, p. 883). Others researchers have written that role/identity becomes organized in a hierarchy according to those identities that are “most central, pervasive, encompassing, influential, and salient role/identities” (Burke & Tully, 1977, p. 883). There is a distinction between role and identity: identity is the manifestation of the personal, “internal” characteristics of the actor, whereas role is the manifestation of the world’s “external” characteristics (p. 883). Role/identity exists only in relation to that of a counter identity (i.e., the role/identity of “husband” relates to the role/identity of “wife,” the role/identity of “American” to that of “German,” that of “college student” to that of “high school student” or “graduate student” or “professor” or “noncollege peer” (Burke & Reitzes, 1991; Burke & Tully, 1977; Reitzes & Burke, 1980).
The socially constructed self, the situated identity, is, according to Callero (2003), “never a bounded quality of the individual or a simple expression of psychological characteristics; it is a fundamentally social phenomenon, where concepts, images and understandings are deeply determined by relations of power” (p. 127). Within postsecondary education, there are relations of power at work, and it is that very relationship that can influence the identity development of the first-generation student.

Harrod (2008), based on his research study findings and like Hamid and Lejeune (2009), revised the Identity Control Model that was based on the original model developed by Burke (1991). This revised model included attributions as influential factors in the early input stage of identity development. Figure 2 reflects Harrod’s findings that attributions influence a person’s identity formation at the onset as an individual works to determine whether he or she is experiencing and acting in accordance with a particular identity (Harrod, 2008).
Figure 2. Heuristic model of Identity Control Process with Attributions. Source: Harrod, 2008.

Having reviewed the relevant theories the focus of this chapter will now be to contextualize the study as it pertains to first-generation college students and their enrollment in higher education, the use of the Internet as a new tool for students colleges, and universities as well as student development theory.

Contemporary Postsecondary Education

Postsecondary education enrollment trends. Colleges and universities are enrolling more students than ever before. According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics (2009a), in 1963 there were
4,779,609 students enrolled in degree-granting institutions. By definition, the U.S. Department of Education classifies a degree-granting institution as one that “grant[s] associate's or higher degrees and participate[s] in Title IV federal financial aid programs” (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009a). By 1970 that number had almost doubled to 8,580,887, and by 2008, the number stood at 19,102,814 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009a).

Correspondingly, in 1967 (i.e., the first year when these data were reported by NCES) there were 6,015,683 undergraduate students enrolled in higher education institutions, 7,368,644 undergraduates by 1970, and 16,365,738 undergraduates in 2008 enrolled in degree-granting institutions (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009a).

In 2008, the total number of undergraduate and the total number of first-time freshmen enrolled in degree-granting institutions was at an all time high – in both the U.S. as well as in the southwest state where this study occurred. Table 1 outlines the enrollment growth of first-time freshmen in the U.S., as well as in the state where this study was conducted, from 2000 to 2008. Table 2 provides a more detailed summary, by gender and by full-time or part-time enrollment status, of the number of first-time freshmen in the U.S. in 2008. During that time span, the first-time freshmen population in the U.S. increased by over 597,000 students, and enrollment in WU’s state increased by over 42,000 students first-time freshmen.
### Table 1

*First-time Freshman Fall Enrollment in Degree-granting Institutions by State or Jurisdiction: 2000-2008*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State or Jurisdiction</th>
<th>Total Enrollment, Fall 2000</th>
<th>Total Enrollment, Fall 2004</th>
<th>Total Enrollment, Fall 2005</th>
<th>Total Enrollment, Fall 2006</th>
<th>Total Enrollment, Fall 2007</th>
<th>Total Enrollment, Fall 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>2,427,551</td>
<td>2,630,243</td>
<td>2,657,338</td>
<td>2,707,213</td>
<td>2,776,168</td>
<td>3,024,723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest states</td>
<td>46,646</td>
<td>50,521</td>
<td>76,987</td>
<td>63,830</td>
<td>75,310</td>
<td>89,486</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Degree-granting institutions grant Associate’s or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Data are for first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates. Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009b

### Table 2

*Total First-time Freshman Fall Enrollment in Degree-granting Institutions by Attendance Status, Sex, Control of Institution, and State or Jurisdiction: Fall 2008*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State or Jurisdiction</th>
<th>Full-time</th>
<th>Part-time</th>
<th>Fall 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Enrollment</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>2,427,740</td>
<td>1,115,500</td>
<td>1,312,240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest states</td>
<td>70,575</td>
<td>26,739</td>
<td>43,836</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Degree-granting institutions grant Associate’s or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Data are for first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates. Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009b
As of fall 2007, the U.S. Department of Education (2009c) recorded that the University of Phoenix Online campus had a student enrollment of 224,880, as the country’s leading institution in student enrollment. WU’s oldest campus was recognized among the top five institutions in terms of its student enrollment. In the last decade, WU has realized unprecedented growth that is expected to continue. The total enrollment in fall 1998 was just under 50,000 students; minority enrollment was at a record of just under 9,500 students (or just under 20% of its total enrollment). As of fall 2008, the university had a total enrollment of just under 68,000 students, and almost double the number of minority students, with almost 26% minority student enrollment. Under the current administration, the university is projected to grow to an unprecedented student enrollment by 2012. The most significant growth in student enrollment would be through the enrollment of students taking courses through the university’s online based campus (Crow, 2008). The number of proposed online students would outnumber total student body enrollment at nearly all brick and mortar institutions.

**Internet Practices of Colleges and Universities**

A college or university website is a resource used by many different individuals. The webpages are written for many different groups – prospective applicants, alumni, graduate students, faculty, staff, researchers, community members, and donors to name a few – and are therefore different in terms of content and expected outcomes, or Discourses. According to Gee (2004),
Discourses are ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing, that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities (or “types of people”) by specific groups, whether families of a certain sort, lawyers of a certain sort, bikers of a certain sort, business people of a certain sort, church members of a certain sort, African-Americans of a certain sort, women or men of a certain sort, and so on and so forth through a very long list. Discourses are ways of being “people like us.” They are “ways of being in the world”; they are “forms of life”; they are socially situated identities. (p. 11)

The Discourses on institutional webpages help inform the intended reader and other readers how the institution represents and recognizes persons of their certain sort.

In recent years, colleges and universities have continued to increase their overall use of technology. In the area of recruitment and admissions, “Institutions rely on technology to market to prospective students and to more easily and effectively disseminate information about their institutions and their admission procedures” (Clinedinst & Hawkins, 2009, p. 17). Between 2007-2010, four-year colleges and universities have seen a significant increase in online applications, rising from 58% of applications being submitted online in 2006 to 68% in 2007 and 72% in 2008 (Clinedinst & Hawkins, 2009, p. 17). Clinedinst and Hawkins (2009) provided percentages of online applications received by various colleges and universities in 2008 (see Table 3).
Table 3

Mean Percentages of Applications Received Online by Institutional Characteristics: 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean percentage of online applications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>72.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>70.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>72.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer than 3,000 students</td>
<td>68.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3,000-9,999 students</td>
<td>75.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000 or more students</td>
<td>83.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selectivity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept fewer than 50% of applicants</td>
<td>81.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept 50-70% of applicants</td>
<td>71.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept 71-85% of applicants</td>
<td>72.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept more than 85% of applicants</td>
<td>66.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yield</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enroll fewer than 30% of admitted students</td>
<td>80.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enroll 30-45% of admitted students</td>
<td>72.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enroll 45-60% of admitted students</td>
<td>70.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enroll more than 60% of admitted students</td>
<td>51.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Source: Clinedinst & Hawkins, 2009, p. 17

The use of the Internet is not simply limited to use as a portal for admissions. For many institutions, it is the principle medium, for example, for conducting business (e.g., operational including Human Resource Management) and is the mechanism through which online (i.e., Internet-based) courses are accessed, students electronically add funds to their institutional identification cards, and institutional parking citations can be paid (or disputed). In other words, it has become the primary point of access for the entire community. Entire organizational units are devoted to supporting, maintaining, and securing this vital access point in
particular areas, whereas other academic affairs and student affairs units may leave their upkeep to a departmental administrative assistant as a part of their *other duties as assigned*. In later sections, I discuss the intersection of identity and IT to further elucidate this practice.

**Internet Practices of Incoming College Students**

More students are also using the Internet to conduct research on colleges and universities (Noel-Levitz, 2008). An increasing number of students of diverse demographic characteristics are pursuing college degrees (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009d) and the Internet is becoming the college-bound student’s research tool of choice (Noel-Levitz, 2008). To better understand the Internet practices of college-bound high school students, Noel-Levitz (2010) conducted a survey of over 1,000 high school seniors. Findings indicated that 100% of the students had visited at least one website college website, and at least 65% had viewed at least one college website within the past week (p. 2). Ninety-three percent of the students most used the Internet in their home to conduct their searches but also used computers with Internet in several other locations: at their high school (66%); at a location with wireless fidelity (WiFi; 25%); at a public library (25%); and on a smart phone (23%; p. 2). Fifty-four percent of students found the most beneficial information to be “academic-related content”, with 29% of students identifying “a list of academic programs and degrees” as being “the most valuable academic-related Web content” (p. 4).
Regarding student satisfaction with the use of college or university websites, 16% of students reported “if they don’t find what they need on the school’s website, they’ll drop it from their list;” 76% reported “they’ll be disappointed if a school’s site isn’t helpful, but they will find other ways to get information;” and 8% reported “the school’s website isn’t really an important information source for them” (Noel-Levitz, 2010, p. 4). Students also reported viewing other topics, such as student life (46%); academic/classes (30%); location/areas around campus (11%); athletic events (6%); and faculty/program details (5%) (p. 6).

Incoming freshmen may be computer savvy and may already be regularly using packaged computer software programs (e.g., Microsoft Office Suite, Mac OS) and engaging in social networks (e.g., Facebook, Twitter). Of the 1,000 students who participated in Noel-Levitz’s (2010) survey, students reported their social media use follows:

- Facebook (76%)
- YouTube (59%)
- MySpace (33%)
- [None] (9%)
- Twitter (8%)
- Gaia Online (2%)
- High Five (1%). (p. 5)

Although these college-bound high school seniors are technologically experienced in some ways, they will be novices when it comes to navigating the
college or university website as an insider. In fact, the students may be academically talented and very proficient in a number of areas (technology-wise and non-technology wise), but required use of an institutional website for potentially all facets of their student experience (e.g., selecting their new student orientation, paying tuition and fees, housing, selecting courses, completing and submitting course materials) may be a new experience for them. Students’ confidence in navigating the process may be uncertain. The dilemma can be summed up with this thought:

What is deeply problematic is that, despite proficiency and competency in a great number of contexts, adults (and children) often do not see themselves as competent and carry a negative sense of self, shaped by their history of participation with schools, into learning environments, shaping their own and their children’s education. (Rogers, 2004a, p. 52)

The cost of failing to properly use technology when interacting with the college or university has significant implications for students’ futures at their institutions. For students who consider pursuing a college education at their selected institution, this is a significant social good, and as such, has a significant amount of importance for them. There is more at risk: When individuals want to be accepted or viewed as acceptable or good …, [there] are cases where social goods are at stake …: how you use language … and how people respond to you are deeply consequential to you and for you. If you get accepted
…, you gain a social good. If you do not get fully accepted…, you lose a social good. (Gee, 2011a, p. 6)

According to the Radford, Tasoff & Weko (2009), several factors play a role in student’s college enrollment decisions. Table 4 illustrates how different those factors have been among students:

Table 4

*Enrollment Choice Factors of Beginning Postsecondary Students Who Were Recent High School Graduates, 2003-2004*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment Choice Factors</th>
<th>Public 2-year</th>
<th>Public 4-year</th>
<th>Private, not-for-profit 4-year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before selecting a college</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considered campus safety</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
<td>56.2%</td>
<td>65.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considered graduation rate of enrolled students</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulted published list of college rankings</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
<td>55.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for enrolling in institution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable/financial</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
<td>66.4%</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal/family reasons</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>43.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>83.1%</td>
<td>78.8%</td>
<td>73.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
<td>76.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program/coursework</td>
<td>38.0%</td>
<td>57.2%</td>
<td>67.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enrolled in first-choice institution</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for not enrolling in first-choice institution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not admitted to first choice</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>45.3%</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admitted, reasons for not attending first choice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough aid</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too expensive</td>
<td>50.6%</td>
<td>58.1%</td>
<td>49.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal/family reasons</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 4 displays National data on first-year college students’ *enrollment choice factors* at the point of college selection and at the point of enrollment, as well as the reasons why students did not enroll at particular institutions. The data show
that there are very distinct differences between students’ reasons for selecting public 2-year, public 4-year, and private not-for-profit 4-year institutions.

Although all of these data are informative, each category has some striking differences. Among the pre-enrollment reasons, there exists a considerable difference in the importance of graduation rates and the use of published lists of college rankings between students and their enrollment in the three institutional types. When outlining students’ reasons for enrolling, the importance of affordability and finances, as well as institutional reputation and academic programs and coursework, had the greatest difference. Conversely, the single most common reason for not attending their first choice institution was too expensive. Given the characteristics and challenges faced by many first-generation students, as well as the fact that first-generation students are disproportionately enrolled in two-year colleges (Staklis, 2010), the data above shed new light on the decision-making choices made by incoming freshmen inclusive of first-generation students.

First-generation College Students

First-generation college students defined. Researchers have defined first-generation college students as “students whose parent did not attend college” (Choy, 2001, p. 1) or “those whose parents had no type or quantity of postsecondary education” (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005, p. 410). According to the U.S. Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education and the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education final regulations (2010), first-generation college students are defined as “individuals from families in which there is no
family history of successfully pursuing a Bachelor's degree” (p. 65,746). This categorization would mean that either parent could have graduated from high school and attended college but that neither parent had earned a Bachelor’s degree. I have employed this definition for use in this study. The rationale for employing this definition is that it allowed for the broadest consideration to be made regarding study participants. This definition also recognizes that neither parent has successfully completed a bachelor’s degree program and therefore are unable to share knowledge gained from their successful degree completion with their student.

**First-generation college students in postsecondary education.** The increase in the number of students enrolling in degree-granting institutions also includes the number of first-generation college students. Although their numbers continue to grow, their enrollment continues to track consistently into particular enrollment trends. Since 1995, and every four years since, the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics contracts to conduct the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS). These ongoing studies are conducted to gather representative data on the postsecondary enrollment statistics of all eligible under-graduate and graduate students enrolled any time between July 1st and June 30th in 1995–96, 1999–2000, 2003–04, and 2007–08 at Title IV1 eligible postsecondary institutions in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

Approximately 114,000 undergraduates were study respondents in
NPSAS:08, 111,000 were in NPSAS:04, 57,000 in NPSAS:2000, and 47,000 in NPSAS:96. (Staklis & Chen, 2010, p. 2)

The reports provide data representative of students “who attended public 2- and 4-year, private nonprofit, and for-profit institutions by student and enrollment characteristics, hours worked while enrolled, and community service activities” (Staklis & Chen, 2010, p. 1).

Although certain reports contain data reflective of the more immediate student experience, other reports are the result of longitudinal studies. As is the current case, when a new study year has begun, there are simultaneously occurring studies (e.g., researchers were in the fourth year of the 6-year of the NPSAS:04 longitudinal study when they began first year of the 6-year NPSAS:08 longitudinal study). Of the total number of NPSAS:04 respondents, 19,000 were first-time, first-year postsecondary students, and they became the study population for the longitudinal study representing the almost four million first-time, first-year postsecondary students. The most recent interviews with these students occurred in 2009. This study on the status of undergraduate students in the U.S. provides a comprehensive data set profiling undergraduate students on a variety of demographic characteristics, from enrollment and attendance to student characteristics to work, community services and voting characteristics (Horn, Nevill & Griffith, 2006, p. xv). Table 5 shows the percentages of students who enrolled in postsecondary education (inclusive of all postsecondary institutions), both 2-year and in 4-year institutions by parent’s level of education as reported in NPSAS:04 (Horn, Nevill, & Griffith, 2006, p.107). This set of data reveals the
disparities that exist between first generation college students – from students whose parents have at most earned a high school degree to students whose parents have attended college to those students who parents have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher.
Table 5

Percentages of Students Who Enrolled in Postsecondary Educational Institutions
by Institutional and Student Characteristics and by Parents’ Highest Education Completed, 2003-2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional and Student Characteristics</th>
<th>Parents’ Highest Education Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High school or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (50 U.S. states, District of Colombia, and Puerto Rico)</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year sector</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public and private not-for-profit</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private not-for-profit</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution type</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less-than-2-year</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-year</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year non-doctorate-granting</td>
<td>33.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year doctorate-granting</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private not-for-profit</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less-than-4-year</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year non-doctorate-granting</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year doctorate-granting</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private for-profit</td>
<td>49.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private for-profit less-than-2-year</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private for-profit 2 years or more</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than one institution</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance intensity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any full-time</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusively part-time</td>
<td>41.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple races</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependency status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The statistics are striking among the entire population of students enrolled in postsecondary education institutions; however, the statistics are more distinct when examining students who were enrolled in four-year institutions. When reviewing the percentages at two-year institutions, it is worth noting that the percentages are about the same but that the percentages correspond to different categories; the students who had the lowest overall enrollment were the first-generation students whose parents had some postsecondary experience. The data continue to illustrate that first-generation students are more likely to enroll in two-year institutions than at four-year institutions (Horn, Nevill, & Griffith, 2006, p. 107). To further illustrate the differences in the enrollment practices of first-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No dependents, unmarried</th>
<th>Married, no dependents</th>
<th>Single parent</th>
<th>Married parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>37.7%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age as of 12/31/03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 years or younger</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19–23 years</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24–29 years</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–39 years</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 years or older</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowest 25 percent</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle 50 percent</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest 25 percent</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>51.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No disability reported</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>41.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some type of disability reported</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment while enrolled</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not work</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time (35 or more hours/week)</td>
<td>41.9%</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Refers to NPSAS institution only.
2 Black includes African American, Hispanic includes Latino, American Indian includes Alaska Native, Pacific Islander includes Native, Hawaiian, and Other includes respondents having origins in a race not listed. Race categories exclude Hispanic origin unless specified.

Note: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Source: Horn, Nevill, & Griffith, 2006, pp. 107-108
generation college students Table 6 details the type of institutions first attended by students by parent’s highest level of education.

Table 6

*Level of Undergraduates’ First Institution Attended by Parents’ Highest Education Completed, 2003-2004*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of First Institution Attended</th>
<th>4-year</th>
<th>2-year</th>
<th>Less-than-2-year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>43.6%</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent's highest education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not complete high school</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>59.2%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma or equivalent</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
<td>56.9%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational or technical training</td>
<td>39.2%</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than two years of college</td>
<td>39.7%</td>
<td>53.4%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate's degree</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or more years of college but no degree</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
<td>56.6%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
<td>38.8%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's degree or equivalent</td>
<td>64.8%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-professional degree</td>
<td>77.1%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral degree or equivalent</td>
<td>70.5%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not know parent's education level</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
<td>54.3%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The data are telling of the type of postsecondary institutions students selected to attend particularly when broken down by level of parental educational level. The data shows that the lower the level of the parent’s education the higher the proportion of first-generation students enrolled in less-than-2-year and 2-year institutions. Conversely the higher the level of the parent’s education the higher the proportion of continuing generation students enrolled in 4-year institutions.

In a more recent comparative report, Staklis and Chin (2010) collected and presented the data from the four NPSAS studies: NPSAS:96, NPSAS:00, NPSAS:04, and NPSAS:08. The data illustrated that many of the disparate
enrollment characteristics between first-generation college students and continuing generation college students have persisted over time. The report showed with regard to the enrollment differences between first-generation students and continuing generation students that first-generation students in comparison to students whose parents have earned a Bachelor’s degree or higher that first-generation students have:

- Consistently, across the 12-years disproportionately enrolled in 2-year institutions (p.9) although the percentage has been decreasing for first-generation students.
- Consistently, across the 12-years disproportionately not attended 4-year institutions (p. 13) with a percentage rate difference ranging from 19.2% in 1995-96 to 24.2% in 2007-08,
- Consistently, across the 8-years (data not available for 1995-96) disproportionately enrolled in for-profit institutions (p. 21) with a percentage rate difference ranging from 25.8% in 1999-2000 to 29.8% in 2007-08. (Staklis & Chen, 2010)

The trends in the data reflect that first-generation college students continue pursuing their undergraduate degrees, yet their institutional choices have not changed over time.

The statistics from the most recent NPSAS:08 (Staklis, 2010) confirm that first-generation college students tend to disproportionately enroll in two-year
institutions. Additional statistics also reflect that first-generation students are predominantly:

- Female
- Hispanic or Black
- Between the ages of 19-23
- Low-income (i.e., the majority of students or their families reported income below $59,999/annually)
- Classified as independent from their parents
- With two or more dependents (21.2% of students whose parents have a high school diploma or less as compared to 7.5% of students whose parents has a Bachelor’s degree or higher)
- Have earned a GED rather than earned a high school diploma (8.6% of students whose parents have a high school diploma or less as compared to 3.7% whose parents have a bachelor’s degree or higher)
- Attend college in their home state
- Did not live on campus (8.6% of students whose parents have a high school diploma or less as compared to 23.9% whose parents have a bachelor’s degree or higher) or who live off campus but not with their parents – (65.9% to 51.7%)
- More likely to have qualified for any type of financial aid – (13% more than those who parents had a bachelors degree or
higher when qualifying for federal financial aid (52.7% as compared to 39.7%) and by 10 percent when qualifying for any type of grant (56.2% as compared to 46.2%)

- They averaged about 32 hours a week on a job
- Averaged the highest number of community service hours worked in a month (an average of 18 hours/month) and specifically more hours working in service to a church which was the leading community service activity for all three categories (parents’ education: high school diploma or less; some postsecondary education; bachelor’s degree or higher).

(Staklis, 2010)

Although the data cast an image that the first-generation student population has many challenges, it also revealed that first-generation students hold to within 1% of their continuing-generation college peers with regard to their academic achievement within their first year in college (i.e., earning grades comparable to their peers; Staklis, 2010). Although 10% more reported having taken a remedial level course (i.e., they were 4% more likely to have taken a remedial course during their freshmen year), first-generation students were exactly average with their continuing-generation peers at having taken an average of two remedial courses during their freshmen year.

First-generation students’ challenges can be attributed to a lack of resources or access to resources (via cultural capital, economic capital, political capital, or other social forces) rather than having a lack of intellectual or academic
ability. What the data fail to reveal, but which is the outcome when an individual does not have access to resources and the various forms of capital, is that first-generation college students also lack access to certain literacy practices (e.g., knowing how and when to use secondary Discourses in the correct context at the right time with the proper people [Gee, 1989b] and to other forms of knowledge as not all knowledge is academic). As Apple (2004) stated,

One way to think about culture in society is to employ a metaphor of distribution. That I one can think about knowledge as being unevenly distributed among social and economic classes, occupational groups, different age groups, and groups of different power. Thus some groups have access to knowledge distributed to them and not distributed to others. The obverse of this is also probably true. The lack of certain kinds of knowledge – where your particular group stands in the complex process of cultural preservation and distribution – is related, no doubt, to the absence in that group of certain kinds of political and economic power in society. (p. 14)

When considering the Discourses within colleges and universities, of higher and postsecondary education, of WU, it must considered how “particular ‘kinds’ of students ‘get’ particular kinds of knowledge and dispositions” (Apple, 2004, p. 15) and how this informs the development of their situated identity.
First-generation students and immediate enrollment in postsecondary education. Gaining admission to a postsecondary institution and attending immediately after high school is more often the experience of continuing-generation college students. First-generation students are not as likely to hold to this trajectory. Each year since 1992, “those whose parents had less education [than a bachelor’s degree or higher have had lower immediate college enrollment rates each year since 1992 [the earliest year for which comparable data on parents’ education are available]” (Aud et al., 2010, p. 70) than students whose parents had earned at least a Bachelor’s degree. The data in Table 6 reflect the difference between immediate attendance rates from 1992 and the most recent data from 2008. Table 7 shows the percentage comparisons from 1992 and 2008.

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than or equal to high school diploma</td>
<td>50.1%</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college, including vocational/technical schools</td>
<td>67.5%</td>
<td>72.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree or higher</td>
<td>81.3%</td>
<td>82.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>38.0%</td>
<td>54.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school or less</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, 2010*
It is worth noting that in the sixteen years since these data were first collected, there has been little movement among any group except for those who have had parents with some college or postsecondary education experience. With all of the programs, interventions, and initiatives in the U.S. to improve the number of students earning Bachelor’s degrees, little progress has been made in this area.

**First-generation college student retention and attrition.** First-generation students are members of a larger student population that have historically been under-represented among students who graduate from high school and enroll in a college or university to pursue a four-year degree (Chen, 2005). Specifically, first-generation student do not have members in their immediate family who are able to speak from experience as it relates to earning a Bachelor’s degree. In addition, there is no one who can, from experience, counteract the potential negative perceptions the family or the student may have about educational environments. The lack of these resources places the first-generation student at disadvantage in that the Discourse of higher education is not a part of their primary Discourse. Their understanding of the Discourse of higher education is learned and not acquired and is a part of the other secondary Discourses they will encounter.

First-generation college students have many factors that place them at a particular disadvantage, none of which negates the impact of being a first-generation college student (Choy, 2001). According to a set of studies conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics examining what takes place when
first-generation high school graduates and postsecondary students reach the point of access to postsecondary education, being a first-generation student places an individual at a clear “disadvantage” (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2001, p. xvii1).

Furthermore, this disadvantage continues to exist, “even after taking into account other important factors such as educational expectations, academic preparation, support from parents and schools and family income” (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2001, p. v). Although first-generation students might successfully negotiate their disadvantaged position to gain admission and enroll in a college or university, it does not change their disadvantaged status. Even when “controlling for other related factors [family income, educational expectations, academic preparation, parental involvement, and peer influence]” (Choy, 2001, p. 8) of being a first-generation student, not having parents who attended college most significantly affected these students as they worked to matriculate through their institutions to graduate and earn their degree. Given that first-generation students acquire the Discourse of higher education, it is important to understand the mechanisms through which they are acquiring the Discourse.

The attrition implications for first-generation students continue through the first two years of their college experience. Berkner and Choy (2008) reported that among many other facts, the three-year attrition rates of the first-year, full-time freshmen who were a part of the 2004-2006 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS:04/06). Table 8 reports the retention rates of
first-generation and continuing education college students who were a part of BPS:04/06.

Table 8

*Percentage of Beginning Postsecondary Students Who Enrolled in 4-Year Institutions 2003-2004, Who Attained or Did Not Attain a Bachelor’s Degree by June 2006, by Parents’ Highest Education Completed*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student and Institutional Characteristics</th>
<th>Attained Degree by June 2006</th>
<th>No Degree, Last Enrolled Anywhere</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest education of parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school or less</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some postsecondary</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree or higher</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Within the first two years of enrollment, students whose parents did not go beyond high school were twice as likely to leave a four-year institution when compared to students whose parents had some postsecondary education. They were three times as likely as students whose parents earned a Bachelor’s degree or higher to leave in the first two years of attendance. By the third year post-enrollment, there is a slight difference of 2% in comparison to the first two years between all three groups. Although the purpose of this study was not to determine the cause of this leveling out of student departure or of the higher figures for the other demographic groups, it is certainly a fact worth noting. It should be noted
that the number of first-generation students who earned a degree in the three years is almost 3% higher than for continuing generation students. These figures include vocational degrees as well as associates degrees, which are programs that are disproportionately pursued by first-generation students.

Last, all three groups reported the leading reason for their departure within the first year were personal reasons, followed by financial reasons. Although some might assume academic reasons as the leading departure reason for first-generation college students in particular, this was actually the third lowest reason for all three groups (Berkner & Choy, 2008).

**Establishing the Theoretical Context of Higher and Postsecondary Education**

Colleges and universities are historically rooted in White, middle- to upper-middle-class traditions. The earliest U.S. institution of higher education was created to “provide a learned ministry to the colonies” (Harvard, 2005, p. 3) from an educational opportunity for White, Anglo-Saxon males in their religious traditions. This was in keeping with the practices of the time, whereby colleges were associated with a religious organization (Harvard, 2005; Stanford, 2010). Today, the U.S. has many different types of institutions of higher education: Some are established under the federal Land Grant Act of 1862, whereas others are private religious institutions, tribal colleges, Hispanic serving institutions, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Many U.S. colleges and universities remain influenced by the social, historical, and economic forces within the greater society.
As the issues of student development and identity, as well as Discourse and technology within the context of higher education are explored, both as separate and as interconnected issues, there are certain practices that must be foregrounded. Higher education, and education in general, has been contested by many as a means of producing and perpetuating socially constructed norms and practices, leading some critical theorists to explore the subject of education as a “ritual performance” (McLaren, 1999) or others to explore the experience of, “twelve non-academic working class lads from a town we shall call Hammertown and attending a school we shall call Hammertown Boys …, [a] non-selective secondary modern school” (Willis, 1977, p. 4). It is in this work in which Willis explored “how middle class kids get middle class jobs [and] why other let them” (p. 1). Moreover, he stated the following about the working class and capitalism:

The working class does not have to believe in dominant ideology. It does not need to mask of democracy to cover its face of oppression. The very existence and consciousness of the middle class is deeply integrated into that structure which gives it dominance. There are none who believe so well as those who oppress as honest men. What kind of bourgeoisie is it that does not in some way believe its own legitimations? That would be the denial of themselves. It would be the solution of a problem of which they were the main puzzle. It would invite self-destruction as the next logical move. The working class is the only group in
capitalism that does not have to believe in the capitalist
legitimations as a condition of its own survival. (p. 123)

The issue of class difference remains a silent issue not to be discussed in
polite company. Class issues, social inequity, and socioeconomic issues are rarely
directly addressed in the form of a fear or concern; rather, these are typically
viewed as opportunities or resources that only students in a lower socioeconomic
group could take advantage of to help pay their college enrollment costs. bell
hooks (1994) called attention to the “bourgeois class biases” (p. 178) at work in
higher education. To make her point, hooks (1994) shared her personal
undergraduate experience:

During my college years is was tacitly assumed that we all agreed
class should not be talked about, that there would be no critique of
the bourgeois class biases shaping and informing pedagogical
process (as well as social etiquette) in the classroom…As silence
and obedience to authority were most rewarded, students learned
that this was the appropriate demeanor in the classroom. Loudness,
anger, emotional outbursts, and even something as seemingly
innocent as unrestrained laughter were deemed unacceptable,
vulgar disruptions of classroom social order. These traits were also
associated with being a member of the lower class. If one was not
from a privileged class group, adopting a demeanor similar to that
of the group could help one to advance. It is still necessary for
students to assimilate bourgeois values to be deemed acceptable.

(p. 178)

hooks’s (1994) depiction of her undergraduate experience is not a rare occurrence. This experience is the lived experience of many students currently enrolled in higher education as the values discussed have been institutionalized. She acknowledged that students had to choose to either abide by the class values that were at work or risk *losing face* with peers, faculty members, and others. Apple (2004) acknowledged that the labels that have been created to differentiate one group from another are

all commonsense constructions *which grow out of the nature of existing institutions*. As such they must be treated as historically conditioned data, not absolutes … . They are – categories that developed out of specific social and historical situations which conform to a specific framework of assumptions and institutions, the use of which brings with it the logic of the institutional assumptions as well. (p. 127)

The *silence* that can then exist in the classroom and the use of labels are not solely an action that takes place in that singular space or location or in a particular level of school. The socialization of children (and parents) in primary and secondary education has been at least a twelve-year enculturation. Although hooks contested the issue of class and Apple contested the use of labels, they are but two of many issues that have been contested. The use of language in the construction of a *practice of silence* and labels treated as real or reified practices
remain at the heart of what many recognize as the *hidden curriculum* in higher education, discussed next.

The hidden curriculum in higher education consists of many different practices all with the same intended and *unintended* ends. Although accomplished through different daily occurrences, hidden curriculum is a practice found within all levels of education. The hidden curriculum that is taught (and practiced) has been developed in such a way as to “maintain the ideological hegemony of the most powerful classes in this society” (Apple, 2004, p. 41). For an individual to internalize and carry forward hegemonic beliefs and practices (i.e., practices that work to the favor of the dominant and the disfavor of the minority or lower class but are thought to be of benefit to all) he or she must be taught during earliest educational experiences (Apple, 2004; Margolis, Soldatenko, Acker & Gair, 2001).

Higher and postsecondary education is not exempt from this practice as “[h]idden curricula occur at multiple places and times during schooling” (Margolis, Soldatenko, Acker & Gair, 2001, p. 16). These are not an overt or visible set of practices; rather, as the name refers, these consist of a set of hidden or *invisible* practices that take place in everyday activities and events, within everyday practices and in everyday language. I refer to the occurrences as *everyday* in the context of a calendar day as well as meaning within typical conversations and activities that take place in the classroom and in interactions between individuals (Apple, 2004; Margolis, Soldatenko, Acker & Gair, 2001), in which students are socialized to behave in accordance with particular cultural
expectations (Apple, 2004). It is within these *school acts* that one can find cultural
capital, which acts as a sorting mechanism that duplicates the rank order found in
society. Apple (2004) recognized that Pierre Bourdieu asked readers to consider
the following regarding cultural capital:

[We must] think of cultural capital as we would economic capital.
Just as our dominant economic institutions are structured so that
those who inherit it or already have economic capital do better, so
too does cultural capital act in the same way. Cultural capital
(“good taste”, certain kinds of prior knowledge, abilities and
language forms) is unequally distributed throughout society and
this is dependent in large part of the division of labor and power in
that society. (p. 31)

Accordingly, Apple (2004) called attention to Bourdieu’s request that “we must
not see culture as neutral” (p. 31).

The reality is that each of the examples provided above are examples of
constraining activities, each having a significant impact on the collective
community while negatively affecting marginalized populations who have been
socialized to accept these experiences as *just everyday occurrences*. This is not to
say that all educators are actively engaging in these practices, but noting these
practices should serve as a cautionary notice to those working in the field of
education that their positions are not neutral and that there is a responsibility “not
to reinscribe the very modes of domination in our practice with students,” to

**Student Development Theory.** As students transition from high school to college, they take on a new perspective and a new way of behaving. Within the field of higher education, there have been several theories that have been developed to support this premise. The work of noted psychosocial theorist Erick Erickson (1950, 1968) and student development theorist Arthur Chickering (1969) (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998) have influenced the field of theorists and their research examining college student development, as well as the resultant theories (e.g., James Marcia [1966] and his model of ego identity status; Ruthellen Josselson [1987a] and her pathways to women’s identity theory; William E. Cross [1991] and his model of African American identity; Janet Helms [1993d] and her model of white identity; Jean Phinney [1990] and her model of ethnic identity; Anthony D’Augelli [1994] and Vivienne Cass [1979] and their models of homosexual identity development; Nancy Schlossberg [1989] and her model of transition theory; Vincent Tinto [1993] and his model of college student departure) (Evans et al., 1998).

Each of these single identity theories considers how individuals in a particular role experience that particular identity (e.g., racial identity, sexual identity). The theories do not address how one individual in many roles develops multiple identities simultaneously (e.g., a senior-level undergraduate African American male who is a first-generation engineering student attending a historically predominantly Hispanic-serving institution). Postsecondary students
are now more than at any other point in time developing and experiencing multiple roles and multiple identities as they matriculate through their institutions during a time of unprecedented enrollment.

More recent scholarship has explored students’ multiple identity development, but the concept of multiple identities is not a recent phenomenon. As determined by Evans N. J., Forney, Guido, Renn, & Patton (2010), “In the past, the dominant culture controlled the invisibility of the discourse around multiple identities, as well as oppressions and privileges” (p. 244). Much of the early student development theory scholarship did not directly acknowledge the institutional practices, and not those solely of postsecondary institution, that privileged dominant populations while marginalizing non-dominant populations (i.e., individuals who were not White males). The resultant theories either reflected one-dimensional students who were representative of the majority population or those on the margins who were experiencing difficulty with their multiple identities. Rather than challenge the status quo and specifically name the challenges students experienced (e.g., discrimination, oppression, marginalization, reproduction of dominant Discourses, hegemony, and lack of economic, cultural, academic, or social capital), generalized or neutral terms like “challenge” by “external forces” or “undergoing” a type of “encounter” (Evans et al., 2010) have been used by some theorists which has an effect of neutralizing or minimalizing the nature of the encounters students are facing. This has been practiced as a norm.
To better understand the evolution in student identity theory, three theories are particularly relevant to this study. The theories can be classified as the following: Multiple Identity Theory, a 21st-century approach that has added to the field of multiple identity scholarship in the field of higher education; Student Integration Model, a 20th-century approach now recognized as being out of alignment with current higher education practice; and Marginalizing and Mattering, a 20th-century approach that reflects issues relevant to students now enrolled in colleges and universities. Scholarship in the field of student affairs and in other related fields of study, psychology and counseling, “have provided a better illumination of our multiple identities and their corresponding privileges and oppressions” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 244). Evans, et al., (2010) recognized the importance of future research in this area, “The ways in which individual identities such as race, class, and gender are woven together to create a whole, unique individual, not a person with separate, distinct, unrelated identity categories, demands more study” (p. 247). This study hopes to add to the body of multiple identity scholarship.

In 2007, Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007), based on the work of Abes and Jones (2004), reconceptualized Jones and McEwen’s (2000) model of multiple dimensions of identity. In 2004 Abes and McEwen conducted a study on the identity development of lesbian students that resulted in a revised conceptual model that provided a visual representation of the construction of the students’ multiple identities. Although developed in their study of lesbian college students, the model could be applied to a generalized population of U.S. college students.
This study, and resulting conceptual model, was the first of its kind in the field. Abes et al. (2007) revised the earlier model, adding key factors they felt were missing from the previous model. Figure 3 shows which included the addition of a meaning-making filter.

![Figure 3: Reconceptualized model of multiple dimensions of identity. Source: Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007)](image)

Using grounded theory and the constructivist-developmental theoretical approach to their work, the model was based on the work of Reynolds and Pope (1991), Deaux (1993) and Jones (1997). Both the models by Abes and McEwen
(2000) and Abes et al. (2007) incorporated many of the elements that are foundational to the work of Stryker (1994) and Burke and Tully (1977). Abes et al.’s (2007) “model of multiple dimensions of identity describes the dynamic construction of identity and the influence of changing contexts on the relative salience of multiple identity dimensions, such as race, sexual orientation, culture, and social class” (p. 2). Both models depict a core identity with multiple identities, the salient nature of each identity, the correlations of intersecting identities, and the context within which identities are developed; the revised model, however, shows a two-dimensional representation of the interaction between context, meaning-making, and identity perceptions (p. 4). Directional arrows were included, demonstrating the influence of “contextual influences, such as peers, family, norms, stereotypes, sociopolitical issues” (p. 7). Abes et al. also incorporated “meaning-making” as a representative filter with “grid” that had the ability to grow more closely woven or more loosely woven depending on the complexity of the individual’s “meaning-making capacity” (p. 6).

Although the model created by Abes et al. (2007) was an important addition to the field of student development theory, it does not incorporate certain elements of this study that are critical to the existence of a fully representative model. With the remainder of this chapter I explore the theoretical elements I believe are necessary to broaden the research in the area of identity development of college students beyond its current understanding.

**Student Integration Model.** For years elements the work of Vincent Tinto (1983) has been contested my several researchers. These researchers
(Braxton, Sullivan & Johnson, 1997; Martin, 2010; Rendón, 1994; Rendón, Jalomo & Nora 2000; Saunders & Serna, 2004; Tierney, 1992) have contested his theory and model of interaction and persistence and shared data that contradicted his student integration findings. Some have devoted entire book chapters to a review of the theory’s validity and application (Smart, 1997). According to Tierney (1992), Tinto himself acknowledged the limitations and imperfection of his theory (Tierney, 1992, p. 607). At that time Tinto was stated to have been referencing to his failure to more fully identify the significant role of finances on a student’s decision to leave college.

The element of research at issue is Tinto’s claim regarding the need for academic and social integration of students in their college departure decision. As some would have it, this representation of integration meant that “For first-generation students, movement into the middle class requires a ‘leaving off’ and a ‘taking on,’ a shedding of one’s social identity and the acquisition of another” (London, 1996, p.22). More broadly stated, the issue of “leaving off” and “taking on” was not solely about who identified as middle class but that of a person who identified with the role of a college student. Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) stated, specifically, some have questioned whether the reliance of Tinto’s model on separation from one’s native culture as a precondition for persistence is appropriate or applicable to the experiences of many minority students. For example, in Hispanic cultures “separation is often not a viable option, as family is a source of rootedness and strength” (Rendón, et al., p. 139). That is, separation is problematic
because it suggests that minority students must disconnect from their past norms and cultural patterns and “turn over their loyalty to the conventions and practices of the academy which may have little or nothing to do with the realities from which [these] students come” (Rendón, p. 3). Therefore to better address this problem, both in research and in design of institutional retention policies and programs, minority students’ perspectives need to be considered on their own terms, not in terms of their compatibility with dominant group values and behaviors. (p. 418)

In the context of the present study, separation is problematic because it suggests that first-generation students must disconnect from the norms and cultural patterns they have always known to the point of college enrollment. Tinto’s (1983) model would not allow first-generation students to transition from the role of a high school college to a college student without sacrificing the former for the latter. To continue the word substitution, “to better address this problem, both in research and in design of institutional [messaging and Discourse in addition to] retention policies and programs, [first-generation] students’ perspectives need to be considered on their own terms, not in terms of their compatibility with dominant group values and behaviors.”

In 2006 Vincent Tinto, based on more current research on the college experiences of under-represented student populations, revised his position on his own findings (1988),
Take for instance the research on the retention of under-represented students and the so-called stages of student departure (Tinto, 1988). Where it was once argued that retention required students to break away from past communities, we now know that for some if not many students the ability to remain connected to their past communities, family, church, or tribe is essential to their persistence. (p. 4)

New research and findings allowed Tinto to change his position on his own model. This change in language, perception and practice - based on new research and findings regarding first-generation college student retention - reflects the considerations, conversations, research, and practices that should now be occurring in postsecondary education.

**Marginalizing and mattering.** Contrary to the controversy around particular elements of Tinto’s theory, the work of Nancy Schlossberg has maintained its relevance to current practice. Although her early work focused on adult males transitioning to college (1967), through time her work considered the following transitional experiences: adult women and men transitioning through occupational change; *basic truths* about adults transitioning through life; adults in postsecondary education; and adults transitioning from the world of work to the world of retirement. She conducted these investigations to help both the adult and those in supportive roles (e.g., teachers, administrators, employers, counselors, family, and friends) better understand the experience and the changes that would occur as individuals moved from one role into another. The experience of
transitioning from the role of a high school student to that of a college student is similarly fraught with change and uncertainty; the questions of *what if* and *if only* (Schlossberg, 1967) still remain. From the perspective of those in supportive roles (e.g., teachers, administrators, employers, counselors, family, friends, web developers, and those who have been delegated duties and responsibilities for maintaining institutional websites), the need for practices that recognize the dynamics at work are more pressing than ever before, given the diversity of the student population and colleges and universities they are attending.

It is Schlossberg’s (1989) work in the area of marginalization and mattering that is also a key theoretical consideration for this study:

The polar themes of marginality and mattering connect all of us rich or poor, young and old, male and female. Are we part of things, do we belong; are we central or marginal? Do we make a difference; do others care about us and make us feel we matter…My work on transitions-events or nonevents that alter our lives convinced me that people in transition often feel marginal and that they do not matter. Whether we are entering first grade or college…we are concerned about our new roles. We wonder, will we belong? Will we matter? (p. 6)

**Marginality.** Robert E. Park (1928) applied the following definition of *marginalized* when describing the experience of Jews who had been living in medieval ghettos and later returned to live among others who had not lived in the ghetto. He defined the marginalized person as
a new type of personality, living and sharing intimately in the cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples; never quite willing to break, even if he were permitted to do so, with his past and his traditions, and not quite accepted, because of racial prejudice, in the new society in which the he now sought to find a place. He was a man on the margin of two cultures and two societies. (p. 892)

Sans the gender and racial references, this definition was a contributing definition to the work of Schlossberg (1989). As Schlossberg discussed marginality, she posited that

The larger the difference between the former role and the new role the more marginalized the person may feel, especially if there are no norms for the new roles. The first students of nontraditional age to attend traditional campuses, for example, faced such problems. They had no norms to anticipate their pioneering role. (p. 7)

Her research determined that there were three types of marginality: a state of being that occurs during a in time of change, a particular type of individual or personality, or the manner in which one lives their life or “a way of life” (p. 8).

How then does the institutional Discourse on institutional webpages make manifest the issues of marginalization and mattering? These considerations are posed as a research question for this study given the existing data that shows that first-generation students have a greater likelihood of being “overrepresented in the most disadvantaged racial, income, and gender groups, and they inhabit
intersecting sites of oppression that uniquely position them within this broader context of educational stratification” (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005, p. 409).

Applying the given definition of a marginalized person would result in the recognition that some first-generation college students experience a temporary feeling of being marginalized as they develop the new situated identity of a college student. The second definition could be applied to reveal that some first-generation college students could feel marginalized. How then do colleges and universities reflect these possibilities within the messages found on their websites? As a medium for communicating the institutional views, beliefs, practices, culture and norms, expectations, and Discourse, marginalization should not be taken for granted because it matters.

**Mattering.** Mattering is at the other end of the continuum from marginalization. In Schlossberg’s definition for mattering, she quoted noted self-esteem researcher Morris Rosenberg (researcher who developed the Self Esteem Scale, 1989) as stating that mattering is the “direct reciprocal of significance” (as cited in Schlossberg, 1989 p. 9): “Mattering refers to our belief, whether right or wrong, that we matter to someone else. This belief is a motivator” (p. 9) and could affect a student’s decision to attend a local college or one of significant distance from their home thus requiring them to leave their family and friends.

Schlossberg’s (1989) research findings determined that marginality and mattering occurred throughout life and confirmed the fact that “people need to feel that they count, they belong, they matter” (p. 11). Other dimensions of mattering include attention that counteracts when an individual feels “we know no
one and where no one would notice if we did not appear”; importance in that “the
other person cares about what we want, think and do or is concerned with our
fate, is to matter …. Mattering does not necessarily mean approval”; ego-
extension or “the feelings that other people will be proud of our accomplishments
or saddened by our failures”; dependence in a way that acknowledges “our
dependence on others … our actions are equally governed by their dependence on
us” (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981 as cited by Schlossberg, 1989); appreciation
hence the “feeling that their efforts were appreciated”) (pp. 9-10).

Along a similar line of research, Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) confirmed
the findings of the work of Patrick Terenzini et al. (1993) that “[e]arly validation
appears to be a central element in students’ successful transition to college”
(p.19). Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) also confirmed the finding by Terenzini et al.,
(1993) that “Whether academically or socially (and there are decided variations
across institutional types), new student need to be reassured that they can succeed:
that they can do college-level work, that their ideas and opinions have value, that
they are worthy of the attention and respect of faculty, staff and peers alike”
(Terenzini et al., 1993, p.15). The early work of providing validation or mattering
does not begin once a student has set foot on campus but via the institutional
Discourse found on the college or university’s website.

Belonging. In addition to marginalization, mattering, and validation as key
factors to the successful development and successful transition of first-generation
college students, belonging is a fourth factor to be considered. By direct statement
or through inference, belonging is as significant as the three aforementioned
issues. Schlossberg (1989) used the terms when defining marginalization and mattering. In 1995, Baumeister and Leary published a comprehensive (but not exhaustive) review of existing literature as it related to the need to belong. The review spanned theoretical and empirical evidence focused on many areas of belonging. The first step taken in this review was to establish the metatheoretical prerequisites of their claim “that the need to belong, or any other drive, is a fundamental human motivation” (p. 498). They established that

A fundamental motivation should (a) produce effects readily under all but adverse conditions, (b) have affective consequences, (c) direct cognitive processing, (d) lead to ill effects (such as on health or adjustment) when thwarted, (e) elicit goal-oriented behavior designed to satisfy it (subject to motivational patterns such as object substitutability and satiation), (f) be universal in the sense of applying to all people, (g) not be derivative of other motives, (h) affect a broad variety of behaviors, and (i) have implications that go beyond immediate psychological functioning. (p. 498)

As germane to the development of first-generation college students and their motivation for bonding, the fifth criterion addresses the issue of motivation. According to Baumeister and Leary (1995),

A motivation can be considered to be fundamental only if health, adjustment, or well-being requires that it be satisfied. Also, motivations can be sorted into wants and needs, the difference being in the scope of ill effects that follow from nonsatisfaction:
Unsatisfied needs should lead to pathology (medical, psychological, or behavioral), unlike unsatisfied wants. Thus, if belongingness is a need rather than simply a want, then people who lack belongingness should exhibit pathological consequences beyond mere temporary distress. (p. 498)

As a motivational factor, the need for social bonds should be considered when examining the issues of enrollment, transition, and retention of first-generation college students. As colleges and universities develop their institutional websites, messaging to help students understand that creating bonds is not only an important part of their upcoming college experience but should also demonstrate that the institutional realization and commitment to this important element in their college-going experience.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) succinctly described the need to belong as “the need for regular social contact with those to whom one feels connected” (p. 501). They also proposed that the need to belong has two primary characteristics, that “people need frequent personal contacts or interactions” that would be both “affectively positive or pleasant .... [Moreover, it should be] free from conflict and negative affect” and that “there is an interpersonal bond or relationship marked by stability, affective concern and continuation into the foreseeable future” (p. 500).

The effects of belonging are among the strongest feelings one can experience. Although not all relationships are equal (e.g., romantic relationships versus parental relationships versus close friendships versus membership in a
fraternity or sorority), a regularly occurring, affectively positive relationship exists has positive effects. When an individual is accepted and feels as though he or she belongs or is included, he or she can experience any number of positive feelings ranging from “bliss and joy”, “happiness”, “subjective well-being” to “elation, contentment, and calm” (p. 508). Most importantly, within these relationships the individual must believe that the other person or persons “cares about his or her welfare and likes (or loves) him or her” (p. 500).

Forming bonds is not an experience that occurs only with those with whom an individual may have a positive experience or history. Under adverse conditions individuals will form bonds with former adversaries. After a review of these data, Baumeister and Leary (1995) determined that “belongingness motivations appear to be able to overcome some antagonistic, competitive, or divisive tendencies” (p. 502). They also found that given a chance to build bonds or relationships that people would lean toward “a communal orientation” (p. 502). Otherwise stated, when individuals desire a relationship with another but found that the way in which they wanted to have the relationship would not be possible, they were willing to have the relationship based on the terms available to them – terms determined by the other individual or by the situation (rather than in a romantic relationship and friendship was to be had).

Belongingness, or the lack thereof, is not as simple as feeling connected to another or others. Individuals can also experience or fear experiencing the loss of a relationship, through divorce or death, or exclusion. Each of these experiences brings varying degrees of emotional distress but the loss through death of a loved
one (e.g., husband or wife, close friend or child) is among the “most stressful events” that a person can experience (Baumeister and Leary, 1995, p. 507). This type of loss can result in grief in the form severe depression. An individual can also experience anxiety at the thought of their own death or that of a different loved one. This experience stems from a fear in “being separated from friends and family” (p. 507). Divorce, which is also the loss of a relationship, can illicit the feelings of “distress, including anger, depression, desolation, and loneliness in nearly everyone” (p. 507).

The lack of belongingness most likely to be experienced by a first-generation college student would include not feeling included or accepted, social exclusion, or the “dissolution of social bonds” (Baumeister and Leary, 1995, p. 506). Because students could feel concern about the potential disconnect from family and friends as a result of going away to college, these feeling could affect the decisions they make regarding where they will attend a postsecondary institution. As concluded by Baumeister and Leary (1995) “both actual and potential bonds exert substantial effects on how people think” (p. 505).

The perception that one may not be accepted or included has been shown to have an emotional and psychological effect on individuals. As a result of the perception of not being accepted or included, individuals experienced both “general depression and social depression (i.e., dysphoria about the nature of one’s social relationships” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 506).

Hoyle and Crawford (1994) studied 107 students at a large college university to gather information on the student’s measures of “personal
adjustment, and their social relationships at the university” (p. 478). The data reflected a connection between the feeling of belonging and social outcomes. Students experienced both “depression and anxiety” as a result of their lack of a sense of belonging to the university due to their lack of daily interaction through involvement in activities at the university (Hoyle & Crawford, 1994, p. 479).

“Social exclusion may well be the most common and important cause of anxiety” (Baumeister & Tice, 1990, as cited by Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 506). This exclusion can produce feelings of anxiety – an effect felt by children as young as one year of age and adults who are separated from their mothers or loved ones, respectively. When an individual has had previous negative experiences in which they were excluded from a group, anxiety and the thought of this occurring again “increases physiological arousal” (Craighead, Kimball, & Rehak, 1979, as cited by Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 506); however, when an individual is included or socially accepted the previously experienced anxiety is eradicated and the effects of the exclusion are canceled out.

For some, ending a social bond, even when the individuals entered the situation knowing the time together would be finite (i.e., training groups) was not something they were willing to do. Individuals work to preserve relationships and social connections, and some have experienced an unwillingness to end what would be considered negative or abusive relationships (Baumeister and Leary, 1995, p. 503). When an individual has made up his or her mind to end an intimate relationship, he or she would most often feel a tremendous amount of distress over its ending (p. 503). In some situations “many social institutions and behavior
patterns seem to serve a need to preserve at least the appearance of social attachment in the absence of actual, continued interaction” (p. 502). For example, people still resist dropping each other’s name from the mailing list because to do so signifies a final dissolution of the social bond. In fact, most people will send Christmas cards to perfect strangers from whom they received cards. People seem not to want to risk damaging a relationship even if they do not know the identity of the other person. (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 503)

To use a modern-day vernacular or a euphemism, this action within the context of social networking websites, such as Facebook, might also be known as *unfriending* an acquaintance, which is a significant enough action in our culture to warrant an, although unofficial, *National Unfriend Day* on November 17 (National Unfriend Day, 2010).

It has been found that “having some intimate bonds appears to be important and perhaps even necessary for happiness. Social isolation is practically incompatible with high levels of happiness” (Baumeister and Leary, 1995, p.506). The point of having intimate bonds in not in having a voluminous number of friends, but to have close relationships with others. To that end, there is another experience to consider – when an individual’s need for belonging is only partially met. It is not enough that an individual have interactions with others (i.e., social contact), the experience of belonging is critical to meeting this need (i.e., intimate connections). No matter how many friends one may have nor the amount of time spent with friends, if the need for intimate connections is not met, the individual
has been shown to experience loneliness. The review of the literature resulted in the recognition that the medical, psychological, and behavioral effects increased the following “effects on the immune system”, “mental illness”, “eating disorders”, “combat-related stress is also moderated”, “negative effect on adult crime…[but that] social bonds with other criminals or to criminal groups may foster crime”, “lying, cheating and stealing”, “suicide”, or “anxiety, depression grief, jealousy and loneliness” (p. 508).

Baumeister and Leary (1995) determined that belonging met the metatheoretical prerequisites of their claim “that the need to belong, or any other drive, is a fundamental human motivation” (p. 498). They determined that belonging was a need and not a want. Moreover, they determined that “The need to belong can be considered a fundamental human motivation” (p. 521). In their conclusion they noted, “A general pattern may well be that cultures use social inclusion to reward, and exclusion to punish, their members as a way of enforcing their values” (p. 521). Relevant to this study, the authors stated,

In the U.S., the melting pot ideology has recently gone out of fashion as the nation has begun to accept the problematic reality of multiple, separate enclaves defined by racial and ethnic background. In short, it appears that asking people to redefine their belongingness to accommodate new realities is difficult and only sometimes successful. (p. 522)

Belonging has far-reaching implications, in that it is not merely an issue of fact but one that begins with an individual’s own perception of belonging. First-
generation college students could make certain assumptions about their sense of belonging at an institution from the couch in their home based on what they view and how they make meaning of the messages on institutional websites.

**The Present Study**

It was upon this multi-faceted theoretical foundation that this study was developed. This study required the bringing together of many theories from various research areas. Having shared the theory associated with the study, I now provide some background regarding myself as the researcher – an insider and outsider to this study, a description follows of my researcher/practitioner paradigm and any assumptions I believe to exist regarding students and higher education.

**Researcher’s vantage point.** I am both an insider and an outsider to this phenomenon. I am in this context a researcher/practitioner and a budding scholar, but I have multiple identities and corresponding roles; I am not one without the others. I am an insider to this research study in great part because of these roles, which have afforded me opportunities to learn and to be literate in the institutional Discourses. I am an insider in that I am a member of socially constructed marginalized groups and have been categorized as a member of other on many different occasions. In contrast, I was an outsider to the many of the Discourses of the students who were participants in this study.

As a university employee who was also responsible for oversight of the campus units coordinating the summer transition program, I made arrangements with the staff members who assisted with the coordination the summer programs
on Campus A and Campus B to establish some parameters to delineate my role as 
a researcher from my role as administrator. For example, when I first presented
the study to the summer program students, it on a day during a week when I was
not scheduled to work on that campus. I was there to present as a researcher and
did not have any other interaction with them during that week other than in that
capacity. I also conducted the focus group meeting with the students in a
conference room in the campus library. Although I conducted the two student
interviews in my office, the interviews occurred after the summer program had
ended.

Each of my roles and multiple identities have influenced my identity as a
researcher/practitioner – and, by extension, my paradigm or theoretical approach
to research. As Guba and Lincoln (1994) explained,

A paradigm may be viewed as a set of basic beliefs … that …
represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the
“world,” the individuals place in it, and the range of possible
relationships to that world and its parts”. (p. 107)

I am a critical theorist. I aspire to contribute to the scholarship of critical
discourse analysis and the scholarship of higher education. According to Mary
Lee Smith (2009), critical theory posits that the ways individuals come to make
meaning is not accidental and that their understanding is “conditioned by the
material, economical, historical, and social-structural conditions in which they
live” (p. 17). I believe that individuals think and believe in ways that support
dominant culture and yet are unaware of the manner in which dominant culture is
the practiced norm. As a result, I am aware of my own proclivity toward speaking to abuses of power and issues of equity and have, whenever necessary, worked to maintain a neutral stance while I gathered the data and interacted with the study participants. I sought to never interject my personal persuasions upon another. It was my goal to be the type of researcher who walked among the flowers without disturbing them, to be present but not disturb, and to honor the trust the students and staff members had so willingly placed in me. Despite this, I recognized that separation was not completely possible and that even the topic of my dissertation was the result of my personal philosophy and interest.

**Assumptions.** I believe that individuals react to such social barrier categories as gender, race, and class as if they were as real – as though they were material or physical objects. This is a reciprocal action, as both the perceiver and the perceived have the potential of reacting to these categories. I also believe that there are certain assumptions that are made by others regarding students.

In my 15 years of working in higher education, it has been my experience there are those who make the following assumptions about students and higher and postsecondary education:

- Students share the same meaning of words and experiences
- Males and females share the same meaning of words and experiences
- Students of color means they are also low income and first-generation but don’t make the same assumption about White students
• If a student is categorized, by their definition or others, as *underprepared*, this is synonymous with his or her being low-income

• Pre-placement scores earned through standardized tests are good indicators of academic ability for all populations of students

• If faculty or staff members are careful and politically correct they will avoid negative messages to students (e.g., not stereotyping or saying negative things about a student’s background)

• Operate as though certain groups and Discourses are not privileged

• Higher and postsecondary education is a privilege.

It may not be one’s intentions to carry or perpetuate these assumptions but they are perpetuated. In the next chapter I address how students and staff members at WU have addressed these assumptions while exploring the six research questions.

**Synthesizing Statement**

As overall student enrollment in postsecondary education increases, so has the number of first-generation college students. WU is among the top five largest institutions in the U.S. and seeks to continue setting record enrollment figures. To keep up with the volume of new students, institutions rely more heavily on the use of the Internet as a means of communication. Students are equally as enterprising
in their use of the Internet, which has become a primary means of conducting
college searches and communicating with their select(ed) institution(s), as well as
a popular medium for social networking. However popular the use of the
technology may be, it is all being conducted within a new Discourse and with new
user requirements. Upon admission, communications with and information on the
institutional webpages shift from recruitment messages to messages about
students’ new affiliation with the institution in their situated identity: a college
student.

Whereas continuing generation students have the benefit of a parent who
has experienced this process, first-generation students, who choose to or are able
to go immediately from high school to college, are not institutional legacies and
must learn how and what it means to be a college student through other means.
They only have an outsider’s view and understanding of what is expected of them
as college students. There are many factors that place first-generation students at a
disadvantage but none of them can mitigate their status as a first-generation
student.

U.S. institutions of higher education have a history that began by
privileging one group over another. Higher and postsecondary institutions are not
exempt from experiencing the same social, political, historical, and cultural issues
faced by any other institution in which interactions and ways of being together
create a way of being a community of like people.

As first-generation students begin to develop the situated identity of
college students, they do so in the midst of their other multiple identities. They
grew up in a primary Discourse and have experienced and become adept at other secondary Discourses – Discourses that have informed and shaped their multiple identities. Being a college student who attends a particular institution requires very specific ways of being, which requires the students to be literate in the ways of being a WU kind of student. It is through the comprehension of written or oral language, learned or acquired through interaction in a particular context, in a secondary Discourse, that individuals make meaning of messages – an exercise in literacy. Being literate in one Discourse does not mean that an individual is or will be literate in another – resulting in the need for multiple literacies.

Using technology as a part of a role for a particular identity requires particular kinds of literacies and has the potential to impact the user in physical and cognitive ways. When an individual is working to develop a new situated identity and is not literate in the new Discourse, even when that is in part experienced through technology, he or she may experience difficulty in resolving any conflict. This individual may attribute these challenges to him- or herself or to the situation, observing others, seeking cues to make adjustments in their behavior. These observations compare and contrast how individuals believe they are to act in this new role to how the experience and make meaning of how others perceive they are to act in their new role. If they are unable to make changes to satisfactorily resolve the situation and their state of conflict, their identity development remains problematic. Ultimately the goal is to bring about resolution with their identity conflict.
As colleges and universities seek to increase the retention and graduation rates of all students, a key to unlocking this issue may be in understanding how those with commensurate academic profiles but the least cultural, economic, social, and political capital – first-generation students – are introduced to and become literate in the Discourse. All humans seek a place where they will belong and get a sense that they will matter to those with whom they are committing to spend the next several years. Chapter 3 includes a description of the methodological approach taken to explore the not so simple question that started me on this research path.
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

I conducted this qualitative case study to observe action taking place and the way in which first-generation college students make meaning. This multifaceted study examined the Internet and web practices of a specific group of first-generation college students, their use and meaning making of their universities website, their development of the situated identity of a college student, and the impact of institutional website on the situated identity formation of these select students. A multifaceted study was necessary, as the research questions were multifaceted. It was my goal to collect “rich data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 13-14). As Charmaz (2006) described it, “Rich data get beneath the surface of social and subjective life…. Rich data are detailed, focused and full. They reveal participants’ views, feelings, intentions, and actions, as well as the contexts and structures of their lives” (pp. 13-14). This multi-faceted study required the use of multiple inquiry methods to fully explore this phenomenon and to triangulate the data.

To explore and assess student development of the situated identity of a college student and the impact the messages located on the institutional webpages may have had on that development, I generated data from multiple sources. To gather the data I used a semantic differential questionnaire, conducted focus group meetings, conducted individual interviews, conducted observations of the students, and interviewed WU staff members. Copies of each of the letters to the participants and data collection instruments are located in the Appendix.
Prior to beginning my research I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to conduct this study. The IRB Letter of Approval is located in the Appendix. I strictly adhered to the conditions of the IRB by ensuring that I only conducted research with students who were aged 18 or older, that I would maintain confidentiality of all participants by using pseudonyms for each person, and that I would keep all documents and data in a secured location. Upon completion of the focus group meeting I revised my IRB application so that I could conduct individual interviews with two of the focus group participants.

There were two phases to this study, a pilot study and the study with the target population. During the pilot study I distributed a questionnaire and conducted focus group meetings with students who would be closely affiliated with, but not members of, my target population. During the study with the target population I conducted research in three areas: with summer program participants, on the Internet websites of three institutional units that specifically addressed incoming freshmen, and with university representatives who were responsible for developing and maintaining those institutional/departmental webpages. My research with the summer program students involved the following: distribution of a questionnaire, observations of the students as they engaged in classroom and other activities during the summer program, a focus group meeting, and individual interviews with two of the four focus group members. I conducted face-to-face interviews with the university staff members or administrators. Last, I collected screen shots or captured electronic images of the various unit webpages that I had previously identified as the focus of study.
I carefully considered several instruments and methods for their appropriateness for this study prior to deciding upon those used during this study. The questionnaire was adapted from two questionnaires previously used in other studies by Burke and colleagues to measure Situated Identity development (Burke & Tully, 1977; Reitzes & Burke, 1980).

The questionnaire data were used to establish the context and as a reference point for the most of the focus group discussion and for the student interviews. It provided an opportunity to understand the general consensus of a larger group, a combination of first-generation and continuing generation students, to use as a point of comparison with the smaller target group comprised of just first-generation students. It also provided an opportunity for cross comparison of two groups – first-generation college students and continuing generation (Pratt & Skaggs, 1989) college students. I decided to conduct a focus group as a part of the as I recognized the following:

The purpose of conducting a focus group is to listen and gather information. It is a way to better understand how people feel or think … a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment … [and] the intent of the focus group promote self-disclosure among participants. We want to know what people really think and feel. (Krueger & Casey, 2009, pp. 2-4)
I determined another appropriate step in this study would be to conduct participant observations. This step allowed me to observe the students in their new environment, observing their words and actions while interacting with their peers, faculty members, and staff members all within the university environment, which is key step to understanding situated identity development. According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992)

Through participant observation – through being a part of a social setting – you will learn firsthand how the actions of your others correspond to their words; see patterns of behavior; experience the unexpected, as well as the expected; and develop a quality of trust with your others that motivates them to tell you what otherwise they might not. (p. 39)

In total I conducted eight separate observations of the Campus A summer transition program students – twice during each of their four classes.

Conducting a semi-structured focus group session and individual interviews provided structure while also incorporating flexibility, so as to allow for the unique possibilities of each interaction. More specifically, the participants might have made similar or very different meaning of the same pieces of information, and it was a goal of this study to capture any similarities or differences expressed by the participants’ individual and collective responses.

To begin to capture identity development at an early stage, I identified a population of students who were just beginning their foray into higher education. It was important that these students had been accepted to the University and had
accepted the admission invitation. This was necessary because these students would have committed to attending WU and would have moved past the recruitment messaging to messaging directed toward an incoming first-year student. Additionally, it was important to try to observe the students in an environment in which they were transitioning within a postsecondary environment in which they were recognized as college students but with the understanding that the students were still learning what is being a college student.

With those considerations in mind, I identified a summer 2010 transition program specifically for incoming freshmen who would be attending the University in the fall 2010 semester.

The rationale for selecting students who were participants in this program was threefold. First, the program was only available to students who were first-time, full-time students attending the University the following fall semester. The program solicited participation by recruiting students who met particular criteria: According to the website, enrollment was limited to students who were required to take either pre-college math or pre-college English. This limitation was important in that these two courses were and are still considered pre-college level courses. These factors created a unique situation in that the students were college students taking pre-college courses. During the academic year, the university did not teach the pre-college math class but instead by the local community college district in partnership with the university.

Second, participation in the program was voluntary and the actual cost for all that was provided through the program was done so at an extremely reduced
out-of-pocket cost of $30.00 to cover administrative fees. There were many other incentives for students who participated in the program, which included earning up to seven academic credits during the second five-week summer session of courses.

Last, students were just weeks from having graduated from high school and might have still been realizing that they were a part of a new Discourse and identity. The transition to identifying as a college student may have still been in its formative stages; therefore, this allowed the students to have less familiarity with the institutional Discourse and may be better positioned to help me understand how the transition to the situated identity of a college student occurs.

Students who participated in this program elected to participate in an academic program that occurred in advance of the start of the fall semester. This permitted the researcher to study students who were in a non-residential program, engaged in situated activities that would encourage the development of the situated identity of a college student but who were still living at home where the familial expectations may not have changed in accordance with their new status as college students.

Although the summer program, which was completely an in-person program with no online courses, simultaneously occurred on all four of WU campus locations, I confined my study to the two of the four campus locations – Campus A and Campus B. I selected only these two campus locations as a result of the composition of the student populations on each campus, the ability to control for some other influences, and the ease of access to the participants.
because I also worked on both Campus A and Campus B and I was more familiar with the campus cultures. Although I recognized that the summer program was not like the traditional semester, it was my goal to conduct the study within campus environments that were much like the environments students might otherwise experience during the traditional academic year.

The use of technology during this study was strategically implemented. Although this study was aimed in examining the use of technology and the potential impact it could have on students’ situated identity development, certain low-tech approaches were intentionally used. The questionnaire was not electronically accessible as it was my hope to capture some insight into the participants’ thought processes, e.g. erasures or scratched out words that replaced other words, as they completed the survey. I thought it would be interesting to see how the students thought through each of the questions, capturing instances in which they might have reconsidered their responses. While students could have been mentally adjusting or considering their responses as they responded to the items, the paper version the paper questionnaire allowed for the researcher this possible opportunity in printed form. Additionally, the pilot study and the targeted population focus groups were held in mediated classroom spaces, on both of the campus locations. I displayed the tabulated responses using overhead projectors rather than providing paper copies. Providing paper copies would have allowed students to jump ahead of the group, permitting them to think about their responses in advance of the discussion. This electronic approach was taken to control for participants’ viewing of webpages and data collected from the other
participant’s responses to the questionnaires ahead of time to ensure that each participant viewed the data at the same time.

**Pilot Study Procedures**

After I identified a target group from which to draw my sample, it was critical to ensure that the measurements used were well-vetted, as I was keenly aware of the power of influence in the process of identity formation. To allow me to develop and refine the research process – questionnaire, observation, and interview protocols, as well as develop clarified questions regarding the student interpretation of particular website messaging – I conducted a pilot study. My goal was to select students who could be considered *role-models* for incoming freshmen when carefully considering pilot study participants. Not role models by my definition but role models based on their position within the university through their student employment. These students had attained and maintained high grade point averages, over a 3.0, had been involved in various campus groups and were student employees working at the university.

The students selected for the pilot study were sophomore, junior, or senior student employees of the unit responsible for conducting the summer program. They were either working as tutors or as desk assistants within the unit and were going to be working for the unit over the summer in the same capacities – either with the summer program or for the duration of the summer semester.

Those who were hired as tutors had to met the following requirements that were established by the summer transition program: have earned at least 24 credit hours, have at least a 3.0 cumulative grade point average, have at least a 3.5 grade
point average in the subject area in which they would like to tutor, have a recommendation by at least one faculty member, be currently enrolled student at the WU. Desk assistants, not required to meet the grade point average requirements, must have been in good academic standing, be proficient in using a computer, and be proficient in using certain computer programs (e.g., Microsoft Office, database software). The students who were selected to work for the summer transition program were highly recommended by their peers and others as excelling in their roles. Because of these factors, the tutors and desk assistant were asked by the summer program student employee coordinator if they would like to apply to become tutors and the desk assistant for this summer program. Once their applications were complete they were hired to work for the program.

During the pilot study, the participants completed a questionnaire and participated in a focus group. The questionnaire was used to gather data on the situated identity of a college student, the student’s Internet and institutional website practices, and the student’s perceptions of the recruitment practices of various colleges and universities. During the focus group sessions I asked the students to consider their responses to the questionnaire in relation to those of the others participants.

Conducting one pilot study on each of the two campus locations allowed me to use each experience as an opportunity to more carefully and deliberately hone each step to be taken during the formal research study, so as to collect the most accurate and insightful data on this phenomenon. As I met with each group, first distributing the questionnaire and then conducting the focus group meetings,
I was able to revise my approach to the data collection process, making observations while simultaneously making necessary adjustments. This permitted me to arrive at a point where I could proceed with conducting the research with the incoming freshmen in the summer program.

It is difficult to separate the two processes of developing the study and the instruments, for without the pilot study, the new approaches taken, e.g. the questions asked on the survey or the order of questions asked during the focus group, would not have occurred. With each interaction and at each step I experienced revelations and acquired new information that offered new insight into this phenomenon (see Chapters 4, 5, and 6). The steps to developing the study instrumentation and study protocols are important to the data collection process because through it a data collection process was designed to answer the research questions that were particular to the study. To that end, I next discuss the evolution of the questionnaire and the interview protocols that occurred during the pilot study.

**Campus A pilot study.** To begin the pilot study at Campus A, a brief presentation was made to six student staff members – five tutors and one desk assistant. These students were selected because they would be working for the summer transition program and would be *role models* for the summer program participants. The questionnaire provided to the Campus A pilot study participants was comprised of seven main questions and two closing demographic questions (i.e., their birth date and if either their mother or father had earned a college degree). Specifically, the first five questions assessed situated identity
development via asking the participants to identify adjectives or descriptors that best described the situated identity (i.e., a college student) and two comparator identities (i.e., a high school student and a college professor). The adjectives and descriptors were terms from the Burke and Tully’s (1977) and Reitzes and Burke’s (1980) questionnaires, a few select adjectives from WU webpages, and a few select adjectives or descriptors I chose. The participants were to select from the 44 adjectives or descriptors that were provided. The participants were verbally informed that they could add terms they felt should be added, but these instructions were not provided on the questionnaire, which was not intentional but was later realized to be necessary.

Of the six questionnaires (paper and pencil) that were distributed to students, all six of the students returned their questionnaires and signed release forms the same day upon submission. The questionnaires were then gathered and the data were placed at a table where their responses would be used as a part discussion during the focus group to the meeting. This process provided an opportunity for me to review the students’ responses to the questions; as a result, a few adjustments, e.g. adding the additional direction that participants could add their own adjectives/descriptors, were made to the instrument in preparation for the pilot study group at Campus B.

**Campus B pilot study.** I initiated the pilot study at Campus B one week after the group at campus A. Again, following the same protocols, I met with a total of six student employees – all six were tutors. When I distributed the questionnaires to the Campus B pilot study participants, I made a few adjustments...
to the instrument. The instructions for items 1-5 now closed with this statement, “You can only use each word once and you may add words that you may not see on the list but you feel are appropriate – positive or negative”. This was added to officially acknowledge that their feedback was welcome beyond simply responding to the items; rather, I desired to gather greater insight into the adjectives or descriptors upper-level students used to describe the identified roles that were both positive and negative. A second change to the instrument was the addition of an eighth item that asked, “Since you have been admitted to WU, what WU webpages do you visit? How often do you visit them?” This item was added because it would likely help me to better understand how the students used the institutional website since they had been admitted to the university. This item was added because the other items did not address the students use of the institutions website.

Of the six Campus B participants, four tutors returned their questionnaires and signed the release forms within two days after it was given to them. Again the data were collected and added to the table that contained the data from the Campus A respondents. Again, as the iterative process continued, I evaluated and further adjusted the instrument; it was now necessary to turn attention to the focus group sessions.

**Pilot study focus groups.** The pilot study focus groups were held within one week of the collection of the questionnaires and were audio-recorded using a Sony ICD-MX Digital Recorder. The first group to meet consisted of the pilot participants at Campus B. All four of the tutors from Campus B who returned
their questionnaires participated in the focus group session. Of the six students who completed the survey from Campus A, three participated in a focus group meeting. No identifying information was retained from any of the pilot study participants. The approach to the discussion was the same for the focus group sessions; the conversation began with a discussion focused on Items 1-5, the situated identity of a college student. The participants were asked to consider their responses in relation to the responses that of the other pilot study focus group participants. They were asked to discuss their thoughts about the results, reflecting on the top five adjectives or descriptors given for each question. The data from the four collected questionnaires from Campus B were presented to the Campus B participants. The focus groups for Campus A were provided with the responses from both groups and again the responses remained anonymous. The information was displayed in an Excel table that contained each set of responses displayed in columns.

I directed the conversation then toward three specific university webpages and the meaning students made of the pages. Using the talk-a-loud protocol, I instructed the students to speak aloud their thoughts as I lead them through particular institutional webpages. At both Campus A and Campus B, we discussed the campus housing webpages, beginning at the university home page, then clicking on the A-Z Index, then locating the landing page (home page) for UH. We then delved into the three housing pages that led from their landing page to the house for incoming freshmen. Among the responses elicited from the participants, they were asked to share what they saw, inclusive of pictures and
text, inclusive of what first caught their eye, how they interpreted the information on the pages, what they felt the messages meant, for whom the information was intended, and how the messages made them feel.

During each step of this pilot study, I asked clarifying questions to better understand the students’ process of identity development and the manner in which they make meaning of sections of the text. I reviewed pilot study results of the questionnaires and audio recordings of the focus group meetings. Having completed the pilot study, it was now time to begin the study with my target population. Based on the pilot study findings, I made significant adjustments to the questionnaire and to the focus group agenda.

**Primary Study Procedures**

The main study consisted of conducting research with both the summer program participants, as well as with university representatives who were responsible for developing and maintaining institutional/departmental webpages that are directed toward incoming freshmen. This phase of the study involved the following: distribution of a questionnaire, a focus group meeting, participant observations of the students, individual interviews with two of the four focus group members, interviews with the university staff members or administrators, and analysis of select institutional webpages. Again, no personally identifying information was attached to any of the data that was viewed by the focus group participants.

To conduct the Internet research for this study, I purposefully selected the webpages of three specific units within the universities larger website: University
Housing (UH), the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS), and the
University College (UC). My rationale for selecting the three units was based on
their direct connection to the undergraduate population. All freshmen had the
potential to visit the UH webpages, as this particular university requires freshmen
live on campus. To do so, they must complete an application for on-campus
housing. If a student were to choose not to live on campus he or she would be
required to file an exception to live off-campus. Both forms are found on the UH
webpage, so this is the most likely outlet students will use to declare their housing
intentions. The CLAS is the largest college at WU; therefore, it has the potential
for the largest number of freshmen who will visit its webpages. UC is the home
for exploratory students – student who do not yet have a declared academic
identity. As a result, the information on this webpage will be more oriented
toward helping students make decisions about the future academic identity, which
may also help the students develop their overall situated identity.

The study with the summer transition program participants was conducted
in much the same way as the pilot study. I made short presentations to the summer
transition program participants on both Campus A and Campus B and distributed
the revised questionnaire. It was necessary at this point to inform the students that
any questionnaires returned by students who were under the age of 18 would not
be used in this study. At this time I was also made my initial request for students
who were first-generation students who were willing to participate in the focus
group to sign the Focus Group interest form (found in the Appendix) and return it
with their questionnaires. The questionnaires were collected and the responses
were once again placed into an Excel spreadsheet for later use during the focus group meeting. After collecting the questionnaires I further limited my research to that of Campus A, as this campus is known to be a campus with a high first-generation student population and with a deliberate institutional effort to develop a burgeoning undergraduate student population.

I conducted eight participant observations—two observations in each of their courses—of the students in the Campus A summer program. Although the students had a choice to take either the pre-college-level English course or the pre-college-level Math course, they were all enrolled in a critical inquiry course, as well as a college success strategies course. I sat in the back of all four classrooms so as to observe the entire group of students, but I paid particular attention to the students who had identified as first-generation college students. Prior to the conducting the observations, I designed an observation protocol (a copy is located in the Appendix) to ensure that certain activities or occurrences, e.g. student presentations, group activities, students taking exams, were recorded. The observations were conducted prior to the focus group and the individual interviews to gain insight into students’ actions and ways of being in advance of developing the questions for the interviews.

It was during the last week of the summer program that I conducted the focus group meeting. Within the first semester of students’ freshmen year I conducted the personal interviews with two of the four focus group members, Olivia and Paris. The focus group meeting began with a conversation around several prompts that focused on the participants’ thoughts and perceptions
regarding what it was to be a college student. As with the pilot study, I then asked the participants to discuss the selected university webpages using the talk-a-loud protocol. They were asked to direct their attention to the various pages as they were displayed via the computer using the overhead projector onto the screen in the front of the conference room. They viewed the webpages in the following order – UH, the CLAS, and the UC. The participants shared their observations, thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and understanding about each site. Each of the department or college webpages the focus group participants viewed followed the in a similar series of webpages. To visit the UH website I began at the WU homepage, proceeding then to the A-Z Index webpage, and to the UH website and then the webpages lead to the freshmen webpages. To visiting the CLAS website or to the UC website I began at the WU homepage, proceeding next to the Colleges and School webpage and then to the CLAS website or to the UC website and then to the webpages for their incoming freshmen students.

The latter portion of the focus group was a review and discussion of selected questions from the questionnaire. Again, the data were displayed in such a manner as to allow the students to see each of the responses of the entire participant group to the various questions while also displaying the top five adjectives or descriptors for each question.

It was evident after the conclusion of the focus group that individual interviews should be conducted with the two students who were pursuing their degrees on Campus A – Olivia and Paris. This would permit the researcher to ask more in-depth questions about their personal experiences without the presence of
others. It was my hope that the students felt comfortable responding to more intrusive questions about their family, friends, and other personal experiences, e.g. where were their parents born, what was their parents highest level of education. The rationale for interviewing the Olivia and Paris rather than the total four is that the two students at Campus A had a continuum of matriculation solely experienced on Campus A. I felt important that participants reflections and perspective be from their experiences on their home campus as this was the campus they had chosen to call their college home. The two other students, Rose and Violet, were now enrolled in academic programs that were on the first campus of the university and their experiences would be a blend of experiences from two campus locations rather than from the same campus experiences.

To explore the webpages of each of the three units, I first interviewed the staff members who were responsible for developing the content on the pages. Again, the interviews were semi-structured and were all held in staff members’ offices. While we discussed their role and the factors that came into play as they developed the webpages, we also viewed the webpages around which the interview was conducted. A copy of the interview protocol is in the Appendix.

Following the interviews I captured screen shots, or digital images of the various unit Internet pages that I had identified as the focus of study. This step allowed me to capture and preserve images of the webpages as they were at the moment in time when I conducted this study. Although the adaptability and immediacy of technology is an advantage in providing information quickly, it is also a limitation for this study, as webpages could change without notice.
completely and immediately. The screen shots of each of the selected college webpages are located in the Appendix.

After having the secured the transcribed pilot study and focus group meeting, as well as the two student interviews and the staff interviews, I reviewed the transcripts for accuracy and made any corrections or clarified where the taped conversation may have been inaudible.

**Critical Discourse Analysis**

To analyze the data I used critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis, also known as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is both a theory and a research method. There are many approaches to critical discourse analysis – French discourse analysis, social semiotics, sociocognitive studies, the discourse historical method, and multi-modal methods (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, & Joseph, 2005) – and many definitions associated with CDA’s three most closely associated terms: discourse, ideology, and power (Weiss & Wodak, 2003). CDA has been defined as

> fundamentally interested in analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested by language. In other words CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, constituted, legitimized, and so on, by language use (or in discourse). (p. 15)

To clarify, James Gee (2004) made a distinction between uppercase CDA as a term representative of “Fairclough’s (1992, 1995) approach to discourse
analysis and the term (spelled out) *critical discourse analysis*, with a wider array of approaches, including Fairclough’s, my own, and others” (p. 20). According to Rogers (2004b), Fairclough and Wodak (1997) presented eight foundational principles of CDA:

- CDA addresses social problems
- Power relations are discursive
- Discourse constitutes society and culture
- Discourse does ideological work
- Discourse is historical
- A sociocognitive approach is needed to understand how relations between texts and society are mediated
- Discourse analysis is interpretive and explanatory and uses a systematic methodology
- CDA is a socially committed scientific paradigm. (p. 2)

Ultimately, as a researcher I chose critical discourse analysis as my method of analysis as I am “concerned with a critical theory of the social world, the relationship of language and discourse in the construction and representation of this social world, and a methodology that allows them to describe, interpret, and explain such relationships” (Rogers, 2004b, p. 3). Like Gee (2011a), my goal in using critical discourse analysis is to “contribute, in terms of understanding and intervention, to important issues and problems in some area that interests and motivates us as a global citizens” (p. 12).
Critical discourse analysis allows the researcher to “investigate [using “various tools of inquiry”]…the domain of language in use” and that “language-in-use is about saying-doing-being and gains its meaning from the “game” or practice it is a part of and enacts” (Gee, 2011a, p.11). I employed the use of critical discourse analysis to analyze the data collected as I assessed how first-generation college students and institutional staff members used language in the construction of identities and messages intended for incoming freshmen and how the students made meaning of the language in use. Gee (2011a) established that there are within the “community of practice” tools and strategies that “are continually and flexibly adapted to specific issues, problems and contexts of the study. They are continually transformed as they are applied in practice …. They are through and through social and communal” (p. 11).

As an element of this study involved the analysis of WU’s website and unit webpages, it was necessary to use a method of analysis that specifically addresses these types of multimodal data. Within discourse analysis there is an analytic approach specifically addressing multimodal data. Using the Multimodal Social Semiotic approach developed and described by Gunther Kress (2010), I was able to conduct this important element of the data analysis using an appropriate tool. As Kress (2010) stated,

*Social semiotics* and the *multimodal* dimension of the theory, tell us about interest and agency; about meaning(-making); about processes of sign-making in social environments; about the resources for making meaning and their respective potentials as
signifiers in the making of the signs-as-metaphors; about the
meaning potentials of cultural/semiotic forms. The theory can
describe and analyze all signs in all modes as well as heir
interrelation in any one text. (p. 59)

All other analysis theories have a single focus for analysis. Other forms of
linguistic analysis would not be suitable to use when analyzing a picture or figure,
as they would limited to providing “comment” on the figures description or text
caption but could not analyze any of the elements of the photo in and of itself
(Kress, 2010, p. 59).

Social-semiotic theory is interested in meaning, in all its forms.
Meaning arises in social environments and in social interactions.
That makes the social into the source, the origin and the generator
of meaning…. In social-semiotic account of meaning, individuals,
with their social histories, socially shaped, located in social
environments, using socially make, culturally available resources,
are agentive and generative in sign-making and communication.
(Kress, 2010, p.54)

The three theoretical perspectives that inform Multimodal Social
Semiotics are “semiosis – meaning making; multimodality – issues common to all
modes and to all the types of relations between them; and specific mode – the
forms and meanings which are appropriate to the specificities of a give mode”
(Kress, 2010, p. 61). All signs, “a fusion of form and meaning”, are the products
of “social interaction” and are “made rather than used” (Kress, 2010, p. 54]). The
focus on the making of the sign rather than the way the sign is used is one of the distinctive elements that sets social-semiotic theory apart from other forms of semiotics.

**Data analysis.** To conduct data analysis I used discourse analysis tools developed by Gee 2011 (2011b). First, these tools incorporate seven types of “reality” or “building tasks” (Gee, 2011a, p. 121): significance; practices (activities); identities; relationships; politics; connections; sign systems and knowledge. Second the set of tools incorporate six tools of inquiry: social languages; situated meanings; figured worlds; intertextuality; Discourses; Conversations. “The tools are not ordered. They are all meant to apply at once to any data that is being analyzed. For some data, some tools will yield more illuminating information than for other data” (Gee, 2011b, p. x). As such the tools were used in combination to analyze the data for possible themes and evidence in response to the six research questions. The data analysis could provide data that could be determined to be in support of or contradictory to the research questions. In the end there were 42 total questions that could be used to analyze the data and several other discourse analysis tools to be applied.

**Data reduction.** Having gathered data a voluminous amount of data from multiple sources – either written by the students own hand (questionnaires) or transcriptions of verbal interactions between the participants and the researcher (pilot study and study focus group meetings, individual student and staff interviews) as well as transcripts and field notes from student observations - it was necessary to conduct data reduction. As such it was necessary to review all of
the data and selectively incorporate the data that was relevant to the established research questions and my hypothesis reality as “any real discourse analysis deals only with some of the questions” (Gee, 2011a, p. 122). As I conducted the reduction I reviewed all of the data to ensure that I understood each of the data in the greater context of the study. Data reduction is not a separate process from data analysis and “is a form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organizes data in such a way that “final” conclusions can be drawn and verified” (Miles & Huberman, 1994 p. 11).

The process of conducting discourse analysis was “an interpretation of an interpretation” (Gee, 2011a, p. 122). As such it was imperative that I use as many of the 42 questions as were possible to establish validity. The questions were of themselves a way to verify data within the seven different building tasks through the six different tools. Gee (2011a) established four “elements” for validation in discourse analysis studies. The four “elements” for validity were: convergence; agreement; coverage; linguistic details. Of the four criteria “convergence and linguistic details are the most immediately important aspect of validity – that is showing that answers to a number of questions like our 42 questions above and linguistic details converge to support the analysis” (p. 124).

I employed as many of the 42 questions of the data as were relative to this study. It was not simply a matter of responding to the questions but rather “A discourse analysis is more, rather than less valid (i.e. trustworthy) the more the answers to the 42 questions converge in the way they support the analysis…the
more the analysis offers *compatible* and *convincing* answers to many or all of them” (Gee, 2011a, p. 123).

The second element for establishing validity was *agreement*. As this research study was conducted and completed under the supervision of my dissertation committee members, they each reviewed my analysis of the data using the critical discourse analysis tools. A my committee members was a faculty member with extensive knowledge and experience in the field of discourse analysis and two faculty members with extensive knowledge and expertise in the field of higher education. They carefully reviewed my dissertation study to ensure the quality and accuracy of my study findings.

The third element for establishing validity *coverage* was attained by the use of multiple data collection methods that increased the number of sources for data triangulation. The questionnaire data, focus group meetings, student interviews, and staff member interviews provided an opportunity to gather confirming and disconfirming evidence of the data (Gee, 2011a; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The final element, linguistic details, was achieved through the use of various discourse analysis tools that focused on linguistic forms and uses as well as the “grammatical devices” that are being used by the participants. The “devices” are the words, terms and phrases, used singularly and in combination in their speech acts.
Study Limitations

As we will delve into the research data in the following chapters, I must address the limitations of this study. This study was focused on the process of identity formation and the specific meaning making of one particular set of first-generation students attending WU. Additionally, the four members of the main study focus group were all females and all young women of color. As this study was limited to one group of students at one university the finding are not generalizable. Because of this limitation, other student populations attending other types of higher and postsecondary institutions have not been studied.

The questionnaires were developed using previously created instruments that were modified to make them appropriate to this study. The questionnaires were specifically developed for this particular study. As such the data was specific to the phenomenon at this specific institution; however the instruments – questionnaire, observation guide, focus group, and interview questions – may serve as resources for another who may seek to conduct a similar study.

Finally, the student participants were a part of a very selective population as they had to qualify to participate in the summer program and it was my desire to capture the thoughts of students before they began the first full semester of their undergraduate education. This delimitation was an important parameter as I wanted to capture the student’s initial impressions.

Chapter 4 consists of three parts, the perpetual performance or display of WU Discourse through the institutional website, situated and multiple identities at work (i.e., the situated identity formation of first-generation college students and
university staff members) and the meaning making of the messages located within various units’ webpages.

There are some points to understand when reading the data analysis chapters based on the discourse analysis methodology I employed. Written text generally follows the appropriate language conventions of the particular language that it is representing. Using normal conventions of written English language, when an author wants to indicate that a thought has come to a conclusion he or she will generally use a period (.). If that sentence represents an exclamatory statement or thought, the author might end the sentence with an exclamation point (!). When the author desires the reader to take a pause during a thought, he or she will use a comma (,). Oral language does not carry such conventions; a speaker cannot show a punctuation mark in their speech. Each speech act represents these written practices in other ways; therefore, other conventions are used when transcribing an oral or verbal interaction.
CHAPTER 4

What Does it Mean to be a College Student and “Attend University”?

This chapter addresses the following research questions: (a) What are the situated identities of the incoming freshmen attending the summer transition program at WU and (b) How do the first-generation participants particularize their new situated identity, and (c) what salient identities are at work in their development of the situated identity of a college student?

First-Year-Student Participant Data

I asked the participants in the summer transition program on both Campus A and Campus B to participate in the first phase of this study by completing a questionnaire. The participants were all first-year incoming freshmen who self-enrolled in a five-week summer transition program to complete either a pre-college Math or a pre-college English course requirement. Their enrollment in either course had been determined by the scores on a required WU placement examination or by other standardized tests scores used (e.g., ACT or SAT scores), in lieu of the placement test. Table 9 provides demographic information about the summer transition program participants.
### Table 9

*Western University Summer Transition Program Demographic Data by Campus*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Pre-college level course taken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>African American/Black</td>
<td>Business - Tourism</td>
<td>Math</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Exploratory/Social-Behavior Science</td>
<td>Math</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Campus B

<table>
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<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Major</th>
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<td>English</td>
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<td>American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Math</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I invited all of the 42 summer transition program students to participate in the first phase of this study. The second phase of this study involved making observations of the summer transition courses – courses in which enrollment had been restricted to allow for only the summer transition students. The third phase
of this study involved a focus group meeting limited to only summer transition program participants who were first-generation college students. In the final phase, I conducted one-on-one interviews with two members of the focus group. The demographic details of each phase of the study involving the students are shown in Table 10.

Table 10

Research Study Participant Breakdown by Campus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Participants</th>
<th>Campus A</th>
<th>Campus B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summer Transition Program Enrollees (N = 42)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (n = 36)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male (n = 6)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Questionnaires Completed (n = 31)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Included (n = 23)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excluded (n = 8)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent Demographics (n = 23)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (n = 21)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male (n = 2)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Generation (n = 17)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing Generation (n = 6)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group (n = 4)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (n = 4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male (n = 0)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-on-one Interviews</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to note that, of the 23 participants, 17 were first-generation, whereas 6 were continuing generation. This disparity in participation reflects extant findings that first-generation students are more likely to have taken a remedial course during their freshman year in college than continuing-generation students (see Chapter 2). On the other hand, this summer transition program enrollment data reflects something not previously accounted for: This group of first-generation students sought an opportunity to eradicate this disparity and far-
outnumber those continuing-generation students in taking advantage of this summer opportunity.

**Cross-Comparison of Situated Identity and Two Comparator-Identities**

I collected data to determine how the participants were putting into context the situated identity (i.e., internal characteristics /external role) of a college student when compared to two comparator identities. The rationale in doing so was to establish a baseline for understanding a student’s situated identity as a college student. These data were collected as a means for developing the focus group meeting – with the participants *Paris, Olivia; Rose, and Violet* – in one-to-one interviews with Paris and Olivia; and with four WU staff members. As a result, I utilized the data from the questionnaires, as well as the data from the focus group meetings and the interviews, in combination, to answer the research questions.

The 23 students responded to the 12-item questionnaire. The first question asked the participants to select from a list of pre-determined adjectives or descriptors that best described the situated identity of a college student and of two comparator identities (i.e., a high school student and a college professor). The high school comparator identity was selected because it was the identity they last held. Using this identity would provide an opportunity to see how they may have constructed their most recent identity. The college professor comparator identity was selected because it is an identity within the university but is a position of authority. Situating the college student identity between the two would provide an opportunity to demonstrate where they positioned college student in comparison
to the two other identities. Table 11 shows the side-by-side comparison of reports for the three identities, whereas Tables 12-14 presents the data for each identity individually (i.e., the comparator identity of a high school student, the situated identity of a college student, and the comparator identity of a college professor). Additionally, Table 11 provides the overall responses to the question, whereas Tables 12-14 illustrates participants’ responses by generational status (i.e., first-generation or continuing generation).
Table 11

*Participant-Selected Adjectives/Descriptors for College Student (Situated Identity), High School Student, and College Professor Identities (Comparator Identities)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High school student</th>
<th>College student</th>
<th>College professor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Procrastinator</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Ambitious</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Motivated</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mature</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressured</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Critical thinker</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambitious</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Driven</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Hardworking</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Money-conscious</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Accepts criticism</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustrated</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Committed</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerned</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Dedicated</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driven</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imaginative</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Open-minded</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonchalant</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Frustrated</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naïve*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Creative</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepts criticism</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Involved</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apathetic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Prepared</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pressured</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Realistic</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardworking</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Responsible</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Studious</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outspoken</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Excited*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used to being successful</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Go-getters*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t look at the big picture*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Academically aggressive</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frightened*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Concerned</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Imaginative</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reckless*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selfish*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Imaginative</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheltered*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Individualistic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Innovative</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceptional</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquisitive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Passionate</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspiring</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ready</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Reliable</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-minded</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passionate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sensitive</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Thoughtful</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talented</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Well-rounded</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughtful</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Cautious*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed-minded*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. An asterisk (*) indicates an adjective/descriptor added by a participant.*
The descriptors listed in Table 11 are listed in order of highest to lowest number of times selected. For example, procrastinator is at the top of the list of high school descriptors because 11 of the students selected it as the most representative characteristic of a high school student. The participants were not asked to rank-order their selections; however, they were not able to use any of the descriptors more than once for any one of the six questions. As such, the numeric count associated with each adjective/descriptor is based on the number of times a participant selected that particular adjective/descriptor for that specific identity (i.e., this could serve as a proxy for rank-order). Additionally, I informed the participants that they could add positively or negatively worded adjectives or descriptors to their responses if they desired. All of the participants provided five descriptors from the pre-determined list of descriptors for each of the identities, and a few chose to add their own descriptors as was an option they could have selected to exercise.

The data reflects the clear distinctions made between each of the three identities. The characteristics most attributed to each of the identities are progressive, as though looking at a timeline of personal maturation. The participants identified several descriptors most consistent with their perceptions of the situated identity of a college student, that, when compared to descriptors for the two comparator identities were positioned between the two comparator identities with regard to agency and independence.

Of the 44 adjectives/descriptors (hereafter referred to as descriptors) identified by the participants that most closely depicted the characteristics of a
high school student, the three characteristics that resonated the most with the participants were procrastinator, followed very closely by dependent and then social. This number also included eight adjectives or descriptors that participants added on their own. Notably, two separate students added the descriptor naïve as a term they associated with a high school student. Other descriptors added by the students included Doesn’t look at the big picture, frightened, sheltered, closed-minded, insecure, reckless, and selfish.

Of the 41 characteristics selected that best described a college student, the three characteristics that resonated most with the participants were ambitious, independent, and motivated. The participants also added three additional adjectives to this list: excited, cautious, and go-getters.

Last, of the 36 adjectives/descriptors chosen that best described a college professor, the three characteristics that most closely exemplified this identity for the participants were respected, experienced, and highly qualified. One participant added the adjective aloof to the list.

It is interesting to note that there was a difference between the numbers of descriptors the students selected for each of the three identities. The identity that was most recent and most familiar to the students – that of a high school student – had the greatest number of selected descriptors, followed next by that of the college student, and last by that of the college professor. Additionally, as the number of descriptors fell, so did the number of descriptors that were added by the participants. The number of additional descriptors went from eight to three to one; however, the only addition for the identity of the college professor was one
of the more sophisticated words, *aloof*. These occurrences could be attributed to the fact that the students were most familiar with the high school student identity, they had greater insight into this identity. In contrast, their familiarity with the identity of a college student was novel, and their familiarity with the role of a college professor was distant; therefore, it was difficult for them to describe that role with as much detail as was possible for that of the high school student identity.

When cross comparing the three identities, the participants situated each identity with increasing levels of independence, motivation, and competence, progressing from the identity of the high school student to college professor. Students attributed the least amount of agency to the identity of high school student and little motivation to make things happen, whereas they perceived college students as having a drive to achieve, as well as a sense of newfound freedom. Regarding the identity of college professor, students reported that college professors would have earned the respect of others through their years of work.

The data reflect that the participants perceived that each of the two identities had distinct characteristics. In fact, the adjective descriptors that were selected for the high school student and college student identities were naturally occurring oppositional descriptors: *procrastinator* versus *ambitious* and *dependent* versus *independent*. The selected descriptors for the identity of the college professor were representative of a level of position given to a person in that position (e.g., *respected, experienced*). The participants’ responses
demonstrate that they attributed particular descriptors that distinguished one identity from another. The characteristics attributed to the comparator-identity of a high school student that participants perceived the high school student as an individual who has yet to find his or her way in life and of a young person who is under pressure to do so. The perception of the situated identity of a college student was that of an individual with goals to achieve and the motivation and desire to take on these new life challenges. The relation between the comparator identity of a high school student and the situated identity of a college student is almost a study in contrasts: Whereas the high school student is perceived as a procrastinator and as dependent, the college student is perceived as ambitious and independent.

**Full Participant Group Perception of High School Student Identity/Role**

The fact that the leading characteristic for a high school student was a procrastinator is telling and can be considered from multiple perspectives. The participants might align this attribute with a more obvious identification of an individual who puts off the completion of homework until the last minute or who waits until the last minute to complete various other tasks.

The data collected during an interview with two WU staff members, Di and Ed, who were administrators who worked for and advised students in WU’s exploratory college, indicated that staff members encountered procrastination with the high school students they were advising. In their years of working with high school students, they had found the following to be their experience with this population of students:
Interviewer: ...What do you/ when you envision your
freshmen population, what comes to mind/
What picture do you have of a college
freshmen/ So are there characteristics that
you have with what they think/ What are
some of the things that you kind of have in
mind when you think about incoming
freshmen/

Di: Before they get here or once they're here/

Interviewer: Okay// So there's a difference// So before
they get here/ how do you think they/ what
do you think of it/

Di: Well, and we always had a joke about this in
the office. But you can REALLY TELL at
what point in time they graduate high
school//

Interviewer: Okay//

Di: Because a student we’re meeting with an
orientation program or perspective/ you
know/ the time before high school
graduation has a different mindset than the
student that is post high school graduation.
Ed: They’re still in high school/ they haven't moved on/

Interviewer: So when you say they're in a different mindset/ what do you think/ they're not/

Di: They're not as focused yet on college/ like they're not/ they're really focused on/ "Oh, prom is next week"/

Ed: It's not a reality yet/

Di: Or, "Oh…"/ it's not reality/

Ed: It's not a reality for them that they're coming to college/

Interviewer: Okay/ okay/

Ed: They're still on high school/

Interviewer: Okay/

Ed: They're taking the day off high school to come to orientation or they're coming on a Saturday/

Interviewer: Okay/

Ed: And they're still focused on/ you know/ "I still have a baseball gave next week or I have prom" or "I still have/ you know/ assignment next"/
Interviewer: Okay/ okay// So they're still on their high school//

Ed: “I still have my best friends in high school”//

Interviewer: Okay//

Di: Yeah/

Ed: They’re all still in that frame//

Interviewer: Okay/ and then once they graduated/ there's a different mindset//

Di: There's a different mindset like they seem a little bit more focused on/

Interviewer: Okay/

Ed: It's more real/

Di: It's more real to them/

Interviewer: Okay/ okay//

Di: You know/ and it's like/ "Oh/ yeah// Yeah/ I'm coming"// You know/ it's REALLY happening/

Interviewer: So that focus brings what kind of action/ do they do things they're supposed to/ are they responding to emails/ I mean/ is it/

Di: They're responding/ I think// What we do with our students is before our students even
attend orientation/ they actually get a phone call from their advisor//

Interviewer: Okay/

Di: And they have a chat before a student even comes to orientation/

Interviewer: Okay/

Di: So we've already kind of put them in the mindset of the process// But/ I think/ one of the big difference is that they're a little bit more open/

Interviewer: Okay//

Di: to the CHANGES that are coming with college/ post-graduation// They're a little bit more ATTENTIVE/

Interviewer: Okay/

Di: And want to know HOW THINGS work/

HOW it’s different// I mean/ there's definitely little change there//

These staff members’ had experienced the high school student procrastination even as the students are taking the requisite steps to enroll in the university. The students have not quite accepted their responsibility in completing the necessary steps or responding to the calls for action from their academic advisor. The references to the students’ voices and thoughts are used to illustrate that it is not
simply staff members’ thoughts or knowledge gained through their own experience, but what they are sharing is actually shared as a result of their experiences with the students.

To further help move the students from their high school identity to the role of a college student, the advisors in this college take additional steps to help students understand what is expected of them once they graduate from high school. Di shared that the academic advisors “have a chat [with the student] before a student even comes to orientation…. So, we’ve already kind of put them in the mindset of the [registration for their WU courses] process.” Di used the phrase “have a chat” as opposed to using “chatting with”. “Have a chat” has a firmer, sense to formality, as though representative of a short, but pointed, conversation. Had she chosen to use the phrase “chatting with” she would have given less pointed connotation to the kind of interaction had between the advisor and the student with whom they were speaking. Using the phrase “have a chat with” has connotations of making sure that the authority figure has spoken with the student and that the student has a clear understanding of the rules and expectations, that the student understands what is at stake if he or she does not follow the rules, and that the student is not the person in the position of power but is subject to the authority figure’s rules. In the same way, the advisors are informing the incoming freshman student to understand what is expected of him or her as a WU “kind of” exploratory student.

The characterization of a procrastinator could also reflect the perception that a high school student may have developed a sense of apathy or fear toward
the completion of tasks. A change in their identity is imminent, so the student is postponing or delaying the finalization of matters. Moreover, as Olivia stated, some students lack the personal motivation to put forth the effort to complete the tasks required of to pursue a degree at WU. Olivia voiced that this was her experience with her best friend from high school:

Olivia: I get that a lot like/ all of my friends/ the majority of them are GOING to [a local community college] or/ or whatever community colleges they/ they ch[oose]/ they chose um and they're like/ "Yeah/ because there's a SMARTY pants over here/ got scholarships and she got this and this to go”/ BUT [pause] I / I don't think going into the university setting necessarily has to mean that you're "SMART" quote unquote/

Paris: You work for it//

Olivia: Yeah/ I think it's more/ that you value yourself ENOUGH/ to go that extra MILE/ and REALLY/ just be on the ball// Like/ I know/ my best friend/ I love her to death/ like she just wasn’t on the BALL//

Interviewer: Uh-huh.
Olivia: She didn’t complete her FAFSA on time/
She didn't look for scholarships/ She didn't put enough effort/ and so now she's going to [A LOCAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE]//
Not that she minds it cause she GETS that she didn’t put in that effort/ but like/ it bothers me that she tells me/ "Oh/ yeah// Because you're so smart/" No/ it's not because I’m smart/ It's because I/ you know/ I really wanted to come// smart/ It's because I/ you know/ I really wanted to come//

Olivia’s friend, one whom she loves dearly, delayed making the decisions and taking the actions necessary to attend WU and, as a result, had to attend the local community college. There are several binaries in this example: community college versus the university, physical effort versus mental acumen, and personal effort that gets good results versus no effort which could yield poor results. What Olivia and the student participants in the focus group perceived as valuable were not the same values held by even their closest friends (e.g., work). Her characterization and belief in a strong work ethic was one of Olivia’s most salient identity characteristics.

Moreover, this portrayal of a procrastinator could reflect someone who is not in a hurry to move from one identity to the next, putting off the future until it...
is no longer an option. Inevitably, time passes and it is no longer an option to put off what must come next: adulthood. The high school student must begin to consider what his or her next steps in life will be. For Paris, postponing her high school graduation by a semester was a deliberate choice, one of which she was fully conscious:

Paris: Because my older sister/ she's all like “You have really good grades you should go to university first”// So she so like/ “You need to go”// And so then my counselor/ she was like looking at my grades since freshmen year// She's like you would/ like I was already like going to/ I was going to graduate in December/ and so/ like/ “you should start going in January”// And I was like I just want to finish with my class/ So/ I took one extra class//

Interviewer: Really/
Paris: Yeah/
Interviewer: So/ you could've graduated in December/
Paris: Uh-hmm//
Interviewer: But you took an extra class to stay and graduated in May// What was that extra class/
Paris: I took my math class/ another math class/

Paris could have graduated with her class, but her reasons for delaying her graduation – for putting off her future – were so that she could graduate with her classmates. In her mind, delaying graduation was not procrastinating out of fear but out of a sense of community (i.e., to maintain the relationships she had known for many years and to celebrate the final months of high school with those whom she had begun the experience). Although Paris firmly stated at one point “I'm not a procrastinator///”, she was a type of procrastinator (albeit not in a pejorative sense) who was willing to forego her own accomplishment for the sake of those whom she valued. This attribute was evident throughout the data as one her most salient characteristics and attributes.

For many students, the possibilities and the realities of life outside the family home are now more pressing, and decisions regarding their future are required. Parents who have been forewarning their children of the day when they either become 18 years of age or graduate from high school are now expecting that their young adults will have a plan. The most common plans shared by parents with their children include going to college, finding a job, or entering the military. Sitting in their parents’ home, watching television, talking on cellular phones paid for by parents, and eating meals prepared by others will give way to students’ having to take many of the actions they once only associated with adults.

It is the study participants’ second-highest-rated attribute, “dependent” that supports the assertion that “procrastinator” was selected because the
participants perceived that high school students put off or are even hesitant to transition from their high school identity to the next identity, High school student may find their identity as a dependent individual to be liberating or constricting. Being dependent can be liberating because the students are not responsible for their own care, and making decisions about most things can be left to their parents or other adult figures. For example, teachers and school administrators make decisions about the classes high school students should take, and parents make decisions regarding healthcare to movie selection to meals. Some high school students live in households in which someone else does their laundry, they are provided with lunch money, and they have a few household chores, but they are free to do many of the things they enjoy without complete responsibility for their own care.

Conversely, some high school students live in households in which they are required to work a part-time or even a full-time job to support their desired way of living (e.g., having a cell phone, going out with friends) or to help support their family. Although they earn an income and make decisions in their workplace, they still live in their parents’ homes and must follow the rules established by the parents for the home (e.g., abiding by the set curfew, being responsible for specific financial obligations, or parents’ screening of friends or limiting of internet use). Paris’s parents required each of their children to get a job once they turned 16 years old. Paris recounts this experience as follows:

Interviewer: Okay// Now/ you've been paying for your own bills// So/ you've been paying your own
car insurance and cell phone bill since you
were in high school/ because you were
working in high school//

Paris: Since I was 16/

Interviewer: Okay/ and is that because you wanted to/ or/
because your family is saying if you want
these things you're going to have/

Paris: Well/ my parents made me/

Interviewer: Okay/

Paris: So they're like/ "Now that you're 16/ you can
get a job"/ So/ I went out looking for a job
and then/ like/ I started paying for my own
phone bill/ cause my mom was all like she
stopped giving me lunch money/ and so/
then/ I just started using my own money for
my/ and they're like/ "If you want a car/ you
have to buy it yourself"/

Interviewer: Did you/

Paris: Yes/

Interviewer: And so you bought your own car/

Paris: I decided to buy my own car and then/ like/
my mom put me under her insurance and/
yeah/ I've been doing that/
Interviewer: What was your first job/

Paris: My first job/ I worked at [A Local] Montessori School as a teacher assistant//

Interviewer: Really/

Paris: Yeah/ I worked there for a year/

Interviewer: Okay/

Paris: And then I got hired at a new job for the [Local] High School District office// So/ then/ I started working there//

Interviewer: How many hours were you working/

Paris: For my first job/ I worked 15 because of school/ and then my second job/ since I got off the school earlier/ I worked 20 hours a week//

Although Paris was earning spending money and able to make certain decisions of her own accord, she was still dependent on her parents and required to live by their rules. She, like many other high school students, was required to live by someone else’s rules – from parents or caretaker to other authority figures to the federal government, which recognizes one as independent at the age of 18. As such, high school students are subject to rules and expectations established by others and are dependent on the loving kindness, benevolence, good will, sense of obligation, or court-ordered support of others.
In this situated identity, being dependent might also be indicative of high school students’ need for validation from friends and others. Many high school students belong to groups or cliques and have constructed their identities through membership in these groups. Their membership in certain groups allows them to have acquaintances and alliances with peers and, as such, fosters a sense of dependence on this group membership for maintenance of their identity (e.g., being a cheerleader, being a track star, being a marching band member, or being high-performing students). Their identity depended on their affiliation or association with certain groups. Paris recounted the following from her high school experience:

**Interviewer:** Do you think people act differently here at the university than they do in high school/the students/

**Paris:** They do/ because you don't have your regular cliques in college// Like in high school/ you would have the Emo kids and then the skater boys//

**Interviewer:** Emo kids/ what's that/

**Paris:** They're like Emo/ they're like/ kind of like they have their hair in their face and they just/

**Interviewer:** I've never heard of that group before//

**Paris:** They're like weird//
Interviewer: And what are they called/

Paris: Emo/

Interviewer: Emo// Okay//

Paris: My mom calls it “memo”//

[Laughter]

Paris: Because my sister had her hair in her face once and she's like/ "You're memo"//

Interviewer: Okay// So/ you have the Emo kids/

Paris: And like the popular kids and the cheerleaders and the skater kids/ football and jocks and stuff//

Interviewer: Okay/ so cliques//

Paris: Yeah//

Interviewer: Okay//

Paris: And in college/you see people by themselves// So/ it's kind of weird//

Paris’s experience was a story in which she described the other high school students according to the “categorical” groups that were known by their particular “genre” or group membership. Paris recognized that her mother had situated her sister into the “Emo” group, based on the way her hair was laying on her face. She also recognized that the students had, as a result of their membership in these groups, been considered as “insiders” or “accepted” and “outsiders” or “castigated” members of the high school student community.
As she voiced her mother’s comments to her sister, Paris established her mother’s outside relation to the high school experience – her mother’s outsider position to the culture and experiences of American youth. Paris’s mother was born and raised for a portion of her life in Mexico; however, in this same speech, Paris granted me, a researcher, insider status to the culture and Discourse of high school students. For example, Paris did not think it necessary to explain any of the names she used, what categories of students meant, or the “kinds” or “types” who were members of these groups. I was considered an “ex-officio” member of the group of people who understood the Discourse she was using – as a member of the group of educators who worked with high school students.

**Full Participant Group Perception of College Student Identity**

As recent high school graduates, the participants reflected upon their former identity while constructing their new situated identity. When asked to select descriptors for a college student, the top three selected by the participants were “ambitious”, “independent”, and “motivated”. These three descriptors are representative of students’ current experiences within this new situated identity, while students have simultaneously reflected their expectations of themselves as well as what they attribute as characteristics of others in this situated identity.

Further exemplifying the attributes of “ambitious”, “independent”, and “motivated”, the participants – rather than continue the summer break as have others in their position – voluntarily enrolled in an intensive 5-week summer transition program. Their ambition led them to complete seven college credit hours in five weeks. This was equivalent to four hours of instruction four days per
week and three hours of instruction on Fridays. The course instructors expected the students to complete the same rigorous course requirements as expected of college students who complete the course during a regular 16-week semester in the fall or spring semester. In addition to all of the requisite course responsibilities, including daily assignments, quizzes, exams, research projects, and essays, the students were required to participate in other summer transition program events and activities. The participants were demonstrating their “ambition” through their voluntary participation in this intensive summer program.

Participants’ perception and attributed characteristics of what a college student should be like was more reflective of who they were at the moment than they might have realized. Their ambition to become fully recognized as college students was driving them forward and enrolling in this program was reflective of their ambition. They recognized that to be a college student required that an individual have the drive and “motivation” to do the work required of him or her. Olivia recounted reading the course requirements for her business major on WU’s webpage:

Olivia: It looks very animated/ and yeah/ it looks like it’s a workload cause/ like when you go into YOUR major map or/ requirements for certain majors/ um you have/ you know/ that [short pause] LONG [elongated] list of two pages long for courses I have to take and the
requirements that must be MET/ But/ for
ME/ personally/ I think it's just that
challenge/ of have seeing all of that and
thinking/ "You know what/ That's what I
want to do/ That's my goal/ and I have to
meet everything//" For me/ that was one of
the incentives other more than just/ the
PICTURES and the ATMOSPHERE of the
website itself//

Although she felt challenged by the “long” list of course requirements, Olivia’s
committing to being a business major was an ambitious endeavor that she would
willingly pursue as the way to reach her goal.

Through their choice of the most salient characteristics for each identity,
participants acknowledged their perception of distinct differences between the
identity of a college student and the identity of a high school student. Findings
indicate that these two identities and their attributed characteristics stand in stark
contrast to one another. Whereas the high school student is perceived as being a
procrastinator and “dependent,” the college student is seen as being “ambitious,”
“independent,” and “motivated.”

The participants’ declaration of independence for themselves and for other
college students was not lost. In this hierarchy of attributes determined by the
data, “independence” ranked second-highest among the participants. There are
many ways in which to consider the participants’ selection of this descriptor.
First, it can be viewed as the student’s desire to be independent. Students may have been waiting for this moment in time to finally begin making their own decisions. This perception of independence could be accompanied by great excitement, as this independence allows them to be free from the rules in their home and from their previous school setting. They are able to make the decisions about who they want to be and how they want to go about constructing a new identity.

Paris described one of her recent experiences regarding her clothing choice in the context of being an independent college student. She had been asked if she believed college students wore any particular kinds of clothes to which she responded:

| Paris: | I don't think so/ Just wear whatever they want// Cause you can wear spaghetti straps now// |
| Interviewer: | Oh/ you couldn't wear them before// |
| Paris: | In high school/ you can't wear spaghetti straps/ well/ in MY high school/ in the district// |
| Interviewer: | Wow/ okay// So/ now/ you can dress differently// |
| Paris: | Yeah// You can like/ |
| Interviewer: | Do you/ |
Paris: But I still don't wear spaghetti straps around school."

[Laughter]

Paris: I'm just not used to wearing them and I don't even do them anymore.

Interviewer: Okay. So you couldn't wear spaghetti straps then and you don't wear them now, but now you don't wear them because you don't want to.

Paris: Yeah, cause I don't want to but you couldn't use that in high school.

For Paris, being able to wear spaghetti strapped tops was more than a statement about wearing spaghetti straps; it was about her ability to choose to wear whatever she liked to wear. Although she was not one who wore this type of clothing, she recognized her independence to wear whatever she desired and was an “independent,” free from the former restrictions of not just her former school, but of her school district. For Paris, this was a statement about her experience as a student, as well as about her experience as a former employee of the school district.

At a later point in the interview, Paris shared the following:

Interviewer: So Okay so if you're a high school student, you have to wear what the rules tell you to wear.//
Paris: Yeah/

Interviewer: And then you come to college/ you can wear whatever you want to wear/ do you dress up/ or do you wear/ I mean/

Paris: I wear jeans and stuff/ Sometimes I dress up when I feel like it/

Paris shared the following about her level of experience with independence at home with her parents:

Interviewer: What do you think your parents would do if they saw you at a college party/

Paris: They wouldn't mind/

Interviewer: They wouldn't mind/

Paris: They started to let me go party when I was 18/ I'm 18 right now/ Once I turned 18/ like/ they started letting me do and be a little bit free/

Since she had been attending WU, beginning in the summer program and continuing into the fall semester, she had experienced a new level of independence, far beyond the “little bit” of freedom her parents had allowed in their home. Moreover, she had established her own set of rules for her “home” in the residential hall:
Interviewer: So/ if you're looking at now your college experiences is it what you thought it was going to be/ so far/

Paris: So far/ I knew it was going to be like a lot of homework and a lot of stuff like that/ But I didn't know that I will hang out with my friends so much// Like/ we got each other ALL the time and it's kind of different because in high school/ the only time we got would be like on the weekends//

Interviewer: Okay// That is different then//

Paris: Yeah/ because we wouldn't be allowed to stay out solely on the week days//

Interviewer: So/ do you stay out late/

Paris: Yeah/ like yesterday/ we were playing Mario for like ever//

Interviewer: So/ what time did you get home/

Paris: Oh NO they were at my dorm/

Interviewer: Okay// So/ what time were you up to/

Paris: Like three in the morning I went to sleep//

As an attribute for a college student, “independent” could also represent a new level of Discourse at WU. Students at WU are treated and expected to behave as independent individuals. Students must make institutional-experience decisions
(e.g., where they will live, whether they will take classes on a particular campus or another, as well as other personal-experience decisions (e.g., continuing religious practices that may have been a part of their parents home, being involved intramural sports. Some of those decisions will be daily decisions with no long-term ramifications (i.e., what to wear or what to eat), whereas other decisions will occur during particular occasions and will have life-long consequences (i.e., whether to live on campus, to apply for scholarships, or to select a particular major).

Not all college students welcome independence. Some students may not feel prepared to make decisions that have legal or fiscal repercussions (e.g., signing a housing application or contract, completing a Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or applying and receiving a student loan), but they must do so nonetheless to be eligible to use the resources afforded to them through these application processes. Other students may feel the weight of making a lifetime commitment of a major selection and are not confident in their initial choice and would, if given the opportunity, like just a little more time in making such a serious commitment.

One of the focus group participants, Rose, shared that she was, through the course of the focus group conversation, learning more about the exploratory college and her experience in selecting her major:

Rose: I didn't know that was there/ like cause I would struggle/ and like right now// I don’t
wanna I/ I to/ I'm not sure of major// No I'm done with picking my major but like/

A few minutes later Rose stated:

Rose: Honestly/ I think they should have advertised more/ I'm mad now//

Interviewer: Okay/ you're mad now/ why is that/

Rose: Because like/ I never knew like/ when I was coming to the university/ I thought you already had to have a major spelled out to do/ and I didn't know this existed/ because if they had I'd go to community college to/ like cause I heard at community college you get your basics like too general// But I didn’t think the university had any general/

Interviewer: Well I say that's again why I'm asking you all to help me because you have an idea in your head like this is when you get to the university you should have a major in mind// And so then you see the web page and you're like/ "I didn't know that this was there"// And so now it's kind of refiguring//
Rose: Cause I feel like I was kind of right now/ I kind of feel like I was forced to choose my major right now//

Interviewer: Okay/

Rose: Because I didn't know this existed and I don't want to go to community college// So I was like/ "Well/ I'll just picture this for now and if I want to change my major then I'll change it”/ But I mean/ I /this would be better than just going to major and then switching it and switching it and switching it//

In Rose’s initial speech act, she established herself as the theme and the subject of the sentence and yet, after the initial clause of “I didn’t know that,” her sentences – perhaps her thoughts – seemed to become unclear and unfinished. Her faltered speech was perhaps an attempt to cover her real thoughts, but ultimately she revealed what she had attempted to cover: her own uncertainty about her choice of major.

In the speech act that followed, she established a new theme by beginning her statement with “honestly.” This illustrates that she was willing to share her personal thoughts and feelings about what she felt was a disservice. Without explicitly stating any particular individual or office, she declared, “they should have advertised more.” She was clearly upset by “their” failure to share
information she would have found extremely helpful. After she was asked to elaborate about feeling “mad”, she shared the source of her anger: She did not know that there was an exploratory college for students at the university and that she had limited information about students completing their “basics.”

She struggled to use the terms that were a part of the institutional Discourse (i.e., “basics” or “general” in lieu of general studies courses or electives and use of approximate words that could represent the point she was trying to make). Filling in what she meant and using word substitution, Rose did not know that universities had colleges that were designed to allow freshmen to explore the various majors without penalty. Rose thought that the only place in which students who were not ready to make the decision about a major could still “get their basics” (i.e., complete general studies requirements) was at the community college. Despite this, she was clear that she did not envision herself attending the community college; rather, the place where she imagined herself pursuing her degree was WU.

In her effort to secure her place at WU, she selected a major because, without pointing her irritation at a specific other, she felt that she had no other choice. Was her anger directed at the source that provided her with incorrect information? Was her anger directed at the university officials because they failed to appropriately advertise this exploratory option on their website? Perhaps she was angry at the fact that, despite her efforts to learn all she could about her the university experience, she learned yet another fact that made her feel even more like an “outsider?” What became clear was that she was challenged by her
newfound independence because Rose didn’t know enough about what was being asked of her to feel comfortable making the kind of decisions “they” required of her. Rose was challenged by the expectations – by the Discourse. Rose’s challenges in becoming literate in the Discourse were apparent throughout the data.

Comparison of First-generation and Continuing-generation Perceptions

In total, the participants selected 136 descriptors between the situated identity of a college student and the two comparator identities of a high school student and a college professor; however, it is critical to address what the participant group as a whole did not select as an adjective/descriptor for a college student. Although the students added many other descriptors to describe the comparator identity of a high school student and the situated identity of a college student, not one participant added any descriptors, terms, or phrases that related to intellectual ability or academic prowess.

Furthermore, of the 63 pre-determined descriptors (drawn from previous research on situated identity and from descriptors provided by the pilot study WU student participants) provided for the participants, the closest the participants came to selecting descriptors that could be considered representative of intellectual abilities for a high school student were these, listed from most selected to least selected: “critical” (fourth most selected), “creative” (eighth most selected), and “imaginative” (twenty-third most selected). The descriptors representative of intellectual abilities of a college student were these: “critical thinker” (a phrase used in the title of one of the students’ summer transition
courses; fifth most selected), “creative” (seventeenth most selected), “studious” (twenty-forth most selected), “academically aggressive” (twenty-seventh most selected), and “imaginative” (thirtieth most selected). The participants perceived intellectual characteristics as more in alignment with the identity of the college professor. The participants selected the following descriptors for the college professor: “scholarly” (fifth most selected), “academically aggressive” (sixth most selected), “intellectual” (twelfth most selected), “critical thinker” (fifteenth most selected), “imaginative” (twenty-seventh most selected), and “studious” (thirty-fifth most selected).

The fact that the students did not add or select descriptors that indicated intellectual abilities for either the comparator identity of a high school student or for the situated identity of the college student was further explored with the participants, as it was important to discover the rationale behind this perception. Were the participants in some way reflecting a social stigma that they were not smart or intellectual based on their participation in the summer transition program? The students’ participation in the summer transition program was not an indication of lack of academic preparedness in all areas but rather in specific subject areas – Math or English. Their lack of academic preparedness for some was attributable to not having taken a math course during their senior year in high school. Of the total summer program participants, 6 were enrolled in the pre-college English course and 37 were enrolled in the pre-college Math course. Rose was the one student in the focus group enrolled in the pre-college English course.
None of the focus group participants expressed concern regarding their academic abilities. Again, the theme of “work” or “hard work” appeared in the data:

Interviewer: When we're looking at potential students/
and what most people think colleges are
looking for/ the top five are hard working/
responsible/ driven/ motivated/ and well
rounded// Would you agree/

Paris: Yes//

Rose: Yeah//

Violet: Yup//

Interviewer: That's what colleges are looking for/ okay//
So did smart’s not there/ do you see smart/

Rose: No//

Interviewer: Um, ambitious is the next one/ dedicated/
open-minded// So what do you think people
are saying/ are they looking at intellectual
qualities/ based on those responses/

Rose: No/

Interviewer: Or what do you think you're looking at/ hard
working/ responsible/ driven/ motivated/
well rounded//

Rose: I think committed person//

Interviewer: A committed person/
Olivia: Well rounded I think is the BEST one/
Interviewer: Okay//
Olivia: Out of those/ because/ you don’t HAVE to be smart I think/ to go anywhere// I think as long as you try hard enough/ and GET what you're doing/
Interviewer: Okay//
Olivia: You'll get places//
Interviewer: So do you think it was your WORK/ that got you here/ to the university/
Olivia: Yeah// I personally believe that/ so//
Rose, Violet, Paris: Yeah/ yes/ yeah [simultaneously]

The theme of the American work ethic or of “pulling [oneself] up by their bootstraps” is at work in this excerpt. The group agreed that it is an individual’s work ethic that determines how far he or she will go in life; the measure of success is measured by the effort an individual is willing to put forth. To the participants, everyone has the intellectual ability to pursue his or her degree at the WU; however everyone is not as committed to making to putting forth the level of work required to achieve this goal.

First-generation Participants’ Perception of Situated Identity and Two Comparator-Identities

When exploring the data from the questionnaire as a whole, any differences or similarities that exist between the first-generation participants and
continuing generation participants would not be observable because the data would based on the numerical count alone. In fact, there were several noticeable differences between the two groups when the data is disaggregated between the two groups. To identify and analyze the differences and similarities in the perceptions and ultimately the situated identities that exist between the two groups, the data from Question 1 were separated to reveal the descriptors selected by the first-generation participants as well as the continuing generation participants. Separated, the data were very telling.

Once the data were separated by generational status, it became apparent that there were similarities and differences between the way the two groups perceived the situated identity of a college student and the two comparator identities of high school student and college professor. As is shown in Tables 12-14, the two groups ranked highest the same two descriptors for the high school student, the same three descriptors for the college student, and the same adjective for the college professor, but there were also profound differences between their choices.
Table 12

*Participant-selected Adjectives/Descriptors of a High School Student by Generational Status*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High school student</th>
<th>All respondents (N = 23)</th>
<th>First generation (n = 17)</th>
<th>Continuing generation (n = 6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Procrastinator</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressured</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambitious</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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<td>Frustrated</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Concerned</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driven</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imaginative</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonchalant</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimistic</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepts criticism</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apathetic</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committed</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
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<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outspoken</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used to being successful</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naive*</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hardworking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Involved</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t look at the big picture*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frightened*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheltered*</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceptional</td>
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<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquisitive</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivated</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible</td>
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<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talented</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed-minded*</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure*</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reckless*</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selfish*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspiring</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-minded</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passionate</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughtful</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
First-generation participants’ perception of high school student identity. Whereas 7 of the 17 first-generation participants perceive that “social” was a characteristic of a high school student, only two of the six continuing generation students felt likewise. Additionally, six first-generation students selected “critical” and six selected “pressured” as attributes most representative of a high school student, whereas only one continuing-generation student made the same selection for either attribute. Even as five first-generation students felt that “sensitive” was most representative of a high school student, none of the continuing-generation students made that selection. Moreover, as four first-generation students selected “ambitious” and four selected “competitive,” only one continuing-generation student selected either adjectivedescriptor.

“Critical”. The first-generation participants identified that high school students are “critical”. This could represent their perception that as high school students they were in a “critical” position. As high school students, these participants likely recognized the social good of pursuing a college degree (e.g., becoming prepared for the workforce, becoming a member of the educated populous, potential for increased salary earnings over their lifetime), and there would be considerable repercussions for themselves, as well as for their families, if they had not been successful in gaining acceptance to a college or university. Even more so, they were venturing to do something that no one in their family had yet successfully completed. Their actions in high school were “critical” steps in achieving their future goals – their own and their families’ future goals.
The participant’s selection of “critical” could also represent the critical view high school students have of those around them. High school students begin to question their parents and others, asking Why? more often and becoming more “critical” of what teachers or others say or do or ask them to accept as fact. At one point in my one-to-one interview with Olivia, she acknowledged her rationale for asking why questions in high school:

Interviewer: And there's/ do you think you act differently in your classes now than you did in high school/ So I know you were saying before that you ask lots of questions in your high school classes/

Olivia: Yes/

Interviewer: Do you ask lots of questions now/

Olivia: [takes a deep breath] No/ but because a lot of it is very self-explanatory OR it's just learning what he’s telling you/

Interviewer: Okay/

Olivia: It's not so much “well/ this is what happened”/ “well/ what happened/ you know/to make it happen?” It's more of this is how everything is and this is why it is/ so they answer any questions right/

Interviewer: They do both/

173
Olivia: Yeah/ rather than/

Interviewer: So instead of saying this is how it is which is high school/ college says this is how it is and this is why it is//

Olivia: Right/

Interviewer: And you're asking the why questions and in high school//

Olivia: I love asking why questions//

Olivia asked why questions to satiate her love of learning, but her asking of why questions also indicates that the fact that someone in an authority position has said it does not mean that she wholly accepts the statement without evidence to support the statement. This is another salient part of Olivia’s identity, as she would respond to every study interview question in a like manner. If she was unclear about what was being asked of her or the conditions surrounding her potential response, she would first ask for clarification. Once clarification had been provided she would proceed with her response, first offering her thesis statement, then providing supporting evidence and a concluding remark. Olivia was the consummate student and a highly effective communicator. She was critical of the people around her, examining and probing for her own information at times for the benefit of those who were around her. This too was another salient element of her identity.
“Pressured”. The participants’ selection of “pressured” marked a turning point, a point in which the full scope of responsibility for their future begins to rest more fully with the participants. Pressured alluded to a change in the way participants characterized a high school student and also provided a glimpse into their perceived tension of a high school student’s experience. There are many ways in which a high school student could feel pressure, such as pressure to perform well on standardized tests, pressure to fit in to prearranged group structures, pressure to graduate, or pressure to have a future plan after graduation.

The focus group participants described some of these pressures (e.g., external influences affecting the students in the form of their parents, family members, friends, high school counselors, places of employment, and student groups/clubs/organizations). As Rose shared, “Mmm and I want to work during college or urr well yeah/ but my siblings would like/ "NO/ things will be HARD//". Olivia shared her own personal struggles with pressure. During a one-to-one interview, she shared a story about the death of her father during her sophomore year:

Interviewer: Okay/ because you haven't talked// Now/
and this is going back to our earlier
conversation/ your mom lives in California//

Olivia: Uh-hmm//

Interviewer: Okay// And she's been there since January of
last/this past year/ this year/ of this year//

Olivia: Yes//
Interviewer: Okay// So/ now/ tell me/ I know that we've talked about this kind of in passing// your mom moved to California and your brother lives there with her and you’re here with /well/ there was a family that moved in to your home/ Olivia: Uh huh/ Uh huh/ Right// Interviewer: Now/ when did your father pass away/ Olivia: Two thousand/ April 8/ 2008/ 2008// Interviewer: Okay// In 2008// And so/ the home that you were living in was the home where you were with your mom and your dad// Olivia: Mom and brother// Interviewer: Mom and brother// Olivia: Well/ you see/ the house has a funny story to it// It was first bought by my aunt// Interviewer: Uh-hmm// Olivia: And everybody went to live with my aunt// Interviewer: Okay// Olivia: My grandma/ my other aunts// My mom was still with my dad/ in Mexico// And I was living with them in Mexico/ I lived with them for about four to three years//
Interviewer: Okay/

Olivia: And so then/ she decided to send ME over with my grandmother MYSELF for good another four years/

Interviewer: Okay/ okay/

Olivia: And I was in [a local community] and stable in [the state] [Inaudible]/

Interviewer: Okay /

Olivia: Before she came/ over/ when I was about 12/ 13 /

Interviewer: Okay/ And so/ you've lived both in Mexico and in the U.S./

Olivia: Uh-hmm /

In the first statement made by the interviewer, an “earlier conversation” was referenced. It was during that earlier one-on-one interview that Olivia revealed in greater detail the circumstances that surrounded her mother’s relocation to California and Olivia’s own living with another family, during the last half of her senior year. Specifically, Olivia was living with another family who moved into Olivia’s family home:

Olivia: No/ I think what influenced me the most I think were the fact that I had scholarships going for me and that I could get/ for example/ the Board of Regents which I got 177
and all that other good stuff/ So in knowing that I was going to get to [state] Board of Regents/ I hate to say that I have limited myself but I did/ to choosing one of the three state universities/ But the way I explained it to my mom/ I was like/ if I can CHOOSE any of those three universities which are very good schools/ and I'm gonna to get basically a free education and I'm going to do what I want to do/ why not/ Why do I have to go/

Interviewer: Now/ your mom lives in California/

Olivia: Yes/

Interviewer: And so who are you here with/ who are you living with here/

Olivia: When she left/ which was in January/ [of 2010]

Interviewer: Okay//

Olivia: I was in my house/

Interviewer: Okay//

Olivia: Our house// But we rented the house to my best friend's family//

Interviewer: Okay//

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Olivia: Because they had recently/ which is really ironic/ cause when we/ when she was deciding to go to California to find/ to get her job/ they had lost their house//

Interviewer: Oh/ okay/ okay//

Olivia: So I ended up staying with them at my own house/

Interviewer: Oh/ wow/ wow//

Olivia: Isn't that luck/

Interviewer: Okay// That is// That's amazing//

Olivia: So/

Interviewer: So you stayed with them to finish school//

Olivia: Yes/ to graduate and/

Interviewer: Wow/

Olivia: Finish school//

Interviewer: Wow/

Olivia: My mom has been telling me/ "Come over here// What are you doing/ you're all alone/ I'm all alone with [your brother]"/ And I'm like/ "Mom I really want to TOO but I'm getting everything HERE"/ Like no offense but in California/ it's going under// They're not offering me as much financial aid as I
NEED to pay EVERYTHING completely/
And I mean/ I'm getting everything here/

Olivia had to make several life-altering decisions about her future during her senior year in high school. She was enacting the identity of a businesswoman, practicing the skills of her chosen field of study business, yet while still in high school. Her statements above indicate that she knew the choices she was faced with and she was intentional in making those decisions. While her first use of the word “EVERYTHING” represented the specific costs associated with attending WU, her second use of the word “everything” represented so much more than merely the great financial benefits. She was choosing the pursuit of her education over her family and yet, as she shared later, her mother and brother were the people for whom all of her decisions were intended to support. She was doing what her mother had done for her years ago; the roles had been reversed and Olivia had assumed the “parental” role as she was doing what needed to be done for the moment so that in the long run her family would benefit from this difficult but necessary separation. She intentionally remained in her “home” and in her “home” state, and although not stated as such, she recognized that her decision, although difficult, was a matter of business. She explained to her mother that choosing to limit her college-going choices to the three state universities in her “home” state was a business decision, one that had to be made and one that did not reflect that she loved her mother or family any less.

Through her experiences leading up to attending WU, Olivia maintained her humility and optimism. Whenever she spoke of merit scholarships that she
received, she spoke with a softened tone, so as to not be viewed as bragging but to share the fact that that others had given recognition to her work; to her, it was a matter of doing her work because, through her father’s example, she had learned several valuable lessons. She named the *Regents Scholarship* by name but categorized it with “all that other good stuff” as though she, during our interview, had called enough attention to her accomplishments. The point of her statement was not to be lost; her choosing to remain in the home she had shared with her family which required her to be separated from her mother and brother meant she was taking control of her life and making “business” decisions for her sake and for the sake of her family. Moreover, both pieces of data are examples of business decisions made by her family; she was merely continuing a practice that had been a part of her mother’s side of her family Discourse. Olivia had learned and was making decisions from a perspective that posited that at times an individual would be required to defer personal gratification for the sake of the family unit; however, in the midst of Olivia’s and her family’s experiencing their own struggles, they continued to be of support to and to be supported by their extended family and friends. As Olivia recounted how she, her mother, and brother moved into their family home, she began by qualifying the experience by saying “the house has a funny story to it.” In the subsequent story she told of her best friend’s family moving into “my house/our house,” with the phrase “our house” referring to her family’s home, she stated “Isn’t that luck/”. Was it lucky that her mother had to go to California to find a job? Was it lucky that her best friend’s family was losing their home? Was she celebrating the distress and demise of others? Not at
all; her question showed her ironic use of the term “lucky”. She was again carrying the same message in both speech acts – that no matter what terrible or life-changing experiences one has in life, when a family sticks together, all can benefit and get what they need. Olivia’s mother was able to move to join other family in California with the hope of finding employment and the friend’s family had a new home. Ultimately, Olivia benefited as well, as it was this series of events that allowed her to remain in her home and not just graduate from high school but to “finish school.” For Olivia, finishing school represented the completion of her education which included pursuing her college degree at WU. Even with the pressure her mother was exerting to have Olivia move to another state, Olivia knew that what she would lose in the move would be more than she would gain. Those losses were more than the financial aid and scholarships: She would lose the control over her life that she had wanted for years and was finally able to enjoy. As much as she wanted to be like her family, what she craved most was to be like her older cousin who was “independent.” Her use of the term “everything” in our interview had come to represent many things: a college degree, control over her life, stability, family connections, and independence. She had moved from “object” to “agent” and was not willing to go back to her former way of being.

The pressure that Olivia experienced during her years in high school was her own lived, specific experience; however, each of the participants in the focus group had significant pressure placed on them by their family situations. The participants also shared their own experiences with internal pressures – finding
friends, maintaining some semblance of control in their own lives, earning good grades, finding a way to pay for college to be better, to do better, and to achieve more – and the resultant weight they felt as a result of those pressures. Their stories also offered insight into the pressures they felt as they were transitioning from being high school students to being college students. The weight of each decision caused them to feel “pressured,” which foreshadowed the first-generation students’ selection of “responsible” as the adjective/descriptor that best characterized who they understood themselves to be at the time of the study, analyzed later in this chapter.

**First-generation participants’ perception of college student identity.**

The participants’ rankings for the situated identity of a college student are presented in Table 13.
Table 13

Participant-selected Adjectives/Descriptors of a College Student by Generational Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College student</th>
<th>All respondents (N = 23)</th>
<th>First generation (n = 17)</th>
<th>Continuing generation (n = 6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambitious</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivated</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driven</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money-conscious</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardworking</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinker</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-minded</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepts criticism</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustrated</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realistic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studious</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressured</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excited*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerned</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imaginative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualistic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ready</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughtful</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-rounded</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cautious*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go-getters*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academically aggressive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passionate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. An asterisk (*) indicates an adjective descriptor added by a study participant.
As was the case with the perception of the identity of a high school student, the first-generation and the continuing-generation students who completed the questionnaire shared a common perception that a college student is both “ambitious” and “independent.”

“Motivated”. The differences between the two groups became more salient as the participants chose from descriptors further down the list. Five of the first-generation students selected “motivated,” whereas one continuing-generation student selected this term. Next, five first-generation students selected “driven,” whereas none of the continuing-generation students made that selection. Five first-generation students selected “money conscious,” and again, none of the continuing-generation students identified this as a characteristic of a college student. Furthermore, four first-generation students selected “mature,” “hardworking,” “dedicated,” and “engaged,” whereas only one continuing-generation student selected “mature,” only one other continuing-generation student chose “hardworking,” and none of the continuing-generation students selected “dedicated” or “engaged.”

Focus group members Olivia, Paris, Rose, and Violet understood that being first-generation college students attending the university instead of a community college was “ambitious” and taking an “independent” step. Olivia viewed her experiences at WU as “hard” but “doable,” and Rose’s siblings told her emphatically that "NO, things will be HARD.” Paris shared the following from her interaction with the director of a community-based college-going
program in which she was a participant and for which, upon graduation from high school, she became a volunteer:

Paris: I am I was in this program called Project [M]/ and and so like I already knew I was already thinking I would go to community college/ But/ you know [the project’s director]/

Interviewer: Uh-huh/

Paris: He pushed me to/ want to go to WU//

Interviewer: Okay//

Paris: And so like whatever he TOLD me/ I would like/ be like ok “why is he telling me this” and then/ he would keep on pushing me further in//

Interviewer: Okay/

Paris: That's how//

Interviewer: Okay/ you got to//

Paris: Yeah//

Interviewer: Know WU//

Paris also recounted the following:

Interviewer: That's cool/ That's cool// Okay/ so/ what do you think / if you were to compare what your parents would think of you and your
faculty member/ let's say/ are their expectations of you as a college student the same or different/

Paris: I think they’d be the same/ cause I've always been an overachiever/

Interviewer: Okay/ So/ they expect that you'll do well/
Paris: Yeah/ Like for my younger sisters/ they already know/ like/ not that much about her/ But they already know/ they've always known that/ I've always had like good grades and I've always done so much/ so yeah/

Although Paris had a “three point eight” cumulative grade point average she did not envision herself attending WU. In her family, Paris knew she had a different role, specific to academic achievement, than either of her two school-aged sisters:

Paris: I never had a C in my life so/

Interviewer: Really/ Okay/ So/ “that's not me”/

Paris: That's not// Actually// it's been/ my parents toward my other sister's/ they're like whatever/ because they're so used to them getting Cs// So/ I've always had A’s and Bs// So/ then/ when/ like/ if I would to get a C/ my dad would probably yell at me/ because
he always told me if you get a C/ I would be so mad at you//

Paris had always perceived herself as one who wanted to excel; in her own words, she described herself as an “overachiever.” She recognized that both of her younger sisters were still realizing their potential and that she actually knew more about her sisters and their development than her parents did. To Paris, her experiences had given her particular insight into what her 16-year-old sister was experiencing and yet she also recognized that her sisters should be allowed to have their own paths in life. Although Paris was the “overachieving” sister, her older sister had been the sister of whom an average level of accomplishment was thought possible but her younger sisters’ roles in the family were still being formed. Despite her awareness, Paris was not positioning herself to make that call for her sisters or her parents. She shared how she and the family perceived her and her older sister’s different academic identities in the family:

Paris: I had no idea it was going to go to a university// At first/ I thought I was going to go to/ like/ college students//

Interviewer: Really/

Paris: Like I thought it was going to be like my sister/ because my sister is actually the first one from our whole like family/ like/ my mom's family to and my dad's family to actually go to college//
Interviewer: Okay/

Paris: And/ so um and then there was my cousin and but she went to community college also and then I’m the first one to actually GO to university RIGHT after high school//

Interviewer: Really/

Paris: Yeah/ So like they're all like all into like community college and then to a university/ so being me it was just university/ so it's really/

Interviewer: Do you think there's a difference/ Do you think they look at it differently/ your family saying/ well/ they went to community college and you went to the university/

Paris: They don't really/ they’re all like/ you're still going to college so they don't/ so my parents were not like so big about it// They're like/ "Oh/ I didn’t even know you're going to university"//

Interviewer: Okay// And you didn't think you go to a university/ 

Paris: Uh-uh// [no]
Interviewer: So/ what made you decide to come to see a university/

Paris: Because my older sister/ she's all like “You have really good grades you should go to university first”// So she/ so like “You need to go”/ and so then my counselor she was like looking at my grades since freshmen year// She's like you would/ like I was already like going to/ I was going to graduate in December/ and so/ like/ you should start going in January/ and I was like I just want to finish with my class/ So/ I took one extra class/

There were several people who “[kept] on pushing” Paris to reach for more ambitious goals. The project director, her high school counselor, and more importantly her older sister had “pushed” her to strive for more because they saw something she could not imagine; they saw the potential for another identity that she had been able to conceive. Embedded in the middle of her statement is her recognition of another accomplishment – the fact that she was going to be attending the WU directly after graduation from high school, something many first-generation students are challenged to accomplish (see Chapter 2). Although Paris viewed the community college as an easier experience than the university, it was not that she had any less respect for her older sister or others who were
affiliated with the community college. In fact, Paris was extremely proud of what her sister had accomplished:

Paris: My older sister/ she works at [a local community college]// She's one of the registration ladies/ so she has her own cubicle and stuff// She's been working there for/ this is her third year//

Interviewer: Oh/ that’s good// And she's taking classes there/

Paris: Uh-hmm/ [yes]

Interviewer: Okay//

Paris: She's graduating in May//

Paris’s sister attended the local community college to take classes while simultaneously working as one of the “registration ladies” – something more than anyone in her family expected of her. Paris had given her sister a tremendous compliment by giving her the distinction of categorizing her with the other “ladies” and by acknowledging that her sister had her “own cubicle and stuff.”

Her sister had been able to get a job working in higher education, the type of job that no one in her family had yet to secure: a job where the “ladies” had their own space and where her sister could put her personal belongings. Not only was Paris recognizing the kind of professional her sister had become, she was discussing the future she also saw for herself, as she wanted to be like her sister. Although Paris had been the academically driven member in her family, she acknowledged that
her sister had been a leader in her own right. Moreover, Paris had begun to emulate her older sister in many other ways.

Paris was not the only member of the focus group who perceived that there was a difference between those who attended a community college and those students who attended a university. As Rose and another said in the focus group meeting:

Rose: And then people who are going like/ when my boyfriend he’s going to the community college/ I'm like/ "You have intelligence/ you just don't want to go/" I'm like/ I feel like people who go to a community college I feel like/

Paris: They’re lower but/

Rose: Like they’re lower or something like that/

Interviewer: Okay// So you think you have to be smart/ to be or that's what you thought/ or that's what people think/

Paris: Yeah that’s what everybody/

Violet: That's right// People/ it was more about what people said// They kind of make seem like you're coming to a university/ a four year university/ instead of going to a
Participants’ comments about the community college were not made to infer that those who attended a community college were intellectually deficient but that they felt that the students lacked the “work” ethic required of those who had chosen to go to “university.” That work ethic could be the individual’s commitment to the intellectual or academic “brain” work or it could also be the individual’s commitment to doing work to pay for attending the university or the “body” work. The focus group participants gave little merit to the idea that “smart” was the requisite quality for success at the university; rather, one’s work ethic was necessary for academic success. “Ambitious” was an attribute given to not only represent the lofty goals of the students in pursuing a degree at WU but also of their ambitious goals for their future beyond their undergraduate education.

“Independent”. The similarities between the first-generation and the continuing-generation participants’ perceptions of what it means to be college students initially both centered on the internal attributes of college students – the students’ ambition and level of commitment. Both groups also recognized the transition that a young adult makes from high school to college through selection
of “dependent” for the high school student and “independent” for the college student; however, the two groups seemed to perceive “independent” differently, as the level of responsibility felt by first-generation students seems to weigh far more heavily on them, as indicated by their comments.

With “independent” framed as a lens to consider the differences between the two groups’ perceptions of the identity of a college student, the data indicate that first-generation students selected descriptors that were representative of the nature or the “work” that an individual must undertake to gain and maintain access to the institution and its resources. The attributes were representative of internal traits or characteristics a student must possess or exhibit; continuing-generation students, however, selected descriptors that were representative of the “relationships” a college student must have with others, and then of the internal characteristics of the student.

Furthermore, the individual characteristics identified by the continuing-generation students were not the same as those selected by the first-generation students. Whereas first-generation students selected characteristics akin to those used to describe “manual labor” (e.g., “driven,” “hardworking,” “dedicated,” and “engaged,”), the continuing-generation students selected characteristics that were akin to “mental labor” (e.g., “creative,” “academically aggressive,” “innovative,” “passionate,” “reliable,” and “sensitive”). These differences represent the larger societal differences between social classes – the working class and the educated class, their Discourses, and their perceptions of capital.
First-generation participants’ perception of college professor identity.

It is with these findings in mind that the comparison between the situated identity of a college student and the comparator-role of a college professor was made. The differences between the first-generation college students’ and the continuing-generations’ perceptions about identity within a college setting continued to widen. These data are shown in Table 14.
### Table 14

**Participant-selected Adjectives/Descriptors of a College Professor by Generational Status**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College professor</th>
<th>All respondents ($N = 23$)</th>
<th>First generation ($n = 17$)</th>
<th>Continuing generation ($n = 6$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respected</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly qualified</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarly</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academically aggressive</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspiring</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financially secure</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Passionate</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Well-rounded</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intellectual</td>
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<td>Reliable</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical thinker</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open-minded</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Realistic</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardworking</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aloof*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepts criticism</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committed</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerned</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Imaginative</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used to being successful</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>World-renowned</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dedicated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inquisitive</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ready</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Studious</td>
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<tr>
<td>Talented</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. An asterisk (*) indicates an adjective/descriptor added by a study participant.*
“Respected”. Once again, both the first-generation and the continuing-generation students agreed that the characteristic that most represented the college professor was “respected.” In the figured world of the continuing-generation students, college professors are “respected” because they are “highly qualified” and, as a result, they are “financially secure.” The college professor is an individual who is “experienced,” “scholarly,” “intellectual,” “reliable,” and “independent.”

In the figured world of the first-generation students, a college professor is “respected” because he or she is an “experienced” “leader” who is “highly qualified” and “scholarly” because he or she was “academically aggressive.” The college professor is “inspiring” and “prepared” and, as a result, enjoys being “financially secure” because he or she is “passionate” about work and is “well rounded.” In the focus group discussions, Olivia, Paris, Rose, and Violet proceeded to expound on the many qualities befitting a person of such a position. To Rose, there was a big difference between the way she perceived a college professor would interact with or treat students and what she experienced with her high school teacher in preparation for her collegiate experience:

Rose: Yeah/ Like in high school they did/ um even thought like/ "Oh/ you're an adult/" like senior year/ and they’d be like/ "Oh/ you're an adult you’re preparing you for college” but you’re still kind of/ kind of /
All four: Baby you [all four say the word simultaneously]

Rose: Because like/ I would get/ I personally would get mad of um/ how like you know sometimes your late and you’re like/ you know why you're late/ and it's just some teachers would be like/ "Oh do you work and this and that or brag[ging] you know/ even though you'll know/ like I understood how/ like I HAVE to do my work like that//

Interviewer: Uh-huh// [yes]

Rose: I didn’t need to get babied or anything like that// I understood I have/ I'll get everything on time//

To set the context for her statement, Rose made a distinction about a student’s senior year in high school. Through her intertextual reference, voicing the high school teachers from the perspective of her figured world, high school teachers recognized the students as adults, but not quite yet finished adults. They were still in a maturation process, and the senior year in high school served as a finishing school experience; however, by Rose’s account, their actions did not mirror their words. The teachers held the students accountable as though they were adults, but treated the students as though they were “babies.” Her perception was that teachers did not treat the high school students as though they were
holding themselves accountable for ensuring that their school obligations were met.

Rose’s statement also gave insight into the pressure that she and many other high school students felt during the year. Although this experience personally resonated with all four of the participants, Rose’s use of the word “you” was personal. The context of the data were established when Rose declared, “I would personally get mad”; she was referring to herself and her own experience in the second person, but it was nonetheless a common experience shared by the group. If a word substitution were conducted on her statement, it might be said in this manner:

I had enough pressure on me and I didn’t need someone else reminding me of something else that I had to get done. They wanted to hold me accountable like an adult but by their constant reminders they were treating me like a baby. It wasn’t like I didn’t know I had to get it in. Give me some credit for being responsible; I’m not a baby. I know what I need to do; I will get it done and it will be on time.

What she was indirectly saying was that the teachers did not give the students credit for being equally invested in their own education. The students could be trusted to care for themselves because they were “adults,” as she had voiced in her characterization of her teacher, who were capable of doing so.

Later in the conversation, Paris gave her own reasons as to why there was a difference between a high school teacher and a college professor:
Interviewer: Now do you feel different as college students than you did as high school students/

[Silence 5 seconds]

Paris: I did/

Interviewer: You did/

Paris: But like/ maybe other students didn't/ because some students didn’t really respect their teacher as much as you probably would in college/ because by being in college you think that/ okay the teacher is not going to tell you what to do all the time/ They're not going to be NICE to you all the time/

Interviewer: Okay/

Paris: Like high school students/ like high school teachers are// So//

To Paris, written in the employment contracts of her high school’s teachers were two clauses that required them to tell the students what to do “all the time” and that they had to be “nice” to the students while doing so. Her choice of the word “nice” could be interpreted in two very different ways: (a) as a compliment to the teachers and the school’s selection of teachers who had this innate quality or (b) as a statement that the teachers had no choice but to be “nice” even if they wanted to behave otherwise. Moreover, she stated that the high
school students did not treat their high school teachers with the level of respect
the teachers were due. From her perspective, the act of teachers being nice while
reminding the students of their responsibilities was not optional for teachers, it
was a requirement of their position as teachers.

To Paris, “being in college” was going to offer some students a reality
check. Some students might not be aware of it, but Paris knew that college
professors, unlike high school teachers, were not “contractually bound” to remind
students of due dates, nor were they going to be “nice to you all the time.” The
college professor was a new kind of teacher, unlike any the other high school
students had ever experienced before. The last sentence, “Like high school
students/ like high school teachers are// So//?”, appears to be a slip, as it reads as
though she was drawing a parallel between the teachers and the students. The
clause structures are exactly the same as she was correcting her speech error. With
that in mind, what if the sentence was to be read as “Like the high school
students/ like the high school teachers are// So//?” (emphasis added). This could be
interpreted to mean that the students elicit the teachers’ actions, and that is just the
way it is.

Later during the one-to-one interview, Paris expanded on her perception of
the difference between her college professors, whom she referred to as teachers,
and high school teachers.

Interviewer: Do you think your teachers treat you
differently here in the university than in high
school/

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Paris: Right now/

Interviewer: Uh-huh/ [yes]

Paris: No/ not really because one day I missed

English class because I had a doctor's
appointment/ and my English teacher/ he
emailed me this is what we did today/ here
you go// I think it was because I had already
told him before// I emailed him that I was
going to miss class because I had this and
this// And I even reminded him in class
before/ so/ I think that's why/ because I
remember [another student] didn't tell him
anything about missing class and he never
told her like what we did in class// So/ I
think it was because I had warned him/

Interviewer: Okay// So/ what do you think/ do you think/
in high school/ how did your teachers treat
people in high school/

Paris: They like to baby you/ like/ A LOT//

They're like/

Interviewer: Okay// So/ like/ they make sure you get your
homework turned in/
Paris: Yeah// Well/ my senior year they've stopped doing it like that/ like if you don't turn it in/ oh/ well// They're like/ my freshmen/ junior/ and sophomore year/ they're like turn in your homework or this and this can happen/ or they'll give you like extra time to turn it in//

Interviewer: Okay// What about here/

Paris: Well/ I've always turned in my homework on time here/ but I don't know/

Interviewer: So/ you don't test the waters/

Paris: I'm not a procrastinator//

 Initially, Paris did not recognize that her college professors, or “teachers,” treated her any differently than her high school teachers had. In her mind, her college instructor teaching a course during the fall semester of her freshmen year acted in the same manner as her high school teacher, emailing her the details of the information she had missed by not being in class; however, as she made that statement, she recalled what she had done prior to her absence from the class: She “had warned him” that she would be absent. She not only emailed him about her pending absence, but she also reminded him about her absence before the class she was going to miss. She compared her experience to that of her friend and classmate who failed to “warn” the faculty member of her upcoming absence, the outcome of which was very different. Paris realized in that moment what she had
done was what prompted the teacher’s actions. She realized she had, in fact, been
the driving force for the change in her relationship with the instructor; she
realized she was beginning to understand the institutional Discourse. Her
classmate had not yet made that transition; the friend was not yet as literate in the
social practices and expectations.

Paris realized that the high school teacher and the college professor were,
in fact, different. What followed next was an example that demonstrated that she
recognized the difference between what happened in high school (i.e., between
the freshman and junior high school years) and what happened in college. Within
her story, her use of “you” was not personal (i.e., not used to refer to herself), but
was used to refer to those who did not turn in their homework and those students
who could not manage to meet deadlines and needed extra time. This was not a
group she was a part of in high school, and by her final comment, she wanted it
known that she was not that type of student at WU either: She was not “a
procrastinator.”

“Experienced” gained through “Work”. Although both the first-
generation and the continuing-generation participants selected “experienced” as
the second-most representative adjective/descriptor of a college professor, it was
the college professors’ “work” ethic that was more salient for the focus group
participants. The first-generation and the continuing-generation participants may
have attributed “experienced” to the college professor due to their position within
the university and due to the fact that they situated the faculty role as the most
mature identity of the three identities; it was, however, the work ethic of the
faculty member that was a salient characteristic of a college professor. Both the
first-generation and the continuing-generation students recognized the intellectual
“work” that is a part of the professorial role; however, once again, the first-
generation students attributed the intellectual abilities of the college professor as
gained through hard work and effort. The continuing-generation students
positioned the college professor differently: They credited the work needed to be
a professor as “brain” work but not as “body” work.

**Business Communication Course Instructor**

Olivia shared the following about her fall semester business
communications course:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewer:</th>
<th>Okay/ so then how do you take notes for communication class/</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Olivia:</td>
<td>I take notes in class/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer:</td>
<td>Okay/ okay/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia:</td>
<td>But because when he goes over PowerPoints/ he doesn't get through all of the PowerPoints and just starts the PowerPoints/ He gets like the 5th slide EVERY time/ However/ he TALKS about the slide A LOT MORE than what is explained in the slide/ So he goes like true examples/ through more things that you...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
need to know that aren't either on a book or discussed in the slide//

Interviewer: Okay//

Olivia: That's why I have like I have to take three sets of notes// Basically/ you have the notes in the PowerPoint// You have the notes that you take in class/ what he talks about in class/ and you have the book notes// And that's a workload//

Interviewer: And that's very different from high school/ Ok//

Olivia: Yes// because in high school/ it was just we're going to go through the PowerPoint like this// “All the info that you need is in the PowerPoint”// “It’s not online/ but if you need to me to backtrack I will backtrack// You can continue to write and I’ll move forward”// And here/ it's just this is what we're talking about today// You got to be listening to me or else you're done/ and then look through the PowerPoints AND read the book because everything kind of supplements each other//
Interviewer: Okay/ okay//

Olivia: That's a work load//

Interviewer: Yeah//

Olivia: A big work load//

Interviewer: That sounds like it// So that's the communication class//

Olivia: Yes//

Interviewer: And you love that class//

Olivia: I love that class// [she whispered this]

Interviewer: Why do you like that class so much/

Olivia: Probably the fact that the teachers a really good teacher// He keeps me entertained// He engages the students//

Olivia’s description of the course portrayed it as a very demanding course. She reiterated three times that the class was a “work load,” with the last reference clarifying that it is “A big work load”; however, this was not the first time she used this phrase. She introduced this phrase, “work load,” 6 minutes and 40 seconds into the over one-hour focus group meeting. She said that she “loves” this class because the “teacher” demands a lot of work from the students, which to Olivia and the other first-generation students is in alignment with their belief in a strong work ethic. She also enjoyed the “teacher” because he was equally committed to the exertion of physical energy necessary to “entertain” and
“engage” the students in the class. He fit their figured world description of what a college professor should be.

Mrs. S. and Ms. C., Summer Western University Instructors, and High School Advanced Placement Math Teacher

Olivia also spoke her experiences with three different teachers: her former high school Advanced Placement (AP) teacher and two instructors who taught courses during the summer transition program at WU:

Interviewer: Okay/ And so have you noticed the difference in the way that faculty members teach here in college versus how it was taught in high school/

Olivia: Yes/

Interviewer: Okay/ what's the difference/

Olivia: For example/ Ms. Mrs. [S]/ the math class is very much like high school/ and you know it’s obviously it's math/ but everybody teaches math probably the same way// But apart from the fact that she's much more engaging/ she tries to engage you more and she cracks jokes at you/ unexpectedly so/ it's funny// The LACK of visual aid/ not that/ not that/ it doesn't help me learn because
you know I prefer visual aids/ but it gives you more of a realistic view of math/

Interviewer: Okay/

Olivia: I don't know if that makes any sense/ like in high school you would have/ you know smart boards and they would write out all over it and erase and do it again// And it would be that visual aid/ that/ like for example/ I know my junior year teacher/ he would have PowerPoints and he would do/ you know/ the math within the PowerPoint and when he wanted to explain formulas/ or when he wanted to explain how to do a problem step by step/ he didn't want to do it out HIMSELF/ the same PowerPoint would do like parenthesis/ letter/ parenthesis all in like a paste way if you get everything// So it's kind of like writing it step-by-step but the same PowerPoint would do it for you/

Interviewer: Wow/

Olivia: And it was just cute doing that/

Interviewer: Have they used PowerPoints in any of your classes here/
Olivia: Just Mrs. Ms [C.]

Interviewer: Okay, and so she's used the PowerPoint in her teaching.

Olivia: For presentations.

Interviewer: For presentations. Okay, and how have you used technology here in the University? You use what technology in your classes? Do you use any technology? So do you use any technology in your math class? Does she use a computer at all?

Olivia: No, it's mainly it's we're talking about just basic, raw technology probably just the calculators.

Interviewer: Okay, calculators. And then in your other classes?

Olivia: But definitely for UNI classes you have, I've been using PowerPoints.

Interviewer: Okay.

Olivia: I've been using Word a lot for essays and outlines and all that good stuff.

Interviewer: And so the difference between high school classes and college classes for you is the difference in visual aids.
Olivia: Uh-huh// [yes]

Interviewer: And what else do you think/

Olivia: I think maybe just/ I've noticed for example when/ in Ms. Mrs. Ms. [C]'s class/ by the end of the class she's giving us whatever it is we're going to be doing the next day/ and the class continues to talk over her// And I'd love that I'm sitting right in the second row/ because I still get to listen to her because she doesn't stop// She's doesn't STOP to wait for them to finish// She just keeps going which I LOVE /because it's their fault for being rowdy and not paying attention//

Interviewer: So what do you think she's saying the students in that when she doesn't stop/ Do you think/

Olivia: Sincerely/ I don't think the rest of the class notices// I don't know if anybody else has noticed// But to me it just comes out to say/ "Well/ you're not paying attention to me then I'm not paying attention to you/ so I have no reason to stop FOR you if you're not doing that for me"//

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Interviewer: And so do you think that students/ do you think that students are still responsible//
She's still/ by going on/ do you think she's saying you're responsible for this regardless if you're listening or not/

Olivia: Yes/

Interviewer: Okay/

Olivia: And in difference to high school/ for example my AP teacher would stay quiet and get mad at us// And then so we realize that she wasn't talking anymore// And then she'd be like/ "Are you done/ Can I continue" //

Interviewer: Ah/ okay//

Olivia: So it/

Interviewer: So the difference in the way that they're treating you is what/ what do you think is the difference/

Olivia: The difference is that here/ it's not that they don't have patients for you/ they're holding you to a completely set of responsibility standards/ I think compared to high school// And I think high school/ even though we 212
WERE the AP class or classes for that matter/ they still have that babying effect because they WANTED you to listen/ they WANTED you to do good/ and not that I'm saying that the university setting/

Interviewer: Yeah/

Olivia: That they don't want you to do good but it's more of a/ if you're choosing to pay attention to me then you're good/ If you're not/ then I feel sorry for you/ but it's your decision/ And/

Mrs. S., the Western University math instructor, and the high school advanced placement math teacher. Olivia situated the Math class and the Math instructor from her summer program in alignment with her high school Math class. Moreover, she had deduced that “everyone teaches math probably the same way.” The “everyone” Olivia was referencing included the kinds of teachers who taught Math like a high school teacher; however, Olivia did perceive her summer transition Math teacher as different from other Math teachers of her ilk, because she “tries to engage you more and she cracks jokes.” Mrs. S., in some ways, exemplified a high school teacher, but if considered on a scale or continuum of teachers with high school teachers being at one and college professors being at five, then this WU teacher would have been a four – almost but not quite what Olivia expected a college professor to be. Mrs. S. put real work into teaching the
course while making the “realistic view” of math, despite the “lack of visual aids” and “raw technology,” not seem so boring. There were no bells and whistles; the teacher did not use high-tech teaching methods or visual aids, but the class was more realistic than her high school Math course, in which the teacher used the latest technology, the use of which was “cute.” From Olivia’s perspective, the high school Math teacher did not give students the realistic perspective of what Math, or life, would be like, because, by Olivia’s standards, students should be “working” through the problems as they will in the “real” world. Olivia had taken Math classes for years, and to her they were all the same; therefore, her expectation of how a Math teacher would have behaved, even at the university level, did not change.

During Mrs. S.’s math classes and in her other interactions with the summer program participants, she introduced the students to her Discourse, as the participants math instructor, and to the Discourse of WU. She had a very structured classroom experience from the moment the students walked in the door to the moment they left the room. Every day, Mrs. S. arranged the tables and chairs in a particular order and the students were assigned to specific seats. The instructor’s desk was in the center in the front of the classroom. The row closest to the instructor’s desk was comprised of three sets of two tables that buttressed one another in vertical position to the front of the classroom. Each set of two tables had two chairs for each table and those chairs facing toward the center of the tables and in the set of tables and chairs in the right front row one seat was left open. The left front row set of tables and chairs were left vacant for students who
were acting outside of her accepted classroom practices. There was a second row but there was only one set of tables and four chairs. Last there were three rows of tables that faced the front of the room. Each row had six chairs and but the students were only seated in the front row. Only female students were seated in the first and second rows and the three males were all seated together in the third row (the first row facing the front of the room). The tutor was seated behind the male students in the fourth row.

They would enter the room and take their seats, placing their backpacks or other bags on the floor. They were to pull their homework out and place it on the table, and as Mrs. S. approached, they turned the homework to face her. She would ask if they had any homework and proceed around the room until she had reviewed the homework of all seventeen students. Each of the students had name “tents” they had to display where they sat during each class. When the students were taking their exams they were required to clear the tables of everything but their pencils and pencil cases, calculators, and exams. Every student followed certain steps to leave the room: they closed their exam, closed their calculators, handed in their exam to the instructor, packed their bag/backpack, pushed in their chair, and left the classroom.

During the class meeting times, Mrs. S. in fact had a daily ritual that the students were expected to follow. To ensure that the students understood the official class time had begun, she would announce, “Hello/ hello/ we are in session//” and would tap on the table in front of the class. During the beginning of one class meeting, she made the following statement, “Hello/ hello// You have to
respect the classroom/ it’s like a church or a place where you pray// You have to treat it with respect//”. She was establishing that they were to be thoughtful and attentive to their actions and behaviors while in the classroom, but the statement also invoked a sense that the students were there for a greater purpose. Moreover, they should consider the classroom as sacrosanct as the place where one would go to celebrate their Creator and their faith. Her comments were not specific to a particular subject but rather to the broader ideal of the learning and exchange of ideas that takes place in a classroom. She was establishing a practice the students should continue even after the summer program ended. At another point in the class, she stated the following when the extraneous conversation was too loud: “We are in business/ we are in session please//”. Again, she was reminding the students of the way in which they were to conduct themselves when in her class. She was reminding the students in the classroom that when they were “in business” or when they were “in session” that all attention should be focused on the action taking place.

Mrs. S. had organized the seating so as to leave open four chairs at tables in the front of the classroom in the event she needed to relocate disruptive or non-attentive students. At the beginning of every class, she would have the assigned class tutor work through whatever homework assignment questions the students could not solve from the night prior. Whenever she would ask the students to solve a problem, she would require them to provide the solutions to the problems by asking open-ended questions, e.g., “What do we call this/” or “How will we know/”. She would also ask clarifying questions, e.g., “Irrational or irregular/” or
“Is it okay so far?” If Mrs. S. felt the students needed to remember a particular math concept, she would be directive in her instructions: “I want to remind you to write me the formula// If you don’t write the formula/ you’re gonna lose some point/ so please write the formula//”. The students did not have to raise their hands to answer an open-ended question; however, if she called a student by name, he or she alone was expected to respond to her question.

The students were also instructed to take notes in a particular way. During one class session, Mrs. S. reminded the students of the following: “Put it on your lecture side/ and put it on your summary sheet//”. During another class session, she reminded the students: “Remember/ the summary sheets/ with the special products//”. Additionally, to help the students remember to include the “plus sign” when solving an equation, she offered a bit of dark humor that was exhibited in the following interaction:

Instructor:    You see this plus/

Student 1:    She’ll break your fingers//

Instructor:   I’ll break your fingers//

As evidenced in these data, the instructor was using a social language that represented the language of a Math instructor to her Math students. In turn, the student in the last utterance was repeating the understood social language of students in Mrs. S’s Math class. The use of and reference to Math specific terms (e.g., “product” and “plus”) signaled to the hearers that they understood all that was inferred by the use of those single terms. There was no need to explain what
was meant by the use of the two terms, as the students and the instructor had created a shared social language in the midst of using a larger social language.

During the class sessions, Mrs. S. would write on one of three whiteboards. She used the same approach whenever she was introducing a new concept; she would write the module number they were going to cover and the title of the particular section (e.g., “Graphing Quadratic Functions”) and then proceed to lecture. Whenever she was writing information the students should already know from the previous modules, she would write that information out in blue marker. All new information was written with a red marker. Olivia too followed a color-coded system of her own: She used color markers that mirrored the instructors’ color use and added her own color to denote other information (e.g., Olivia would also highlight new information with a yellow highlighter and use a pink highlighter to draw a circle around the information).

Mrs. S. allowed the students to have what she called a “cheat sheet” that could be used during their weekly exams. It was a note-card on which the students could write the particular formulas for the day. She had very specific rules about what could be included on the “cheat sheet.” As the students were reviewing their homework from the night previous, one class a student asked, “Is this something we will use today/ I mean do I need to put this on my card/”. Mrs. S. replied, “No/no// I’m not gonna do that to you//”. She had particular standards and required students to learn and understand. Therefore, to be tested on that concept in the same day was not something she would do, and she took the opportunity to let students know she “would not do that to them” – she would put them in a
position to have to demonstrate understanding of concepts they had only moment prior just been taught. It was something that could be done but that was not representative of the way she was as an instructor or as a “test giver”; however, she was the kind of instructor who checked each student’s note cards prior to their use. During the same class session, the following interaction occurred between the instructor and another student:

Instructor: What is this/

Student: It is the quadratic equation//

Instructor: It has numbers// I told you/ you cannot use anything that has numbers//

Student: Oh/ okay/ I didn’t remember//

Instructor: [continues to look at the “cheat sheet”]

Student: Can I use it/

Instructor: No//

Based on her use of social language and her Discourse, Mrs. S. was the kind of instructor who remembered what she set as an acceptable practice. She was the kind of instructor who held the students to the established acceptable practices. The student from the last-listed dialogue was the kind of student who broke Mrs. S.’s acceptable practice and was unable to use a tool she allowed all other rule-abiding students use. Mrs. S. was the kind of university instructor Olivia had described her to be – one who was like a high school teacher, in that the students were held to a very strict set of rules; however, she also held them
different set of standards with an increased level of responsibility in their new identity as college students.

Ms. C., Western University critical reading and thinking instructor, and the high school advanced placement math teacher. It was Olivia’s UNI Critical Reading and Thinking (UNI) course instructor who, for Olivia, engaged in practices that represented what it was to be a college professor. UNI was a course that was required of all students; its purpose was to further develop students’ critical thinking and reading skills from those they may have employed as high school students. She considered this to be, after all, a “real” college course, compared to her Math class that was a pre-college Math course. The Math course was a course to bring students up to a collegiate Math performance level, whereas the UNI course required the students to engage in college-level research and analytical practices. Ms. C. held the students accountable, and when she spoke, she did not stop to wait for the students to be attentive to what was being stated.

Olivia voiced what she thought were Ms. C’s actions, which reflected the thoughts, behaviors, and characteristics of a real college professor: “Well/you’re not paying attention to me then I’m not paying attention to you/ so I have no reason to stop FOR you if you’re not doing that for me”. The themes of respect and personal responsibility were once again present. As Olivia offered her concluding thoughts, she modeled a U.S. educational practice taught to students, make a statement and then substantiate that statement with proof or evidence.
Olivia made her statement substantiated by an example from her high school AP course.

It was what Olivia did not say but implied that set the context for her comments. Olivia understood that the students in her AP class were among the best and the brightest students in her school. The students in her AP class had chosen to take a more challenging class by selecting to enroll in the AP class and were taking this course in preparation for the next step in their educational experience, attending a college or university. They were supposed to conduct themselves maturely and learning was something that was supposed to be celebrated in this class because this class was for students who were seeking a more challenging academic experience in preparation for their enrollment in college. Moreover, the students, by virtue of being in this class, had established that they were invested in their future and that they were, by default, to be considered responsible young adults. Despite these expectations, Olivia’s experience in this class was like her other high school classes: The teacher asked for permission to teach and there was yet again some type of personal quality or contractual obligation that moved the teachers to “want” things for the students that some students did not necessarily want for themselves.

Ultimately, the participants’ perceptual differentiations between a high school teacher and a college professor were not determined on the basis of whether either used technology as a tool in their instructional practices. Their perceptual differentiation was due to the way in which the faculty member engaged and interacted with the students and whether the faculty member treated
the students as adults, placing the onus of responsibility on the student. To Olivia, Paris, Rose, and Violet, the “babying effect” was directly correlated to the level of responsibility others expected of the student. A greater level of expected responsibility on the part of the student was related to less responsibility on the part of the teacher to prompt or remind the students of the student’s responsibilities to complete the requisite tasks. This ratio of responsibility determined the level of “babying” present in the situation. For example, a greater level of “babying” corresponded to a decreased level of participant satisfaction with the teacher or college professor.

First-generation Participants’ Perception of College Student Identity for Themselves

Study results demonstrate that there were differences between the first-generation college students and continuing-generation college students in terms of their perceptions of the situated identity of a college student and that of the comparator-roles of a high school student and a college professor. Would these differences extend to the group’s perceptions of themselves at that moment in time? Table 15 shows that there was a profound difference between the perceptions of students in the two groups when they were asked to choose descriptors from the list that would describe themselves during the moment in time when they completed the questionnaire.
Table 15

*Participant-selected Adjectives/Descriptors of Themselves Now by Generational Status*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You Now</th>
<th>All respondents (N = 23)</th>
<th>First generation (n = 17)</th>
<th>Continuing generation (n = 6)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsible</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>Motivated</td>
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<td>Concerned</td>
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<td>5</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Friendly</td>
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<td>Takes initiative</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Determined*</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diligent*</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educated*</td>
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<td>Excited*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loud*</td>
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<td>Descriptor</td>
<td>1st Gen.</td>
<td>2nd Gen.</td>
<td>Difference</td>
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<td>Motivated*</td>
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<td>Thinker*</td>
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<td>Academically aggressive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accepts criticism</td>
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<td>Cautious</td>
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<td>Critical thinker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frustrated</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
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<tr>
<td>Innovative</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspiring</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. An asterisk (*) indicates an adjective/descriptor added by a study participant.

The differences in the self-perceptions of the first-generation students and the continuing-generation students were immediately recognizable in their respective selection of descriptors. First, the first-generation students added 14 descriptors to who they perceived themselves to have been at the moment, whereas only 1 continuing-generation student added an additional adjective/descriptor. Notably, the additional descriptors could be perceived as both positive and negative characteristics, as their meanings are the result of the individual experiences of each study participant.

Although the leading three descriptors that most resonated with continuing-generation students as being representative of themselves at the
moment were “optimistic,” followed by “creative” and “sensitive,” the first-generation students felt “responsible,” “motivated,” and “committed.” Not one of the continuing-generation students selected “responsible” to represent themselves. The continuing-generation students’ perceptions were similar to that of an artist looking forward to beginning a new great work. It was a description that did not carry a sense of weight or of work but of positive-enlightenment. In their new identity as a college student they were hopeful as they learned new and innovative ways in which they could arrive at new levels of awareness and openness to new ways of thinking about themselves or others in the world. The description of the first-generation students was one of an individual who was answerable to others or of an individual who was taking ownership of their experience and that despite/in the midst/because of these responsibilities they were driven or had incentive to meet the challenges they perceived or experienced because they were determined to be successful. The continuing-generation students were arriving, whereas the first-generation students were overcoming. The continuing-generation participant’s description was of “brain work” and the first-generation participant’s description was of “body work”.

The data from the questionnaire were validated by the data collected during the focus group meeting with Olivia, Paris, Rose, and Violet, all first-generation students. Responsibility was the opening topic of the focus group meeting and was a theme interspersed throughout the entire interaction. Early data reflect the issue of responsibility being related to the completion of “homework,” “scheduling,” and “class attendance”: 225
Interviewer: So/ the first prompt or question is right now you believe high school was different from college in what ways/
Paris: Homework/
Interviewer: Homework/
Rose: Yeah/ the work/
Interviewer: Okay/
Violet: Scheduling/
Interviewer: Scheduling/
Olivia: All of the above/
Interviewer: All of the above/ All of the above/ Is there a difference in the amount of work/ your responsibility with the work/ what do you think/
Olivia: I would say responsibility/ just because for example/ in attendance/ they don't know/
Interviewer: Uh-huh/
Olivia: It's not like they're requiring me to ATTEND every class because it DEPENDS on your life/ like they would tell you in high school/
Interviewer: Okay/
Olivia: Here/ it's/ if you want to go/ go/
Interviewer: Uh-huh/

Olivia: If you don't want to/ you have to BUT it's preferable that you go/

Interviewer: Okay/

Olivia: So/ I think it's more that your responsibility for yourself within yourself/

Interviewer: Okay/

Olivia: For what you want to accomplish/ and it’s different to high school where it was/ you HAVE to/ it's MANDATORY that you come to class/ And if you miss so many days/ you’re on academic probation and if you get out of academic probation/ then you're no longer attending high school/

Interviewer: How do you feel about that/ the responsibility being different/ Does it feel better or worse/ you like it/

Violet: I mean/ I personally/ like it more because I mean/ back in high school/ you didn’t really feel responsible for a lot of things/ you didn't take into account that it was actually your responsibility and I feel that/ college/
with the way it is kind of helps you and makes you more of an adult//

Interviewer: Okay//

Within this excerpt is Olivia’s critical utterance that succinctly synthesized the theme of responsibility: “So I think it’s more that your responsibility for yourself within yourself//”. Olivia’s statement marked the shift in her situated identity and perception of responsibility. It was now understood that the impetus for action for college students was internal motivation, whereas the impetus for action for high school students was external motivation. The increased level of personal responsibility was equated with increased adult status. In fact, all four participants attributed their development and transition into adulthood to their situated activities that were a part of their collegiate experiences. They no longer associated themselves with high school students or high school-like behaviors or activities. They perceived themselves as emerging college students. They attributed their transformation to causes that were both internal (e.g., their own personal drive and motivation) and external (e.g., new expectations from the faculty and staff of WU). They had taken on responsibilities associated with being a responsible individual – responsibilities attributed more to an adult than to a high school student. They recognized that others treated them differently and had different expectations of them. Those expectations required different actions, behaviors, and ways of being. They were now behaving in accordance with the new expectations set by WU faculty and staff members. With these new responsibilities came a new level of angst and concern.
Participants’ sense of responsibility and the weight they bore as a result of these new responsibilities, individually and collectively, were palpable during our focus group discussion. There was a social good at stake: Earning a Bachelor’s degree would change their and their families’ future forever. A college degree meant access to an institution and a social class not previously experienced or available to anyone in their families. Earning a degree meant that they would be unlike their parents.

Paris shared the following:

Interviewer: Okay// So/ your drive to be a great student came from where/ did your family emphasize school/

Paris: Mostly my dad because he's like education/ like/ “You don't want to be like us/ We just have typical jobs”/ He wants us to have a career//

These data reveal the conflicted emotional and situational positions Paris and each of these first-generation students were experiencing. The very work ethic they had learned as a part of their primary Discourse under the tutelage of their parents, a practice that was a part of their core identity, was to be employed to not emulate the very persons from whom they had learned their hard work ethic. The disparity between their primary Discourse and their secondary Discourses and between their core identity and their multiple identities was becoming evident.
For these students, earning their Bachelor’s degrees was both a “want” and
a “need.” They understood what they and their family members or supporters had
risked (e.g., investing the money earned from the sale of their family home into
the participant’s pursuit of a college education) by supporting their decisions to
attend WU. They felt a responsibility to live up to others’ expectations, especially
because others had invested financially in them. Their sense of responsibility
extended into many areas of their lives; financial responsibilities were at the top
of the list. Paris, Olivia, Rose, and Violet were committed and motivated to
fulfilling the various responsibilities associated with their college student identity.

First-generation United States Citizens, English Language Learners, Young
Women of Color

There were other identities with the associated responsibilities that they
were simultaneously establishing. For example, focus group participants
described the sense of responsibility they felt to their family members,
communities, and cultures. These multiple roles and responsibilities were of
varying salience to their situated identity and secondary Discourses (see Chapter
6).

Even as the participants felt the weight of their multiple responsibilities,
they expressed a sense of pride and commitment. They were excited to be
perceived as independent persons who had accepted responsibility and taken
action to secure their academic and professional futures; however, they also
realized that, to a certain extent and for some individuals more than others, they
were moving into unchartered territory which no one in their family had
experienced before. They would be the first members of their families to possibly earn a college degree from a university, and they understood the responsibility that had been placed upon them. Of the group, each was also a first in other ways: Three were first-generation United States citizens and one was the first to attend a university in her new home state. Three were members of the first generation in their families to be fully bilingual in their native-Spanish and in English. With these firsts came added responsibilities.

Pursuing a college education at WU required a financial commitment from all of the students. The responsibility for taking care of those obligations differed for each participant. As incoming freshmen, the participants were asked if they thought there were any specific things they were supposed to do as a college student. As a follow-up to their initial responses to the question they were asked whether there was anything else they had to do, organizations they had to join, if they had to have money or anything else. They responded to the follow-up question with the following exchange:

Rose: For me also it /[pause] I say scholarships like/ cause like um I guess I hear a lot about like how it’s EXPENSIVE//

Interviewer: Uh-huh//

Olivia: Uh-huh//

Rose: And I hear people like "OH/ I have to get this LOAN/ and this and that//" And there’s only a few people who have like/ everything
covered// and for me like/ I kind of get worried like when the end of my senior year/ cause I’d APPLY and APPLY/ APPLIED for scholarships/ but I only got ONE scholarship/ and the rest was like/ financial aid// And I was like/ nervous and I was like/ "Am I going to have to take LOANS and stuff like that/" because that's the least I want to do//

Interviewer: Okay// So let me ask this/ did you have any worries/ about coming to college/ So/you talked about that/

Olivia: I still do/

Interviewer: You still do/ what are they/

Olivia: I think it's just/ apart from time management/ cause I’m/ a bit/ I'm not horrible at it// It's just/ I REALLY have put my mind to it// I think it's just like the expenses/ like YEAH/ you figure out if it's EXPENSIVE/ but like/ right now/ I'm kind of like/ trying to figure out how not to struggle to have ends meet as far as buying
my text books/ and still having enough to
buy whatever is necessary for the dorm/

Interviewer: Okay/ And do you have the same concern or
different concerns/ Do you have any/ What
are yours/ none/ She can’t think of any// Do
you have any concerns/

Violet: YEAH// My concerns is pretty much are
they’re financial/ like/ my/ yeah/ I have
scholarships and there's financial aid/ but I
know that my parents are/ pretty much
paying for the majority of my tuition// Like/
they just told me/ and I didn't know this/ like
when we moved from the east coast to
Arizona/ that they sold the house and then
they/ split the money for the house/ down
the middle and half of its my brother's
tuition/ and half of it is mine// And I'm just/
as like um the bills rack up and everything/
like I've see my dad like down stairs/ trying
to pay bills and pay my tuition and all of
these things/ and it just makes me worried
because like/ I don't really want my parents
to have to/ like I don't really want to say
struggle but for lack of a better term/
struggle to pay my tuition/ and my expenses
like that/

Paris: For mine it was the opposite// My parents
are NOT doing ANYTHING
WHATSOEVER for me// Ever since/ like
they know I was okay/ I have a job// Okay/
yeah/ I did// So they made/ they started
making me be responsible ever since I had a
job/ They're like/ "Okay/ you're paying for
your car/ You're paying for your insurance/
You're paying for your phone bill"// And
when I got to university/ I was like/ "Oh my
gosh/ I'm gonna go//" And they’re like/
they're not going to pay for anything/
They're not going to do anything for me// It's
actually my older SISTER/ she's spoiling me
right now/ It's kind of getting annoying
because I'm not used to people buying me
stuff/ and so when she was buying for my/
my um TV and all these other stuff/ and I
was like/ "Why are you buying me stuff/"
"Because you're going to university// You
actually put your effort to do this/”/ and I
did it and stuff so// She’s like my mother//

[she lets out a small laugh]

Rose was wholly responsible for locating the resources to pay for her pursuit of an
Engineering degree in Construction. Her worst fear was that she was going to
have to take out loans, as she had heard from “others.” Like Rose, Olivia was also
solely responsible for finding the financial resources that would allow her to
pursue a degree in Business with an emphasis on Business Communications.

Violet was in a different situation. Violet felt partially responsible for her family’s
financial situation. What she had recently come to learn about the sale of the
family home weighed on her as she witnessed her father’s financial juggling act.
In selling their family home, her parents had committed all of the proceeds of that
sale to ensure that she and her brother were both able to pursue their college
degrees. They had delivered on their responsibility to their children; she now had
to deliver on her end of the responsibility by attaining a Business degree. Paris,
who had been responsible for supporting herself, felt a new level of responsibility,
but her older sister began to fill the void left by their parents. Her degree in Early
Childhood Education was, to her and her older sister, worth the investment.

The students’ perceptions were not paralyzing and resultant in not taking
any action or in the decision not to attend WU but rather motivational. These first-
generation students also described themselves as being “motivated” and
“committed.” They viewed themselves as taking action and handling their new
responsibilities with intent and purpose. They were not mired down by their
responsibilities but inspired. In the midst of whatever concerns they may have had, based on what can be inferred from the cumulative list of descriptors they selected, they were willing to put in the effort and work necessary to handle the task at hand. The participants’ commitment to pursuit of their college degree has been the underlying theme throughout the data presented in this chapter thus far.

As a part of their new Discourse and situated identity the participants were required to use new “tools” and resources. The new tool at the center of this study was technology and participants’ use of the WU website and College and Department webpages. Olivia responded this way to a question about the focus group participants’ experience with the institutional webpages:

Interviewer: Okay// And so does it tell you what to expect/ Does it tell you/ so what do you think you get from the website/ So/ imagine you've been in the classes now summer [transition program]/ and you've gone through// Okay/ so what did you expect college would be LIKE if you were just looking at the information that you got from the webpages/ Did it tell you what to expect/

Olivia: [begins speaking with interviewer at “tell…”] Without being biased/
Interviewer: Without being/ It's YOUR opinion/ what did you get/ [four seconds of silence, cough from one…a small laugh from another]

Olivia: From JUST the website/

Interviewer: Uh-huh/

Olivia: It looked it looks really FUN/

Interviewer: Uh-huh//

Olivia: It looks very animated/ and yeah/ it looks like it’s a workload cause/ like when you go into YOUR major map or/ requirements for certain majors/ um you have/ you know/ that [short pause] LONG [elongated] list of two pages long for courses I have to take and the requirements that must be MET/ But/ for ME/ personally/ I think it's just that challenge/ of have seeing all of that and thinking/ "You know what/ That's what I want to do/ That's my goal/ and I have to meet everything//" For me/ that was one of the incentives other more than just/ the PICTURES and the ATMOSPHERE of the website itself//
Before the discussion proceeded any further, Olivia called for a point of clarification. She had taken on the role of the group’s spokesperson and wanted to make sure they were all free to speak their minds. She did not use any personal pronouns; this was not simply a question for her but for them all. The researcher’s response would determine how confidently they could freely speak their minds. Olivia set the tone for the question at hand as well as for the rest of the interview for the group and for the researcher. What Olivia had done was for the benefit of the entire group, as she had already begun to share her truths and wanted the others to know that the researcher could be trusted; she, however, required the researcher to specifically say what she already knew: The students’ truths mattered and would not be held against them. It was okay to speak candidly with this researcher/university administrator. The researcher was not making judgment calls or asking questions to determine fault or to assign blame but rather was asking questions about their perceptions and experience that had the potential to help future incoming first-year students. The students perceived that they could offer straight talk, real perceptions, real truths, and open conversation with everyone on the same page in a safe environment for the purposes of the study. That now having established this level of understanding, the conversation—real, open, honest, confidential, and no holds barred—could now proceed.

For Olivia, putting aside all of the niceties and all the “FUN,” she was attending WU to take care of business—literally and figuratively. For her, this was deeply personal and was something she viewed as a challenge—one that she was dedicated to pursuing. By stating “ME/personally” she made the comments
specific to her own experience. She was not asking for permission nor was she expecting that anyone else would understand her decisions; rather, she was establishing her motivation and commitment to pursuing her undergraduate degree. Her major map was more than a mere description of courses to be completed; it was her road map to all that she had envisioned her future to be. It was personal: She transitioned from the use of the second-person “you” to the use of the first-person “I.” This was her “challenge,” and she was fully committed to seeing this experience through to completion. Whatever fun and exciting things WU placed on its website, they were all secondary to earning her Bachelor’s degree. For her, it was another business deal she intended on closing. Olivia soon discovered that two other members in the group shared her thoughts and feelings as they declared the following:

Violet: I COMPLETELY agree with anything she said/ cause that’s exactly how I felt about the website/

Paris: Me too/

For Olivia, Paris, and Violet, the website was more than their portal into the institutional Discourse; rather, the website was a “source” that provided them with a “road map” for the identity they were constructing as WU students. Moreover, they were becoming literate in the ways of becoming people of their kind – college students attending their particular institution, WU. Although Olivia, Paris, and Violet expressed having a positive experience in using the website as a “source,” Rose, in her efforts to construct the situated identity of a
college student, voiced a more challenged experience as she used the website as a “source” and a “roadmap” to understanding the institutional Discourse (see Chapter 5).

**Conclusion**

Alexander and Wiley (1971) acknowledged that it was during an individual’s “developmental years” that he or she begins to learn through “role-taking” how to “control and evaluate his or her behaviors” and that through these experiences “the person learns the processes that are effective in self-monitoring and self-evaluation” (p. 272). This is the development of an individual’s core identity and his or her introduction to and socialization in their primary Discourse. Gee (2008) further surmised that the primary Discourse gives us our initial and often enduring sense of self and sets the foundations of our culturally specific vernacular language (our “everyday language”), the language in which we speak and act as “everyday” (non-specialized) people, and our culturally specific vernacular identity. (p. 156)

Within each Discourse there are “various objects, tools, and technologies so as to enact specific socially recognizable activities” (Gee, 2008, p. 155).

The participants in this study, having been socialized within their primary Discourses to be particular kinds of people within their “society of intimates” (Givón, 1979, p. 294), held that they exhibited certain dispositional characteristics. These dispositional characteristics were influential in their perceptions of themselves and others as they situated different identities. They
also used others’ reactions to help them determine what was appropriate behavior or characteristics for particular identities.

As incoming college freshmen, there had only been seven weeks between participants’ high school graduation and the start of their WU accelerated summer transition program; however, in that timeframe the students no longer identified as high school students. The participants had begun to construct their new situated identity of a college student and had begun to display the attributes of a college student. The participants attributed their change in behavior to interactions they had with their family members, other students, faculty and staff members, and the use of the tools associated with being a WU student.

Based on the participants’ previous interactions with their parents, family members, and college professors, the participants perceived each group had certain expectations and dispositional characteristics of the participants in their new situated identity as college students. The participants had also, prior to their participation in the WU summer transition program, used various forms of technology as well as the Internet as tools and resources to learn more about being a college student at WU. As a result, they also perceived certain expectations and dispositional characteristics attributed to college students. The participants recognized there had been a change in the interactions they were having with their family members (e.g., parents, siblings, cousins, aunts). Interactions with the university faculty and staff members were unlike any they had previously had with their teachers. Their new identity required new and different uses of
They attributed the changes to the fact that their family members and university staff recognized them in their new situated identity of a college student. The validation the participants had received from their family members and others also confirmed that with their new identity came new expectations and new ways of being. There were new expectations and uses that were required of the participants in their new identity as WU students.

Recall from Table 13 that as the first-generation students constructed the identity of a college student, they perceived that the top 10 descriptors of college students were these:

1. “ambitious”
2. “independent”
3. “motivated”
4. “driven”
5. “money conscious”
6. “mature”
7. “hardworking”
8. “dedicated”
9. “engaged”
10. “critical thinker”

The very descriptors they selected to describe a college student were representative of first-generation participants who participated in the focus group.
There was some consistency between the descriptors selected to describe the identity of a college student and the descriptors used to describe themselves at the time of the survey.

The most significant difference between the two would be the first-generation students’ sense of being “responsible.” The first-generation participants’ sense of responsibility was one of their most salient identity characteristics. Other salient identities for the first-generation students were that of a first-generation student attending a university, a daughter, a daughter of a immigrant parents, an older sister, a younger sister, a cousin, a niece, a friend, a financially responsible individual, an employee, a role model, procrastinator, a proud member of their cultural group, an English as a Second Language learner, a Business major, an Education major, and an Engineering major. Although this is a composite list that takes into consideration the blended salient identities at work, it is representative of the multiple identities each of the students was experiencing simultaneously. I explore the phenomenon of multiple identities at work during this study in greater detail in Chapter 6, as this was not a phenomenon limited to the first-generation participants.

In Chapter 5, I explore and analyze the data and findings that confirm the existence of a correlation between the use of technology and the Internet and situated identity formation for the students. Unexpectedly, the same correlation exists for the staff members who are responsible for developing and maintaining the college or departmental webpages targeted toward the incoming freshman population.
CHAPTER 5

Technology, the Internet, and Identity, Oh, My!

In this chapter I address the following research questions: (a) What are the Discourses of the institutional webpages that are directed toward the first-year population? (b) How do the Discourses of the institutional webpages communicate or convey the ways in which students are expected to demonstrate that they are members of the community? (c) How do the institutional Discourses on institutional webpages make manifest the issues of marginalization and mattering? and (d) How do these students experience and understand the institutional messages?

Technology and the Internet are tools used as a part of the Discourse of WU – at all levels of institutional practice, by members at all levels of the community. Both tools are central to the institutional Discourse, as the use of technology and of the Internet have been embedded into every facet of institutional practice. For a student, staff member, or faculty member to access the WU website and all the associated and affiliated webpages, applications, and resources they must use a form of technology (e.g., a desktop, laptop, or tablet computer, a Smartphone, an iPod, or a personal digital assistant [PDA]). It should be noted that using technology is not an indicator of level of comfort or familiarity with the technology utilized.

First-Year Students’ Identity Development through the Use of Technology

Western University math courses and “raw technology”. During the summer transition program, three of the four courses required that the students
use a computer, various computer programs, and applications, as well as the
Internet, to complete assignments, papers, and projects. The math course’s only
 technological tool, by instructor’s choice, was that students use a TI-83 calculator
in class (i.e., a calculator that had graphing functionality), for homework and on
exams. The math students were familiar with the use of the calculator and did not
express a challenge in using this type of technology. In the following excerpt from
Chapter 4, Olivia commented on the use of technology in her summer courses,

Interviewer: Have they used PowerPoints in any of your
classes’ here/

Olivia: Just Mrs. Ms [C]/

Interviewer: Okay/ and so she/ she's used the PowerPoint
in her teaching/

Olivia: For presentations//

Interviewer: For presentations// Okay// And how have
you used technology here in the University/
You use what technology in your classes/
Do you use any technology/ So do you use
any technology in your math class/ Does she
use a computer at all/

Olivia: No/ it's mainly its we're talking about just
basic/ raw technology probably just the
calculators//
Interviewer: Okay/ calculators// And then in your other classes/

Olivia: But definitely for UNI classes you have/ I've been using PowerPoints//

Interviewer: Okay//

Olivia: I've been using Word A LOT for essays and outlines and all that good stuff//

Interviewer: And so the difference between high school classes and college classes for you is the difference in visual aids//

Olivia: Uh-huh [yes]//

Olivia called the calculator “raw technology”, as though it were one of the most basic forms of technology. Compared to modern-day technology available in classrooms and for other instructional purposes (e.g., computers, Smartboards, electronic voting devices to engage students large lecture classes, Wolfvision Overhead Projectors that can project and magnify any object – papers, coins, pieces of paper - place under the lens.), Olivia perceived the calculator as a simpler form of technology.

Olivia’s critical reading and thinking course, and her fall semester English course required that she use computer programs to complete assignments. Olivia was very comfortable using the computer technology methods, even referring to them by very familiar terms: For example, at one point, she used the name of the program, *PowerPoint*, in lieu of saying the instructor used the overhead projector
to show PowerPoint slides for her course. She also used the word “PowerPoints” to represent the manner in which she made her in-class presentations using the PowerPoint program to display different information to the instructor and other students in the class. She also referred to the document word-processing program by its simplest name, “Word”. Her use of the name represented more than merely using a program to type a document; it was a resource to help her complete her course assignments.

During an interview conducted in the early weeks of the fall semester of her first year, Olivia discussed the use of technology in her fall courses this way:

Interviewer: Okay/ I know you were saying over the summer that they teach differently// Do they use visual aids and technology in the classes now/

Olivia: Not my math class//

Interviewer: Not your math class// So still your math class doesn't use technology/

Olivia: I don’t think he/ knows anything about technology//

Interviewer: Okay/ so no technology for math then// So how does he do the examples/ he does it on the board/

Olivia: Yep//

Interviewer: Really/
Olivia: With random colored markers [sounding annoyed]// I'm still trying to figure out if he has a system to his color usage//

Interviewer: Really/

Olivia: Yes [said very dryly]//

Interviewer: Okay// You're funny// I tell you/ you are funny// So/ So then do the others use blackboard/

Olivia: Yes//

Interviewer: And so you/

Olivia: All of them//

Interviewer: All of them except for the math class//

Olivia: Except for the math/ he hasn't even setup a Blackboard//

Interviewer: Really/

Olivia: Yes [again said very dryly]//

Interviewer: Okay// So/ everyone uses blackboard//

Olivia: Yes//

Interviewer: Ok/ So do you get notes from Blackboard/

Olivia: [nodding her head up and down]//

Interviewer: Yeah/

Olivia: Yeah [elongated]//
Once again, Olivia’s math class did not use technology as a part of the course.
What is even more noticeable is that Olivia was referring to the Internet-based application used by WU faculty members for their courses, Blackboard, as though it was now the lowest form of technology that an instructor could use. A faculty member could, through the Blackboard application, do everything from send an email to one student or the entire class, post homework assignments, conduct an exam, post classroom presentations and notes (e.g., paper, video, or voice format), and more.

Blackboard was just one of the computer- and World Wide Web (web)-based resources available to WU students. Many other applications were available through the internal WU web portal, MyWU. Through MyWU, students, faculty members, and staff members had access to a myriad of software applications, only available after the users logged into the MyWU access point through an authentication process involving their WU-issued user name and a password of the individuals’ own choosing.

The fact that Olivia’s math faculty member was not using technology was significant, and it was even more significant to her that he did not use Blackboard. Because all of her other faculty members used Blackboard, she concluded that he probably did not know “anything about technology”. Noting that he used color-coded markers to write on the board, she was calling attention to his low-tech approach to teaching. His unsystematic approach to using the markers was even more confounding, as she had mastered her own use of markers in her classroom-note-taking practice, which she had perfected in high school. Since coming to
WU, Olivia had far less need to use her color-coding system as she could access class notes through Blackboard or via the electronic notes provided by her faculty members. Olivia was confused by his choice not to use technology and his low-tech approach to instruction. Her bewilderment recalled previous remarks Olivia had made about the teaching methodology of math instructors, such as the summer transition math instructor, Mrs. S., who used “raw technology” – again, a calculator.

**Western University technological resources.** During the summer transition program UNI, a the critical thinking and reading skills course, a group students were to make an argumentative presentation on a current issue of their selection. Of the 14 students who were presenting that day, all but one of the students had prepared presentations using Microsoft PowerPoint, an application that allowed students create slide like presentations and project them through the use of a computer and digital projector.

Prior to beginning presentations, the instructor directed presenters to come to the front of the classroom and load presentations onto the computer. The classroom was equipped with a computer and projection equipment, on which the students uploaded and displayed their PowerPoint presentations. The student who had chosen not to use PowerPoint to make her presentation displayed a Microsoft Word document on the projection screen as she read from a printed copy of her presentation.

Of the 14 presenters, 11 had saved their presentations on to a portable memory device, also known as a thumb or flash drive. Of the three presenters who
had not used a flash drive to store their presentations, one used her non-WU email address to access her saved presentation and was able to download it without issue.

A second student had also “emailed her presentation to herself” (i.e., she created the presentation on her own computer and then through her MyWU email account sent the presentation to her own email address which would allow her to be able to access her email and her presentation through the computer in the classroom at the time when she was to make her presentation. Instead this student was unable to open her presentation on the classroom presentation. When she realized she was unable to open the attachment to the email she said aloud, “Mine will not open/”. The student tried several different times to open the attachment, and as the class saw her growing distress, they began to offer other suggestions to help her electronically access her presentation but to no avail.

Ms. C., the instructor, allowed her to be the last presenter for that day so that she could make alternate arrangements to make her presentation to the class. After all of the other students had presented, she returned to the front classroom to make her presentation. Before beginning her presentation she announced,

    Ok/ So I had some technical difficulties// I did it on my MacBook in Keynote/ and when I tried to export it/ it got messed up so I’m gonna/ How do I get the screen up so I can write on the board/

The student had used technology, or tools, with which she was familiar; unfortunately, she was not aware that the tools she had previously used were not compatible with the technology or the tools she was to use as a student at WU –
both literally and figuratively. In the literal sense, the technologies were not compatible, and she had to work around or through the problem to make her presentation and resolve her distress. Figuratively, as a WU student, she must learn to use the new technologies WU students were expected to use to successfully fulfill the expectations of her new college student identity.

The last of three students who had chosen not to use a thumb drive used yet another technological resource that was available to all WU students. The student stood at the teaching station at the front of the room and entered his MyWU account. Instead of selecting his WU-affiliated email account, he selected another application called *MyFiles*. This free, web-based application located within the MyWU web-based portal was a virtual location in which students, staff members, and faculty members could upload and store up to four gigabytes of memory’s worth of documents.

As the student accessed the *MyFiles* application, the other students stopped talking and began to pay attention to what he was doing. One student then asked aloud “Wait/ what is this?”, unfamiliar with this application. The presenting student did not reply but continued preparing to make his presentation using PowerPoint. This presenter had begun to identify and use the technology and tools that were available to him as a WU student and found them to be helpful tools. He used this application and WU-provided applications to fulfill the assignments for his other summer transition courses as well.
Western University Staff Members’ Modeling of Institutional Discourse: Use of the Technology and the Web

The use of technology and the Internet was modeled early and repeatedly for first-year students attending WU. Data to support this finding can be traced to the students’ earliest experiences with WU and their use of technology and the WU website is repeatedly reinforced throughout their experience as a first-year student. The admissions and enrollment processes, the financial aid and scholarship application processes, and the housing and dining processes are all Internet-based. Further evidence supported the importance of this element of the WU Discourse during an observation of the students in their academic success course. The academic success course was a required course for all students participating in the summer transition program. The course met daily and incorporated a variety modules, all provided to help the students recognize their personal and academic strong points and responsibilities as they began their collegiate experience as WU students. The students completed projects that required they become familiar with the various academic and co-curricular resources available to WU students.

During this particular class meeting, an academic advisor from WU’s College of Education came to make a presentation to the class. As the advisor entered the room – dressed in khaki-colored knee-length shorts, a T-shirt, and black sneakers – he had in his hand an assorted selection of candy. His dress indicated the not-so-formal nature of his visit and was in keeping with the attire of the season given it was mid-July and the outdoor temperature was over 100
degrees. He was also demonstrating a part of the institutional Discourse – his role as an academic advisor was to be able to relate to and have the students relate to him. The candy was to show his familiarity with the one of the practices that was a part of this class’ Discourse. The course instructor, an assistant director who was responsible for the oversight of advisement of exploratory students at the campus, had previously informed him that she provided candy to the students, as it was the last class of the day and the sugar helped them stay alert. He then began to set up the teaching station for his presentation.

He began his presentation at the beginning of class by showing and making reference to the College of Education’s website. He displayed the college’s website using the digital projector in the classroom. As he showed the students the webpages, he noted the Facebook and Twitter links at the bottom of the page, as well as the academic advising contact information. He specifically called the students’ attention to the name of the college’s academic advisor who specifically advised first-year students. The college’s webpage remained displayed throughout his entire presentation. As he presented, the advisor made reference to many of the social language terms and phrases that were particular to WU and to the College of Education (e.g., “major maps”, “IR”, “Exam”, “AEPA”, “finger printing”). Each of these terms represented a much larger topic that were a part of the WU’s and college’s Discourse. Some of the students asked him to clarify the terms or to expand upon the meaning, whereas others did not question the use or meaning of the terms.
The advisor led the students through a tour of the college’s webpages, noting the page that was specifically for *undergraduate programs*. From this webpage he selected the link that led to the page that described, by area of concentration, all of the courses required of students who were Education majors (e.g., elementary education, secondary education). Throughout his presentation, the advisor used many acronyms (e.g., “[WU]COE” and “iPOS”, terms that represented systems). The iPOS, or plan of study, was the comprehensive list of the courses students had to take, inclusive of student teaching and other graduation requirements, which incorporated the students’ major map.

The advisor responded to a series of participant questions about the college, Education major requirements, and student teaching. A student majoring in Education asked a question using technical language, “Your first-year and sophomore year/ you’re taking your pre-reqs/ End of junior year you’re in the field/ you’re not getting paid/”. The student demonstrated his knowledge of the technical language – that of a college student – as well as an understanding of the institutional Discourse. His question was related to a component of the teacher preparation experience that was beyond his own knowledge base and required specific information about this part of his future experience. After a moment he added, “’Cause I remember people in junior high and high school doing that/”. His reference to a previous experience with a student teacher and his earlier statement were about the student teaching experience, yet he never specifically uttered the words *student teaching*. Its meaning was implied and inferred but never directly stated, yet it was understood by those in the room and never
questioned. All of those present in the room understood his use of the technical social language – the language of the teaching profession.

Later, this student asked another question, but during this utterance a different sort of interaction transpired:

Student: To go into education/ is it better to have a double major/ I mean it makes you more expendable/ no I mean not expendable but/”

Instructor: Attractive/

Student: Yeah [he gives a short laugh]

Here, the student attempted to use the social language of employers but was unable to remember the correct word to use in this instance. The instructor recognized the student’s dilemma and stated the word as though it was a question, allowing the student to respond without embarrassment. She allowed the student to determine whether that was the word he was attempting to use. As Gee (2011b) stated the presenter engaged in a practice called “saving face” (p. 119), she allowed the male student to “save face”, or avoid embarrassment. The student, in turn, took her up on her offered word and agreed that “attractive” was the word he had intended to use. In this example, the student was unfamiliar with the social language in use. Other students used other terms with great familiarity, shortening some terms to a single word (e.g., “bachelors”, “masters”). Their use of the terms demonstrated that they were experienced enough in the way of being a college student that this was now considered akin to “vernacular language” (Gee, 2011b, p. 69)
Plug and Play: University College Thumb Drive

As new first-year students attended their WU freshman orientation program, the students and their guests (e.g., parents, cousins, aunts, sisters, high school counselors) experienced a day of presentations and other activities. By the end of the orientation day, students had completed their registration for their fall courses; toured the campus and the residential hall; and acquired a significant number of brochures, flyers, and many important documents. Often, students who were required to complete other steps to complete their university or course registration were unable to find the paperwork they had been given during the new student orientation. Additionally, important contact information was also often misplaced. To ensure that the first-year students had access to the necessary UC forms, other pertinent documents and website links, UC provided flash drives to all of their incoming first year students. Ed and Di were both administrative staff who were responsible for oversight of the UC academic advising team and were also responsible for the content of the UC website.

Ed: The only other thing I was going to say is for the last two years what we've also done is we at orientation/ we have given our students flash drives// The first year was an experiment// It went OKAY// Last year was/ I think/ much better// What we did is we work with the company that developed kind
of I don't know what you call it/ a

PROGRAM/ if you will//

Di: It's a template almost/

Ed: A kind of a little menu/ I mean a template

menu// And so/ when the students plug this

in/ it'll automatically go// And they can get

ALL we're doing is we're using this template
to get parents/ students and parents TO our

web page content//

Major maps/ what can I do with the major/
you know/ ALL the ALL the type of stuff

that went/ you know/ orientation

preparation// Everything that's on this flash
drive is just a link to what's on our web

page// The first year/ we did static
documents/ it was out of date by the time we
did it//

Interviewer: Okay// But that allows them to connect

through THAT to the most recent

information/

Ed: Yes/ yes// And so/ instead of the students

leaving with the stack of papers at our

orientation/ they leave with the flash drive//

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And I will TELL you that we're in the middle of surveys again right now. It's going to be interesting to see whether we stay with the flash drive concept or go back to more printed materials. We have there's pros and cons of both ways.

Interviewer: Okay/ That's interesting/

Ed: And/ but the students/ we do know that the students LIKE the/ it's a 2 Gig flash drive/ And they use it/ I mean/ and it's got a nice little menu on it for documents and papers and photos/

Interviewer: Wow/

Ed: It's almost/ yeah/ it's actually kind of cool/

Interviewer: So is it like an electronic organizer kind of/

Ed: More or less/ yeah/

Ed raised several facts that he and other in UC understood about the orientation experience and resultant practices of first-year students. Those facts led UC staff to identify another way to provide the students with all of the information and materials they would need without contributing to a problem they knew existed (i.e., giving the students and their families several paper documents in addition to the dozens of other pieces of paper they would receive on that day). UC identified a resource that would have multiple applications and uses – a flash drive,
increasing the students’ likelihood of using it again. Although it had been a new approach to engage the students, it was also very purposeful, as the college recognized the short shelf-life of printed documents. By using the flash drive the College was able to pre-program a template that provided links to the most up to date webpages and Internet-based forms, minimizing efforts in having to have multiple contacts with a first-year student regarding the need to submit the most current version of a particular form.

**The Western University Website**

The WU website and the college and departmental webpages were each crafted for the dissemination of knowledge to the reader. The nature and type of knowledge ranged from *knowledge to inform* (e.g. campus maps, recent news about the accomplishments of students, faculty members, or staff members; events that had taken place at WU; expectations and WU policies; campus traditions; WU staff personnel policies; WU student code of conduct) to *knowledge for action* (e.g. deadlines for registration for classes or graduation or upcoming campus events, such as plays or concerts or guest speakers, changes in policies or procedures, completion of housing applications, paying for parking tickets). The majority of the *knowledge to inform* items reported events or experiences that had already occurred, or it documented WU policies and procedures for students, faculty members, and staff members. The *knowledge for action* was for individuals to act, regarding past or future events or experiences. The *knowledge to inform* was more about the individual and identities –their locations, actions or expectations, whereas the *knowledge for action* was about
business functions, such as completing forms, paying bills, and course registration.

It was not to be taken for granted that since their admission to WU the 23 participants in this research study used the Internet, the WU website, and webpages or the college or department websites. As such, it was necessary to determine that the participants in this study had, in fact, used these tools. The findings from two of the items on the research study questionnaire provide insight into students’ website use and are provided in Tables 16-17.
Table 16

First-Year College Students’ Frequency of Webpage Visitation Since Admission to Western University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generational status (F/C)</th>
<th>WU Webpages</th>
<th>Frequency of visitation/use</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>My[WU] (blackboard, email)</td>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>My[WU]</td>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>my.wu.edu</td>
<td>Every single day</td>
<td>to check for updates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Student life</td>
<td>1-2 times a month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>My[WU]</td>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td>Because it has everything I need to know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>My[WU]</td>
<td>Almost every day</td>
<td>weekly as needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>My [WU] account</td>
<td>I am always checking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>My email account</td>
<td>I am always checking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>facebook!</td>
<td>I am always checking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>My account</td>
<td>mostly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Major maps</td>
<td>once in a while</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Colleges</td>
<td>once in a while</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>The Housing</td>
<td>once in a while</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Financial aid</td>
<td>once in a while</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>the classes</td>
<td>once in a while</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>My[WU] account</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Blackboard</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>[WU].EDU</td>
<td>At least 4 times a week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>housing</td>
<td>very often!!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>financial aid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>student resources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>The library</td>
<td>I visit them and use them</td>
<td>Now I know more about the library website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>My[WU] email</td>
<td>most everyday. Checking</td>
<td>I’m familiar with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>My[WU] page</td>
<td>my e-mail and blackboard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>The library account</td>
<td>I usually. I got there</td>
<td>I also use the library site when I have to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>My[WU] account</td>
<td>about every day.</td>
<td>write papers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Every day I visit and use</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>that website</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>My[WU]</td>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Housing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Jobs &amp; Careers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>My[WU]</td>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Housing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>My[WU]</td>
<td>I often visit my My[WU]</td>
<td>Has so much information to look at. The [WU]jite id is awesome!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>page</td>
<td>page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>[WU].edu</td>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>The website</td>
<td>I visit quite some time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>My[WU]</td>
<td>I check daily</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>My[WU]</td>
<td>Almost every day</td>
<td>to either call or email people I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As Table 16 shows, all 23 students participants visited and used the WU student web portal – MyWU. This portal was developed to serve as a centralized real-time, web-based, access point where students could access their class schedule; any university announcements; specific College or degree information (e.g., academic advisor, plan of study, progress to graduation); any business matters to be completed; Blackboard; the library; parking information; UH and dining services; resources; and support programs and services. Nineteen of the students reported that they visited their account or MyWU portal every day. Additional WU websites and webpages included the directory, employment page, major maps, college web pages, financial aid, housing, and the library. The only other related, but not university-affiliated or -hosted website was Facebook, a website designed to facilitate virtual social interaction among and between friends, acquaintances, and members of various interest groups.

The participants were also asked to share their preferred source for gaining information about WU. The data for this question is provided in Table 17. Of the 23 total participants, all but one student preferred either using the Internet or contacting individuals for information about WU. The one student listed a
preference for the WU website or counselors because he or she felt that if it was not possible to find the information on the WU website then his or her counselor would know the information that the participant needed. Of the 22 participants, 14 preferred using an Internet resource, whereas 8 got information about WU from other people. Of the 14 participants that preferred using an Internet source, 12 preferred getting their information from the WU websites, three indicated three specific websites – two of which were specifically name (Facebook and Rate My Professor), and two students made reference to general Internet webpages. Eight students preferred working with other people, seven of whom cited getting their information from a WU staff member and one preferred getting it from his “sister or other people in general”.

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Table 17

First-Year College Students’ Most Often Used, Preferred Source for Western University Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generational status (F/C)</th>
<th>Informational source</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>My[WU]</td>
<td>Because it is specifically &quot;designed&quot; for me and has links to resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>My[WU].edu ratemyprofessors.com</td>
<td>Because it gives me info about my schedule To see what students say about my professors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Student life</td>
<td>Because it helps me know what I can &amp; can't get involved in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>The [WU] website</td>
<td>because it has everything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>My[WU]</td>
<td>has all info I need or gateway to places I need to go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>The [WU] website Also Facebook</td>
<td>I've met a lot of new people, and we've been able to talk about school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>The student one</td>
<td>where it's students themselves giving information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Webpages</td>
<td>because you can find mostly any answers or the phone # of someone who knows it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>[WU] or counselors</td>
<td>Because the website is easy to navigate, and if I can't find the answer, the counselors know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>The website</td>
<td>because it's easy access.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>[Staff member A.W.]</td>
<td>I went to the [summer program for Native American students] and he is willing to help with Native Americans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>The library</td>
<td>because it is easy to use. because it is convenient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Also the people from [the summer transition program]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>[WU] website.</td>
<td>It has information about the degrees offered, the library and updates on school news.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>because it gives alot of hints and info. On what they are looking for in new students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>The internet</td>
<td>because [WU] has everything listed online.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>The [WU] webpage</td>
<td>I mostly use the [WU] webpage because it is easy to gather information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>The [WU] website</td>
<td>because it has everything on it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>[WU]rite ID.</td>
<td>To know classes and other information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>My[WU]</td>
<td>Because the information is specific to my major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>My[WU]</td>
<td>Because I can know what my grades, FAFSA, status, housing, and other random information on the same website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Advisor!</td>
<td>Personal, easy, reliable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>The [WU] staff</td>
<td>Because they know so much and can give you the inside ropes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>My sister and other people in general</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. F/C = First-generation college student versus Continuing-generation college student; WU = Western University; A.W. = particular Western University staff member mentioned by name.
Responses appear exactly as respondents provided them.

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“The Inside Ropes”: Preference for Personal Sources of Information

The participants’ preference for getting information about WU from an individual (e.g., family member or WU staff member) was fundamentally different than those whose preference was to get information about WU from the WU website or other Internet resource; there were, however, common themes among the shared preferences. The rationale for participants who indicated a preference for gaining information from an individual was best represented by one student’s response: “Personal, easy, reliable.” Another student shared a similar sentiment, “The WU staff because they know so much and can give you the inside ropes.” It was the personal experience they were seeking. The participants recognized that through their personal conversations with the WU staff member the student would gain insider information, which would help them understand “the inside ropes.”

The participant’s response, “the inside ropes”, made reference to a euphemism that originated from the experience of new sailors who learned from seasoned and more experienced sailors how to differentiate between the types of knots used in the sailing trade. The participants, as new “sailors”, would gain an advantage over others from learning from those seasoned and more experienced “sailors” who not only knew the ropes but who had been successfully tying and helping other successfully tie their trade “ropes”. The “inside ropes” were like a lifeline for the participants, as it would allow them to know small details only one who had been in their particular experience would know. By virtue of their institutional position, the staff member would be able to assist the student in
becoming acclimated to the institutional practices, norms, expectations, and experiences so that they could better *fit in* to the WU community.

**Social networking websites as sources of information.** Two students also cited other Internet websites, *Facebook.com* and *ratemyprofessor.com* as resources they used to gather information about WU. These websites were mentioned along with the WU website but were used for very different reasons than those for using the official WU Internet sources. The participants visited ratemyprofessor.com “to see what students say about my professors.” Participants visited Facebook.com for such reasons as “I've met a lot of new people, and we've been able to talk about school.” The difference between the use of the WU webpages and college or department websites and the use of these two Internet websites was *significant* and it further explicated below.

**Latinate versus Germanic lexical items.** Whereas the WU Internet sites are endorsed and vetted through the policies and procedures established by the designated university marketing or technological units, neither Facebook.com (hereafter, referred to as *Facebook only*) nor ratemyprofessor.com (hereafter, referred to as *Rate My Professor only*) are regulated, produced, or sponsored by WU. Additionally, the contents of Facebook and Rate My Professor are user-driven with features that allow for some degree of moderating by a website staff member who is not affiliated with WU. The information provided is on the WU pages was a product of a university representative and written in the WU Discourse, whereas the information provided through Facebook and Rate My Professor may be the product of many different individuals and from many
different Discourses. Both Facebook and Rate My Professor value the
dissemination of information en masse, whereas certain resources within the WU
website are limited by the users’ affiliation with the institution.

The *lexicon*, or vocabulary, of the WU website values the use of *Latinate*
words, also considered “Tier 2” and “Tier 3” (Gee, 2011b, p. 53) words, such as
“award,” “concurrently enrolled,” “dually enrolled,” “activate,” “verification,”
“inquiry,” “circumstances,” “AP, IB or CLEP,” “consult,” “scholar,”
“theoretical”” “implications,” “perennial,” and “bioenergy.” Although some of the
words have more common definitions, most of the lexicon is very specialized to
the WU Discourse and to the social language of higher education. In contrast, the
lexicon of Facebook and Rate My Professor values the use of *Germanic* words,
words considered “Tier 1” words (Gee, 2011b, p. 53), and specialized language
and phrases and emoticons that are a part of Internet social-networking discourse
and Discourse, such as “those of you,” “guys,” “bought,” “join,” “whatsup,” “hit
me up,” “ima go hard,” “For Anyone out there,” “Add Me,” “MESSAGE ME
ASAP,” “can’t wait to get rollin,” “Omg,” “lil joke,” “loads of fun,” “Don’t call
her doctor or Mrs, or Ms just call her/“ “Easiness,” “Helpfulness,” “Clarity,”
“Rater Interest,” “Hotness” “Totally foxy,” and “; ) [emoticon of a winking eye
and a smiling face].” As Gee (2011a, p. 53) stated,

A preponderance of Germanic words marks a style as less formal
and more vernacular than a preponderance of Latinate words,
which marks a style as more formal. Many specialist and academic
domains incorporate a good deal of Latinate vocabulary and this
can be a barrier to people with limited education or literacy skills or who consider such language off-putting for any of several reasons even if they have these skills. (p. 53)

The Latinate, specialized words and social languages on the WU webpages and website would be more appealing to the faculty and staff members and those who work in the various Discourses represented on the website. The Germanic, specialized words and symbols, and social languages of Facebook and Rate My Professor would be more appealing to students and others who are a part of the various Discourses represented on these two websites. Based on the lexical items that are a part of the WU website versus the two social websites, the language used allows insiders to be recognized as insiders, yet requires outsiders or newcomers to be similarly recognized as such.

**Ethos versus New Technical Perspective of New Literacies**

Many, if not most, of the WU website and webpages represented the ethos practice of recognizing “expertise and authority [are] located in individuals and institutions (e.g. university degrees, teaching certificates)” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 81). From their initiation, the pages were representative of an institution whose purpose ultimately involved the conferral of degrees, baccalaureate and graduate, upon its students and the conducting of research. The WU webpages and college and department websites reviewed for this study – WU website and webpages that were specifically directed toward first-year students – were created to inform, assist, or allow the student to meet the requirements necessary to pursue the baccalaureate degree at WU. It was projected that through
interactions or experiences with *institutional experts* – university staff members and administrators, individuals with particular expertise, degrees, and credentials – students would find their direction and flourish.

Facebook and Rate My Professor, by their very design, represent the “new technical” perspective that “expertise and authority [are] distributed and collective; hybrid experts (e.g. Citizens journalism blogs)” (Knobel & Lankshear 2006, p. 81). The participants who used these resources were engaging in new literacies practices; therefore, they gave these two sites some degree of legitimacy by treating them as reliable sources of information. Additionally, the individuals who offered their *expert* perspectives and insider information on Facebook and particularly, Rate My Professor, were students. It was the personal experiences of the participants’ peers that was what the participants were seeking and not the voices of the faculty members or university administrators. The participants’ use of the words “see” and “say” described physical acts but were made in the context of experiences the participants had in a virtual environment (e.g., “to see what students say about my professors” and “I've met a lot of new people, and we've been able to talk about school”). The type of sight and sounds described were experienced through the discourse and Discourse of those who interacted and exchanged their thoughts and experiences through these Internet sources.

What the participants were seeking in visiting these sites was the *personal insight* of fellow students and what they *felt or thought* about the WU professors who would be teaching the classes the participant would to be enrolled in for the upcoming semester. Like the participants whose preferred source of gaining
information was from WU staff or family members, these participants were also seeking *insider information*; however, they sought an *uncensored* truth from the perspective of another who was in a similar position – also in the situated identity of a college student but who had *been* where they were *going*. Participants wanted to have the benefit of lessons learned by another, insight into the demeanor and expectations of the professor, and any other information that would be of assistance as they constructed their college student identity and to help prepare them for experiences as WU students. When the participants wanted to get the perspective of the WU staff or faculty members they used the WU webpage. When they wanted to get information from the perspective of their peers they consulted these other websites.

In addition to getting the student perspective on WU from the Facebook site, a participant also cited that the Facebook website had an added benefit in that it allowed the participant to “meet other students”. Through their “talking” they were able to create connections to other students, using the “collective intelligence” of their peers, a key element of the “new technical” perspective of new literacies. In part, the value of information increases as the numbers of community members or website users who shared their perspectives increased; however, the participant was referencing a virtual community of which he had become a part, a place of belonging. The connections that the participant created were based on commonalities and the shared experience of being WU students. The participant was meeting other students who are able to share their feelings,
experiences, recommendations, and personal anecdotes that were, for the most part, focused on their common identities as college students attending WU.

“Specifically ‘designed’ for me”: Using the Western University Portal

Students preferred to gain information through the WU website and college and department webpages for different reasons. Findings revealed three emergent themes in their preferences regarding the webpages: Pages were “easy to use”, “it has everything”, and “because it is specifically ‘designed’ for me and has links to resources”.

Participants who responded that the WU website was specifically designed for them were referencing the MyWU portal. One student elaborated that the page was personally catered to each student “because I can know what my grades, FAFSA status, housing, and other random information on the same website.” Here, the student was demonstrating knowledge of the resources accessible through WU’s portal. The personalized information that was available helped the student understand what was specifically expected of students and how to meet those expectations, such as completion of the institutional procedures necessary to complete their enrollment for the upcoming year. Steps to completion of the FAFSA, completion of the housing application, and retrieving grades from the summer transition program all represented elements of the WU Discourse.

Participants use of the WU website and college and department webpages had an effect on the students as they constructed the situated identity of a college student. Some participants found WU webpages and college or department websites to
have a positive effect, whereas others found them to be problematic and distressing.

**Focus group participants’ experience with the Western University website.** Through the WU website, Olivia, Paris, Violet, and Rose applied for admission to WU. Also through the WU website, every first-year student completed his or her housing application or a housing exemption request. Olivia, Paris, Violet, and Rose all acknowledged that their first impressions of college had originated from both individuals in their lives and the web. There were clear distinctions between what they had heard from family and friends and what they had learned from the WU website.

Rose: I would say my siblings/

Violet: True/

Paris: I would say that/

Interviewer: Okay/ Okay// What did they say/

Rose: They would tell me/ Oh/ ‘cause they would work/

Interviewer: Uh-huh/

Rose: Mmm /and I want to work during college or urr well yeah/ But my siblings would like/

NO// things will be HARD/

Rose recalled the warnings her family gave her as she prepared to go to college, given to her based on their *outsider status* and on life experiences and challenges they faced as members of the workforce. As Rose continued to voice
the words of caution given to her by her siblings and her parents she recognized their outsider status.

Rose: Cause they would always like give you/you gonna get a lot of HOMEWORK /and/
you're gonna/it's rather you just go to school and not work because then/you’re gonna end up failing some classes/cause my sister um/SHE'S not going to college anymore/

Interviewer: Uh-huh/

Rose: And she didn’t finish so/and then my parents would imput in that/Don't you see your siblings struggling then/why do you like why do you want to work/and things like that/

Rose’s family had already had one student go to college and fail. They attributed her sister’s failure to the difficulties she experienced in trying to work while handling all of the responsibilities of being a college student. Her family members reminded Rose of what happened with her sister not to scare her, but the help her gain insight from the experiences of the one family member who had tried and failed. Rose’s parents wanted her to succeed, but the only advice they could offer was to avoid the failure of her older sister.
Olivia, who was the oldest of two siblings from her parents’ marriage, shared that there were two influences that informed her initial perceptions of college:

Olivia: Personally/ I think I had two influences other than/ just the website/

Interviewer: Uh-huh

Olivia: My counselor/

Interviewer: Your counselor/

Olivia: Uh-huh/

Interviewer: Okay/ And what did they say/

Olivia: They obviously didn’t attend [WU] but from/ based on like how they would/ PAINT college life/ You know I regret not living in the dorms because/ it would have make my life MUCH easier because I would have been able STAY later on campus rather than having to be HOME at a certain time or/ having you know/ to rush to beat traffic and stuff like that/ And just how they we're talking about like involving yourself in SCHOOL and/ knowing that/ there are going to be sometimes when you’re gonna to have to give up ACTIVITIES/ because you
Olivia made a more significant and purposeful distinction about the kind of advice and information her counselor had shared with her. The counselor advised her from the choices she wished she had made when going to college and from the more challenging experiences faced as a result of the choices made. This counselor, like Rose’s family members, was sharing from personal experiences. Olivia stated that the counselor “PAINTED” college life in such a way as to let her know that she was going to have to make some choices about the types of activities in which she was going to be able to participate as a college student. Olivia established a binary between a student’s academic life and the rest of their life as a college student, which gave higher priority to the responsibilities.
associated with academic experience and less importance on all other potential activities.

Olivia also gave insight into the binary between the WU website and the people who were influential figures during this part of her identity development. Olivia identified the word she best felt represented the WU website, describing it as “very very/ [takes a deep breath]/ PERSUASIVE//”. *Persuasive* inferred the website was, in some way, influential as to give information or a perspective that was a deciding factor for some matter. Her utterance indicated there was some degree of convincing that had to be made and the website was effective in this regard.

Paris shared that the project director of the college-readiness program in which she had participated was the individual who had been influential as she prepared to go to college.

Paris: I am I was in this program called Project [M]/ and and so like I already knew I was already thinking I would go to community college/ But/ you know [the project’s director]/

Interviewer: Uh-huh/

Paris: He pushed me to/ want to go to WU/

Interviewer: Okay/

Paris: And so like whatever he TOLD me/ I would like/ be like ok “why is he telling me this”
and then/ he would keep on pushing me

further in/

Although Paris admitted that she questioned the directives of the program’s
director, she also acknowledged that regardless of her questioning she trusted his
rationale. Because of his influence she would carry out tasks he asked of her
despite her reluctance. Paris acknowledged that the project director was
responsible for her decision to attend WU. His advice and mentorship was
significant enough that she was able to envision herself attending WU, changing
the course of her life from what she had believed it would have been.

Violet had three groups of people who made an early impact on her
perceptions of the college experience – her teachers, her counselors, and her
siblings. Violet expressed that they “told her the truth”, information that others
had not been willing or able to tell her. She heard what influential individuals
were saying as, “If no one else will tell you what you need to know we will
because you need to know what ‘really’ goes on in college.” The truth they were
telling her was the naked, unfiltered truth that told of an experience that would
challenge her like no other experience. For example, they instructed that Violet
must carefully manage her time as a freshman because otherwise she would not
have any free time. According to her brother, Violet would be busy all the time
and she should expect life to be very busy. Ultimately, the experience was
Violet’s responsibility to manage. Violet appreciated their honesty because she
felt that it really let her know what she was “getting in to”. Violet used the phrase
“getting into” as though these were the last words of advice given before she

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entered into a deal she could not get out of, akin to a permanent relationship with someone she barely knew. These warnings were all given before she committed herself to all that the college experience required her to do and become as an individual.

It was the following exchange that became a point of agreement for Olivia, Violet, and Paris, but that became a point of departure for Rose.

Violet: I mean it was for me/ it was my counselors and my teachers/ siblings AND the website// Um the counselors/ my counselors/ teachers and siblings/ they just told me the truth// They said like/ first thing they made sure to tell me was college is not like the movies// [laughter from another] It's not anything like that// Don't go into a thinking/ that/ like my brother told me your gonna have no free time as a freshman unless you schedule it in// You're going to be busy 24 7/ trying to make DEADLINES/ papers/ go to class/ scheduling ALL of these things and those really helped me kind of know/ what I was getting into// And on the website/ I pretty much love the website cause you can find anything/ 279
Olivia: Uh huh/

Violet: And whenever I have question about
ANYTHING/ I go and look on the website/

Interviewer: Okay/ And so does it tell you what to
expect/ Does it tell you/ so what do you
think you get from the website/ So/ imagine
you've been in the classes now summer
[transition program]/ and you've gone
through/ Okay/ so what did you expect
college would be LIKE if you were just
looking at the information that you got from
the webpages/ Did it tell you what to expect/

Olivia: [began speaking with interviewer at
“tell…”] Without being biased/

Interviewer: Without being/ It's YOUR opinion/ what did
you get/ [four seconds of silence, cough
from on and a small laugh from another]

Olivia: From JUST the website/

Interviewer: Uh-huh/

Olivia: It looked it looks really FUN/

Interviewer: Uh-huh/

Olivia: It looks very animated/ and yeah/ it looks
like it’s a workload cause/ like when you go
into YOUR major map or/ requirements for

certain majors/ um/ you have/ you know/

that [short pause] LONG [elongated] list of
two pages long for courses I have to take

and the requirements that must be MET/

But/ for ME/ personally/ I think it's just that

challenge/ of have seeing all of that and

thinking/ "You know what/ That's what I

want to do/ That's my goal/ and I have to

meet everything/" For me/ that was one of

the incentives other more than just/ the

PICTURES and the ATMOSPHERE of the

website itself//

Interviewer: Uh-huh/

Olivia: Uh regarding student life and involvement

and/ all the different clubs organizations you

can JOIN/ to make a difference//

Interviewer: Okay//

Violet: I COMPLETELY agree with anything she

said/ cause that’s exactly how I felt about

the website//

Paris: Me too//

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Olivia, Violet, and Paris found that they shared a common feeling and experience with the WU website. Together, they agreed that through the WU website and webpages college looked “really fun”, though they recognized the “workload” that would be their undertaking to reach their goal. These three expressed that the WU webpage was a helpful resource in understanding the requirements for their academic and student life experience.

Importantly, there was no mention from any participants that the WU website provided the same level of truth as the individuals who had been their early resources. There was a difference in perception among the participants regarding the two resources. The particular individuals who had been resources were sharing the inside ropes from the perspective of those who had not been to college or from those who had been to college and wished they had made other choices. The information shared with Olivia, Paris, Rose, and Violet was based on the life challenges of the various individuals and were shared with the hope that Olivia, Paris, Rose, and Violet would not befall the same difficulties during this time in their lives.

In contrast, the WU website painted a different picture of the college experience. The WU website provided information that was not reflective of the past mistakes or challenges or others but reflected new and exciting times that lay ahead. The WU website, through its “pictures and the atmosphere”, reflected a “really fun” place, but a place in which students were each going to be able to pursue their goals. They could see in the website their own future as opposed to others’ past; however, the WU website was not a completely satisfying or positive
experience for all four of the participants, as the collected data in this study would begin to show the real *truth* about the students’ experience with the WU website and the college and department webpages.

“*It’s too overwhelming*”. Whereas Olivia, Violet, and Paris had agreed that they had each come to “love the WU website”, Rose voiced a different experience. Her comments led to a more revealing discussion and further revelations about the focus group participants’ use of the WU website and the college and department webpages.

Rose: I think the/ I think the uh/ the / the school website/ right/

Interviewer: Uh-huh/

Rose: I think for me/ I thought it's too overwhelming because like/ Ahhhhh [exhales with emphasis as though trying to figure out how to say exactly what she means]/ like when you try to look for things like/ sometimes like specifically/ like there's SO many web pages of like/

Violet: Uh huh//

Rose: You have to look for/ okay/ financial aid well that like the basics but they say/ Oh okay/ here and here/ Like there’s like THOUS…/ I don't know how many PAGES
but/ I know I haven’t covered ALL of them//
And I think the most useful though for now/
is like/ the major map/ but I don't know but
where you get a major map/ because it like
helps you like/ see a class where you can
take and if you not interested in that class/
you could be like/ Oh/ well/ maybe this
major is not interesting for me// Or like/ it
helps you understand like/ where to start/ in
your major//

Interviewer: Okay// Would you agree/
Paris: I totally agree//

Before Rose began to reveal her feelings, she asked a clarifying question to make
sure she understood exactly what was being discussed. Rose had some specific
feelings she wanted to share and wanted to make sure she was following the
discussion so that she could respond appropriately to the topic at hand. To
construct the situated identity of a college student, Rose voiced that as she
attempted to use the WU website as a “source” and a “roadmap”, the experience
was “too overwhelming”. Rose had gone against all of the previous comments
made by the Olivia, Paris, and Violet and shared what was certainly counter to
everything they had just stated. Rose felt comfortable enough in the group to
disclose that she did not have the same experience with the WU website.
It was as though all that information and pictures and atmosphere the other three had found to be so satisfying had been more than Rose could handle. Rose, in fact, had an experience contrary to the others. Rose had experienced *information overload*. Rose provided a specific example of looking for the financial aid office: When she attempted to the financial aid webpage, she had to go through a series of other pages, which seemed like “thousands”. She knew this was an exaggeration and quickly recanted her statement by acknowledging she had not been to “ALL” of the pages, but her distress and frustration were very evident. Rose was simply looking for a place to start. The symbolism in of the last lines of Rose’s utterance was *extremely poignant*:

And I think the most useful though for now/ is like/ the major map/
but I don't know but where you get a major map/ because it like
helps you like/ see a class where you can take and if you not
interested in that class/ you could be like/ Oh/ well/ maybe this
major is not interesting for me// Or like/ it helps you understand
like/ where to start/ in your major//

The major map figuratively represented far more than Rose’s curricular path to her degree: It also represented her personal map to the construction her own identity as a college student and beyond, yet she could not figure out the map legend nor could she gather her directional bearing. When she exhaled at the beginning of the speech act, it was as though she had made up her mind to bare all and tell the complete truth. She simply could not figure out how to use the WU website as tool and resources. Rose had not been able to experience the same
sense of satisfaction as Olivia, Paris, and Violet. She could not interpret the WU Discourse and got overwhelmed when she tried to use the tool that was an integral part of the WU Discourse.

Rose had previously shared that she felt anger and frustration regarding being “forced to choose my major right now//”. Now, she expressed her feelings of distress regarding the use of the WU website. Rose could not understand how to use the tools that had been put in place so that she could construct her college student identity. She became increasingly frustrated and uncertain, which further challenged her use of the WU website and her becoming fully literate in the multiple Discourses at work. Rose’s feelings of being “overwhelmed”, frustrated, and uncomfortably unfamiliar in using the website as a “source” or “tool” resulted in challenges which affected her ability to construct her situated identity of a college student.

Although Rose had used the Internet and other website resources for other purposes outside of her role as a student at WU, these previous experiences were of little assistance as she tried to navigate WU’s institutional website and webpages. She was challenged to understand how and where she belonged as a member of the university community and its Discourse. Rose had begun to adopt and utilize different strategies to reconcile the challenges she was experiencing as she worked to construct her identity while using a tool, the WU website, which was a necessary component of her identity of a WU college student.

Through Rose’s willingness to expose her own challenges, the other participants in the focus group later shared that they too had been challenged
when they tried to use the WU’s website and webpages. Olivia, Paris, Rose, and Violet were using similar strategies to address this conflict as they all experienced challenges in using the WU website and the college and department webpages.

In as much as the participants revealed that they “pretty much love the website”, what they knew about the website and the way in which they used the website was very limited.

**Interviewer:** Do you have any concerns or fears?

**Rose:** Well kinda/ I guess like that well I mean not any more than the money but like/ Other than THAT it's just/ think it’s just the money/

**Interviewer:** Okay/ So let me ask this/ if you were to go the website/ would you/ do you find any information that helps you with your fears/ So you go to the website/ do you find the information that answers you questions or do you just find/ Okay/

**Olivia:** The majority of the time// I mean I think there’s always going to be that one question that you're kind of like/ I’d feel better if I went to talk to somebody about it or/ I questioned someone// But I think the website for the maj[ority]/ for/ for very
BROAD concerns/ and sometimes even a little bit more specific ones/ the website covers them//

Interviewer: She's trying to open the chips/ quietly/
Olivia: I know/ I just trying to/ should I open it up at once and/

Interviewer: Can you get ‘em open/ Go ahead and open them/ we'll pause// Okay/ So for broad questions/
Olivia: For broad and sometimes maybe like a little bit/ more /specific questions//

Violet: Yeah//

Olivia: I think the website is/ perfect//

Interviewer: Okay//

Olivia: But I think there’s always going to be that ONE matter that you’re kind of like/ "I'M/ more comfortable if you explain it to me in person or over the phone or by e-mail/ you know/

Interviewer: So if you were/ a first generation student that's looking at the webpage and you don't have anybody to help you/ do you think you
can get the answers that you're looking for off of the web page/

Paris: Yeah you can/

Jasmine: Yeah [in an uncertain/questionable tone]/

Interviewer: Okay//

Paris: Like you could type in financial aid/ and then it'll show up/ like the phone number and/ like EVERYTHING is up there and what campus/ so/

Interviewer: And do you think that's helpful for people to have that kind of access/

Paris: I think it is/

Rose: I think it's helpful [in a noncommittal tone]/ it is helpful [in a more definitive tone]/ but what bothers me is that/ they have like numbers and stuff like that/ and it's like/ sometimes it just an operat[tor]/ like a/ machine like its not like/ a person an actual person//

Interviewer: Okay/ Okay/ So you'll get a phone number/ but then there's no response//

Olivia: It's somewhat like an answering machine thing like/
Violet: Like/ you leave a message and we'll get
back to you/ or you know/ if you're looking
financial aid/ press one/ and like/ it's not
actual one-on-one conversation/

Interviewer: Okay/ so if you were to/ say do you believe
that the information/ so we're looking at the
pages differently than someone that they're
recruiting/ because when they're recruiting
there's information up about whatever//

All four: Uh-huh [yes]//

Interviewer: But if you're looking at your/ so we're going
to look at a couple of pages here// You're
looking at the college web pages/ so the
colleges that you are a part of// Do you think
the colleges or housing/ answer the
questions you're looking for to get answers
about what you're doing or/

Rose: I actually didn't know there were/ my/ like I
didn’t think the college had their OWN
website until like/ I found out/ I think of
when I have to do that/ um they're sending
an information about the [College of
Engineering summer] camp/
Interviewer: Uh-huh/

Rose: And they sent a link to click so that I could sign up/ register for the camp and I was like/ it said [College of Engineering] and I was like/ Oh/ I guess they have their OWN web page//

Violet: Well/ I really found out/ like/

Interviewer: So/ you didn’t know that the colleges had pages// You just thought there was an [WU] page//

Rose: Yeah// Other links like/ financial aid/ cause there are SO MANY PAGES/ but I didn’t think like/ I didn’t know how like/ Kinda I don't know how to kinda/ I just think/ it was like the BASICS like/

Interviewer: Okay/ So do you think it's helpful for/ so once you went to the page/ did you find it helpful/

Rose: Yeah/ I did// The more specific on like/ the things they have like/ they offer//

Interviewer: Okay/ so if/ as a freshman/ do think that it's something that's important that people tell
you/ you know/ the colleges have web

pages/

All four: Yeah/ definitely//

Although all four of the participants used the WU website to gather information and to answer questions about different aspects of their individual experiences at WU, they each approached the website with varying degrees of need and expectation. Whereas Paris used the WU website as a directory, Olivia and Violet used the WU website as a resource to answer various questions – often for general questions and sometimes specific questions.

Rose again expressed challenges when using the WU website, equating it to an “operator” and “answering machine”. Again, Rose was flustered and worked to find the right words to describe the frustration she felt in using the WU website. Rose’s statement “but what bothers me is that/ they have like numbers and stuff like that/ and it's like/ sometimes it just an operat[tor]/ like a/ machine like it’s not like/ a person an actual person//” represented the core of her challenge and frustrations. Rose was looking for a more interactive experience than she had experienced in using the WU website. Rose wanted the website to be more responsive to her needs. What Rose was not saying but what was apparent through her speech acts was that Rose struggled with exhibiting literacy through verbal communication. She stumbled to express herself verbally as she tried to use the words and phrases that were particular to the WU Discourse. It may have been due to her struggles with both discourse and Discourse that she preferred to use the WU website, because it could have required her to have to perform in the
role of a college student when she did not know the words to play the part. Using the WU website as a resource had become a point of frustration for her.

Rose was the only focus group participant who seemed to struggle as much as she did in using the website, yet she was also the only student who was without another resource to assist her as she began her college experience at WU. Rose had been relying on the support and knowledge of her family, but there was no one in her circle of support who could offer her any support that was based on successfully completing any college or university experience. Olivia, Paris, and Violet had the support of others who had earned college degrees, whereas Rose’s sister was the closest person had knew to have had some type of college experience yet her sister failed her community college courses and was no longer attending a community college. For Rose, she wanted and needed the website to fill in the blank spaces in the Discourse and provide her with support and information as she had no other resource available.

When the others in the group saw Roses’ struggle to say what she felt were the correct terms using the correct lexicon, they began to help her by completing her thoughts and providing the words she was struggling to identify. As Rose attempted to voice her concerns, Violet supported Rose and affirmed Rose’s thoughts and feelings. Violet enacted the persona of an answering machine, stating, “If you're looking financial aid/ press one/”. When Violet ended one of Rose’s statements, she affirmed Violet’s statement by acknowledging that interacting with the WU website was not the same as a conversation with an individual. Olivia, Violet, and Paris were demonstrating literacy with the WU
Discourse, whereas Rose struggled. Olivia, Violet, and Paris found a way to use the WU website to help as they constructed their college student identities, but Rose continued to experience challenges as she worked to construct her college student identity.

All of the participants had used one strategy in common to minimize the challenges posed to their identity development through use of the WU website. Once again, it was Rose who opened a new dialogue as she expressed her lack of understanding of the WU structure and the WU Discourse. Rose disclosed that she had no knowledge that the colleges had *their own* webpages until she received an email from her college instructing her to register for the required summer camp.

Rose: I actually didn't know there were/ my/ like I didn’t think the college had their OWN website until like/ I found out/ I think of when I have to do that/ um they're sending an information about the [College of Engineering summer] camp/

Interviewer: Uh-huh/

Rose: And they sent a link to click so that I could sign up/ register for the camp and I was like/ it said [College of Engineering] and I was like/ Oh/ I guess they have their OWN web page//
Rose’s confession allowed Violet to also begin to disclose her own lack of knowledge. Rose’s and Violet’s disclosures made way for Paris and Olivia to share that they too had no knowledge that the WU colleges had their own webpages, which they reiterated throughout the focus group meeting. The group was emphatic that WU should do more to make sure that first-year students knew that each of the WU colleges had their own websites. They were familiar with the *knowledge for action* that was electronically sent to them by the admissions office, the financial aid office, the UH office, and the summer transition program, but they had limited exposure, through the WU website or otherwise, to the other *knowledge to inform* that was available through the websites of other WU units, departments, colleges, and schools.

Beyond using the WU website to address any questions or concerns, the participants acknowledged that they would look at the different pages on the WU website. One question was asked about their personal connection to any of the WU pages they had visited.

Interviewer: So/ when you're looking at the web pages/ was there new information that you found/

So once you're admitted and you're IN the school and so you're like/ Okay/ When I'm looking/ what had been your fav/ the page that you've gone to the MOST where you're like/ That's ME/ They're talking to ME on
that page/ Is there one page/ that you felt
that connection to/

Rose: I haven’t/

Olivia: You mean beside my major map/

Interviewer: So your major map/ Okay/

Rose: I’d agree with that/

Olivia: I love my major map// I just sit there and
stare at it and I’m just like/ you’re
beautiful/

Rose: The classes/ like the classes you need to
take/

Olivia: Your gorgeous/

Interviewer: Okay/ Okay/

Olivia: No/ I really don’t do that but [laughing]/

Interviewer: That’s okay if you do/

Olivia: It's not/ it’s not so much that it represents
me// But it’s one of those things that I can
honestly say/ I think I can do that/

Rose was firm. Rose felt she was an outsider to the WU Discourse and to the WU community. Rose did not feel that any of the webpages directly addressed her, and she did not feel a connection to any of the WU webpages. The WU Discourse on the website remained an exclusive experience that others were sharing; however, Olivia then asked if her major map would qualify as an appropriate
response to the question. When Rose realized this was an option she immediately responded that she would agree with Olivia. There was one webpage on which Rose felt someone or something at WU had reached out and had specifically addressed her. Rose had made one connection to WU through her major map. Rose’s responses were revealing and in keeping with previous data that showed her challenge in making connections to and through the WU website. Moreover, Rose had been frustrated, and at times, angered, by her attempts to understand the WU website, as she understood its importance as a tool in developing and constructing her situated identity as a WU college student.

Rose could not find a way to decipher the new WU Discourse, and through the Discourse she repeatedly experienced her outsider status. The Discourse remained again something experienced by and created for others. It was the WU Discourse that kept Rose as an outsider. As a result, it affected her identity development and constrained her in the process of constructing her college student identity.

If identity development were a linear process, Rose would have been at one fixed point on the continuum of identity development—the starting point. Olivia, Paris, and Violet would have passed the starting point and would have been further along on the continuum. Paris, Olivia, and Violet were supporting and encouraging Rose, providing her lexical words and completing her thoughts to reflect literacy Rose did not yet possess. They, like Rose, understood that Rose was progressing, as they were, in constructing a college student identity and in
making connections to feel that she too was a part of the WU Discourse; however, Rose lagged behind them in her college student identity development.

The one thing Rose knew for sure – the one tool she had been able to decipher and with which she had become literate – was her major map. This single tool had become Rose’s point of connection to WU and had helped her begin to form her college student identity. It was the one part of Rose’s new situated identity that she could definitively say she knew what was expected of her and she knew what steps needed to be taken starting at the beginning. There was a beginning point, a mid-point, and an ending point, as the major map outlined a student’s entire academic experience from first semester of their first year through to their last semester as a graduating senior. There was no need for Rose to have to make assumptions, interpretations, or deductions, and there was no assumption that the reader had any previous experience in being a college student. Unfortunately, through Rose’s own admission, she did not know where to find it on the WU website.

To get the knowledge to inform that was important to situated identity development and to their becoming literate in the WU Discourse, Olivia, Paris, Rose, and Violet found other ways to get the information they were seeking. These round-about approaches included using the links provided in emails that were sent to them by various WU colleges and departments, using the A-Z Index, and using the keyword search option on the WU website. For example, Paris shared this experience:
Interviewer: So if you were/ a first generation student that's looking at the webpage and you don't have anybody to help you/ do you think you can get the answers that you're looking for off of the web page/

Paris: Yeah you can/

Jasmine: Yeah [in an uncertain/questionable tone]/

Interviewer: Okay//

Paris: Like you could type in financial aid/ and then it'll show up/ like the phone number and/ like EVERYTHING is up there and what campus/ so/

Paris’ way of getting answers has been to use the keyword search to get the answers she was looking for, because a keyword search is the process of typing the key words or the most important words into the provided Search Box. Upon selecting the Enter Key, a program will run that produces results that show any and all webpages that have been programmed or have been previously searched with the identified key words the individual typed into the Search Box.

Participants’ use of the keyword search option could be perceived in a couple of different ways. This practice could be perceived as though the participants were passive and did not want to take the time to look through the pages to find the information they were looking for; however, in realizing the participants had agency, the practice could also be perceived that they used the
keyword search because they could conduct a search for information as they wanted it to be, on *their* terms. They could use their own words, more Germanic or non-specialized, in conducting their search for information. They were not forced to use the terms and phrases used in the WU Discourse (i.e., words and phrases that were more Latinate or specialized). The latter perspective situates the students as active agents using their own Discourse to operate in another Discourse, one in which they were not yet literate, and it was with this perspective that participants were operating.

The example Paris used of searching for the financial aid office was not accidental. The financial aid office was of particular importance to this group, as they had already raised this as a particular area of concern. Rose’s search for the financial aid office was most likely a search for *knowledge for action*, as any interaction with this office would require the students to first initiate contact by the completion specific actions. These interactions represented, in many ways, the entirety of this study. All four of the participants used different strategies to mitigate their lack of understanding of the WU Discourse. Olivia, Paris, Rose, and Violet had all experienced some degree of challenge in using the WU website to understand the WU Discourse organizational structure. As a result, they limited their use of the WU website to find both the *knowledge to inform* and *knowledge for action*. Because they did not understand the organizational structure or they did not share an appreciation for the significance of the WU college websites, Rose, Olivia, Paris, and Violet would later share that they also limited visitation of, if they visited at all, their college webpages.
Interviewer: Okay/ So/ do you go to your colleges' webpage/

Paris: Not really [laughs]/

Interviewer: So/ your college is/ no/ honestly// I mean/ thank you for telling the truth because/ it helps to know/ whether people visited or not// So you/ if you had/ if you've gone/ have you gone to the college webpage/

Paris: Yeah/

Interviewer: And what did you look for when you went there/

Paris: My map [laughs]/

Interviewer: Your map/ Okay// So/ that's what you use the college page for/

Paris: Yeah/ we're just like/ what classes/ I need to take/ and stuff// I don't know/ I just like going in and I need to look what I need to do//

Interviewer: Okay// So/ you're really looking for what do I need to do information/

Paris: Yeah//

All Four Participants: Yeah//

Interviewer: Okay//
Rose: I use [very softly like she didn’t want to interrupt but she wanted to be heard] I use more of my account/

Interviewer: You use more of your account/

Olivia: The [WU] [lets out a little laugh]/

Interviewer: Okay/

Rose: I just explore like a lot/

Violet: Blackboard/

Interviewer: Okay/

Rose: Like all of that/ like/ I’m interested in everything/ I learned a couple of things like/ of like I could use for school/ and things like that/

Interviewer: Okay/ Do you go to your/ now/ what's your major/

Violet: Business Management Entrepreneurship/

Interviewer: Okay/ And that has a webpage/

Violet: Um/ I'M NOT SURE/ I know the college/ the [College of Business] has a webpage/

Interviewer: Okay/ Do you ever go to it/

Violet: Um been on there a few times/

Olivia: And they look the same/

Interviewer: And what did you look for/
Violet: Pretty much like what I have to do/ my major map/ classes I have to take//

Interviewer: So do you READ the pages at all or you just kind of like where's the information that I need right now/

Violet: Yeah//

All Four Participants: Yeah//

As Paris, Violet, and Rose visited their college webpages to get knowledge for action, Rose was visiting the MyWU website, as well as other webpages, to get knowledge to inform. Rose, once again, struggled show her literacy in the WU Discourse and used words from her previous Discourses as substitutes (e.g. “The WU” rather than “MyWU”, “school” rather than “college”). Rose – unlike Paris, Olivia, and Violet – had been using the WU webpages to help her prepare for college experience. Although Rose knew the webpage was a resource to get knowledge for action, Rose wanted to use the knowledge to inform on the WU website as a tool from which she could learn how to be a college student.

Rose stated, “I just explore a lot… I’m interested in everything” as though she was on a great expedition and was preparing for her travels by reading and learning all she could about her destination. She was using a familiar tool, the Internet, to learn about something that was unknown, the college experience. But the most powerful words she stated were “I learned a couple of things like/ of like I could use for school”. Her interactions with the WU website were not passive: She was using the website to help inform her practice, as an instructional guide, as
a way to be recognized as a WU college student. Despite the fact that Rose felt no connection to any of the WU webpages, except her major map, she was using the information as a tool. Rose saw the things she learned as tools to be used “for school”. The information on WU website was something tangible for her use. The “couple of things” she learned from the WU website represented mirrors reflecting how she was to behave and the actions she was to take “in school”. Rephrasing the last sentence in WU terms, the strategies Rose learned to employ through her interaction with the website allowed her to feel better situated to make a more successful transition into the WU Discourse and engage in practices that were reflective of a WU college student.

**Keyword Search from the Perspective of the Western University Website Administrators**

The “garbage search”. According to Amy, the marketing specialist for UH and the WU student union, the keyword search is “problematic” at best.

Amy: One of the MOST AWFUL THINGS ABOUT THE [WU] WEBSITE IS THIS SEARCH BAR [softened voice]// It really truly is/ because/ this is a Google search/ which means/ aka/ what I'd like to call it/ a GARBAGE SEARCH// So if you put in/ all right/ yeah/ okay/ Access Excellence Impact/ I had to think of what I was searching for// Why won’t it search for it/
um STRANGE phrase to be searching for/
but here ya go/ here's 1,410 instances OF this// You can sort of by date/ it took point .31 seconds/ that all have that on there//

Interviewer: Wow//
Amy: Okay/ so we've got the New American University site/ the excellence campaign/ it's a BLOG by University initiatives/

Interviewer: Wow//
Amy: Couple other blog things/ a page on the president sight/ more New American University/ The library channel/ library/ librarian/

Interviewer: So this is not just restricted to [WU]/
Amy: This is a restricted within [WU] but it's within all the pages of [WU]// So if you’ve got something HANGING OUT there/ they'll find it// Though they'll doing a little keyword search/ and somebody’ll find it//

So you might have A PAGE THAT’S REALLY REALLY OLD/ HASN'T BEEN UPDATED IN A WHILE/ HAS GOT
WRONG INFORMATION ON IT[softened voice]// It can be found by the lovely/

Interviewer: How do you get rid of those pages/

Amy: [laughs] They have been deleted [softened voice] or you specifically have to go in/ and have UTO program that they DO NOT find those in a search//

Interviewer: Wow/

Amy: Yeah/ it's [laughter] yeah/ it's not exactly fantastic/

Later in the interview, Amy clarified how she and her team addressed the students website search practices.

Amy: OH/ MY GOD [elongated and strongly stated]/ Because they won't/ they won't/ because they will not go through a MENU/ They will search for a word because they KNOW from GOOGLE/ they will find what they want/ We GOOGLE everything//

Interviewer: So/ how do you/ the first-generation college students who goes on and they’re like/ they type in Dorm/

Amy: Okay/ let’s do it/
Interviewer: Do you do/ what /do you keep in mind keywords the student uses/

Amy: Yeah/ of course/

Interviewer: Ah/ okay/ and the living it is/ living on campus is there/ do you pay for that/ I mean/

Amy: No/ no/ no/ But I DO work with UTO to make sure the fact that these certain/ okay [she laughs] now you’re gonna to get into the NUTS and BOLTS of web development/

According to Amy, using the keyword search as a tool for finding information was not a reliable method. Amy, who is responsible for development and maintenance of one of WU’s most highly trafficked webpage locations, knew that many students used this search method to find information. She took steps to ensure that the computer program used to support the keyword search had the most up-to-date information. Amy’s professional training and expertise informed her practice as she worked to develop UH webpages, which made considerations for the student’s keyword search practices. The students had been socialized in other Discourses that using a Google search was to way to get the answers they were looking for, and clearly, to Amy, the WU website was not a location where this other Discourse was an acceptable practice.

Although the keyword search was in Amy’s opinion a garbage search option, it was one of the few options that allowed students to use their own terms
and phrases to seek information on the WU website. This was one instance in which the students could use the Latinate lexical terms of the WU Discourse or students who were unfamiliar with the Discourse might use more Germanic lexical terms to find the information they were seeking. This was one time where the students had some power and agency in their interaction with the WU website; Amy, however, was a staff member working for her particular unit, and her efforts were to ensure that the students searching options were accurately accounted for. Some units did not have staff members professionally trained to develop and maintain webpages; due to their lack of experience they would not be able to engage in or reflect multi-literate Discourse practices.

“Go to [WU] dot EDU, type in keywords”. Maggie was the WU staff member who was responsible for the development and maintenance of the CLAS core college website and webpages. The core college webpages were within the CLAS website and encompassed the webpages that would be considered landing pages and general CLAS information webpages, e.g. the CLAS homepage, About Us, Undergraduate Studies, Graduate Studies, Academic Units. She was responsible for the website and webpages of the largest college at WU. Regarding the keyword search. Maggie also understood importance of the keyword search function of the WU website.

Maggie: You know/ one thing that we need to clean up/ that I just hadn't kind of prioritized/ IS the search/

Interviewer: Okay/
Maggie: We probably notice lots of ads now will/
Interviewer: Yes/
Maggie: Say go to [WU] dot EDU/ type in keywords/ because trying to get people to navigate THROUGH/ and because people search/
Interviewer: Exactly/ exactly/ And that's what the student use/ is the search/
Maggie: Yeah/

Maggie knew this search function had become an even more important website and webpage search practice as many people - website and webpage managers, marketing professionals or others with an investment in directing traffic to their website – were now intentionally directing other people – students, faculty, staff, other website visitors not necessarily affiliated with WU- to keyword search feature on the WU website. Maggie understood the significance of the keyword search yet in the midst of all of the other things her unit was responsible for taking care of this was a specific task she had not been able to get moved up on her list of things she and her team had been able to take care of because ultimately this was her one of her responsibilities.

Find US by typing “I don’t know”. UC was the academic home for students who have selected exploratory as a major. Within UC there were students who ranged from those with no idea or proclivity toward a particular academic field of study or career path to students who had a general idea of a potential career path but had not identified a particular or a specific major. The
college had identified five potential *major tracks* that an exploratory from which a student could choose: exploratory– math, physical sciences, engineering and technology; exploratory – fine arts/humanities/design; exploratory – health and life sciences; exploratory – social/behavioral science.

Students were required to select one of the four *major tracks*. Each major track provided a broad range of general studies courses that allowed students to take courses that would meet the requirements of a variety of like majors. For example, a student who selected the exploratory – health and life sciences major track were able to consider from among several majors that included; applied biological sciences; biomedical informatics; exercise and wellness; microbiology; nutrition; secondary education – either biological sciences or physical education. Recognizing that students would find their way to the UC website through many different ways, Ed and Di (the WU staff members who were responsible for designing the first year student webpages and were integral to the redesign of the UC website) and the members of Ed’s team designed the UC website to incorporate words and terms student might use in a *keyword search*.

Interviewer: Mmm/ Very good/ And if you did a keyword search and there keywords that a student would type in to the search A to Z/ what do you think they would/ what words do you think would trigger bringing up University College page or your advising page/
Ed: Undeclared/ undecided/
Di: Um/ I don't know comes up/
Ed: I don't know/ and actually/ all those are put into/ Degree Search/ If they/ if they type into the degree search/ the eAdvisor/ if they type in any of those/ it will get to us/

Ed and his team understood that students might not yet have literacy in the WU Discourse and as such incorporated the Germanic and vernacular words into the computer program that supported their website. This was an intentional and purposeful step as the students who would be UC students would be among the students who have had the greatest challenge in feeling a connection to the university.

“We don't get much search traffic”.

Interviewer: And you know/ there is a freshmen population that's coming in and as you're envisioning/ the students would go on the web and type in things/ what do you think they would come out/ what key words do you think would be typed in that would bring up the CLAS page/ Are there any number/

Maggie: Sciences and Society [without hesitation]/

Interviewer: Really/
Maggie: Oh/ yes// That's the search term that comes up/ I don't know that/ We don't get much search traffic// Sometimes we get search traffic that really should go to the units// Which I get/ you know/ again/ like psychology/ and then I’ll go to psychology// I mean/ as far so I think/ We probably get say// I mean one of the challenge that we have/ is that the unit sites ARE really important// They’re important for the first-year experience// Important for/ And um But because the resources are somewhat disparate/ Like you know/ we're lucky if there's one person in the unit that has a sense of this// Some of the websites THERE are kind of driven or designed by/ faculty committee// And they consider perspective graduate students as more important// more perspective of faculty [softly spoken]//

Interviewer: So/ do you vet the script/ Do you vet the text/ when a college want to put something on/
Maggie: No/ I mean/ no// We just don’t have the staff for that/ When a unit does that they units pretty much run the show// So/ we provide the resources for kind of re-design and development/ And/ You know/ I help them [inaudible] what they want as of the goals for their site//

Interviewer: Are there particular words that you want to ensure our a part of the messaging for the college/

Maggie: For an individual unit/

Interviewer: For the core pages/ so if we're looking at the core/

Maggie: No/ I mean/ it's been kind of a struggle to/ think through about how we would incorporate the challenges/ cause you know it’s kind of a law as to how we talk about the university [softened voice]// And/ you know/ prior to that/ it was the Access/ Excellent Impact that blew up on EVERYBODY'S pages [softened voice but she laughs at the end]//

Interviewer: Yes/ there were/ exactly//
Maggie: Every UNIT and every COLLEGE was [inaudible]/ so yeah/ But we don’t have right now/ these themes never took off / as a way the colleges to talk about the college// So/ we don't have right now any college specific messaging//

Maggie and Amy both recognized themselves to be webpage administrators who understood student website utilization practices. They both cited their use of Google Analytics – a computer program that generated reports that detailed every aspect of a website or webpage’s traffic or number of visitors. The reports detailed the number of visits to a webpage, the length of time a visitor remained on the webpage, whether the person visited directly from another webpage or from an email, and a host of other information. This information was a highly valued tool for Maggie, Amy, Ed and Di as it showed them how visitors were experiencing the webpages they had designed for their department or college. When Maggie and Amy were asked about students visiting different webpages they both felt that students did not browse through webpages that were not directly related to the information the students were seeking.

Interviewer: Yeah/ links// But do you find that links work/ in providing links to students directly/ in gives them direct access which is in/ kind of what you all want/ You want them to find
the connection/ Make the connection/ to the
department of unit/

Maggie: Right/

Interviewer: It's not that we want them to/ keep clicking/
Oh/ let's look here/ oh/ let's look here//

Maggie: Yeah/ no/ absolutely/ And that's something

that's also/ you know/ something you kind of

have to educate/ not WEB people about/

Like/ No/ we don't want/ Like/ we don't

WANT/ o[ne] nobody/ one NOBOBY

browses/ I’m like REALLY people don’t

browse/ Like some people do/ Like you and

I do/

Interviewer: Yeah// Sure// Well/ hey/ that’s/ Yeah//

Maggie: You know they search/ Or/ you know/ we

have the same status as most people/ where

like 70 percent of the people are first time

visitors/ and most of them stay 10 seconds

or less//

Interviewer: Okay/

Maggie: Um and you know/ and and people KNOW

that about themselves/ with DIFFERENT

WEBSITES/ But//
Interviewer: Oh you know the sites should go to and so you click/ click/ click/ click//

Maggie: Yeah/

Interviewer: I don't even think you know if you'd look for new information/

Maggie: Yeah/ they don't/ yeah/ with their own website/ they think it's different when they want people to linger and look around/ and it's like/ no/ that's not/ that's not/ yeah/ that’s not web behavior// So/ yeah/ absolutely/ it's about connecting them and/ yeah/ I would say for first year students/ which is why we don't WANNA rely on the landing page and the browsing/ because they're VERY imprecise science [she lets out a little laugh]/ I mean/ you really/ there're scooping up a LOT [very exaggerated] of people/ I mean/ and you know you can do things focally/ [Inaudible]//

Interviewer: Trying to carry them from place to place and hopefully they drop out where they need to instead of being carried along//
Maggie: Right// Yeah// So if we CAN get them quicker/ through an email to/ through a/ you know/ link that we pass out on// through us I mean cause we certainly do that//

For Maggie and Amy the reports that they received shared statistics that lead them to understand that no one browses, but in the previous data Rose shared that she was a WU website browser. Moreover she was browsing the various WU pages and using them as a tool to assist her in the construction of her situated identity of a college student. While Olivia, Paris, and Rose used the keyword search function they also had other resources and individuals who were able to assist and support them as they too constructed their situated identities of a college student. Maggie made reference to several binaries – people who are web people and those who are not web people, people like “you and me” who would browse a website and those who would not, and people who linger on webpages and those who do not. Regardless, Rose was that one individual who proved Maggie’s theory incorrect and that there are in fact students who browse. Rose also demonstrated that although students may use the keyword search, some students are trying to find knowledge to inform their situated identity development.

The Western University College and Department Webpages for Incoming First-year Students

The nature of the Discourse of the WU website and college or departmental webpages that were directed toward incoming first-year students were based on both types of knowledge – knowledge to inform and knowledge for
action. Both knowledge to inform and knowledge for action were present on all of the webpages analyzed for this study however the concentration or use of one type of knowledge in combination with the other that was found varied institutional unit, college or department as well as by the ordinal level in the series of webpages for the particular college or department. While each of the interviewed WU staff members expressed the theme in their own way, they expressed that the information posted on the webpages had two intended purposes or desired outcomes: knowledge for action was provided through the WU website and college and department webpages to increase overall accessibility therefore allowing first year students to take the requisite actions as directed by and specific to the particular college or department; knowledge to inform was provided to increase first year students perception of belonging and sense of connection to the specific department or college community as well as the greater WU community. Some administrators were more clearly able to translate their college or department’s knowledge to inform and knowledge for action than others.

The WU staff members ability to clearly and directly communicate the two types of knowledge was based several factors – the clarity of the identity of the college or department in relation to the larger university, the clarity of his or her understanding of the identity of the college or department in relation to the larger university as well as in relation to the various units that comprise the college or department, and the clarity of the his or her identity in relation to their WU position as staff member and in terms of their own identity, and in relation to the salient multiple identities at work in relation to their own situated identity. The
staff members identities, their professional training (either in webpage development or in student development), and his or her understanding of the first-year student and their situated identity construction played a significant role in the messaging and type of *knowledge* communicated through the webpages. The clearer the staff member was about the identity of the college and their own identity in relation to their role within the college, the more clear the messages on the webpages. Although the function of the college or department was the impetus for the type of *knowledge* on the webpages, it was the individual staff members who framed the Discourse and the discourse of the information that in turn affected the understanding and feelings experienced by the students as they learned the institutional Discourse. Ultimately, the goal of each of the webpages was for the first-year students to take some action.

Although the larger overarching WU website Discourse was representative of the identity of WU, each college or department webpage within the larger WU website had a different way of discoursing with the intended reader and a different Discourse. The Discourses of the UH webpages, the CLAS webpages, and the UC webpages were each particular to their unit identities. More interestingly the each of the webpages were crafted and representative of the identities of those WU staff members who were responsible for their content and oversight.

**Multimodal Elements of College and Department Webpages**

Amy, the marketing specialist for UH, explained the website management best practice regarding the use of visual images on websites. These practices were
universally applied to each of the WU websites and webpages as well as the college and departmental websites and webpages.

Amy: Your home page needs to be VERY visual/simplified links/ you know kind of that “Welcome Mat” imaging/

Interviewer: Okay/

Amy: Sub levels/ that secondary level/

Interviewer: Okay/

Amy: Smaller pictures/ MORE information/

Interviewer: Okay/

Amy: Third level/ STRAIGHT information [Inaudible]/

Interviewer: Okay/ okay/

Amy: Yeah/ that's kind of a um structural/

Interviewer: That's what/ that' the practice/

Amy: Norm/ That's kind of a practice/

Interviewer: Okay/

Amy: It's a best practice kind of thing/

Interviewer: Okay/

University College. Ed and Di, who were responsible for the UC webpages that were oriented toward the first-year students in the college, were very excited to share information about their newly designed website. Ed, Di and other members of Ed’s staff were very involved in the website redesign, a
redesign that had been cognizant of the multiple populations that were visiting their website – students, parents, WU staff and other visitors. The changes were also made as a result of their feedback from students as well as from senior level members of the WU administration.

From the outset of the meeting Ed and Di placed their students at the forefront of the conversation. They were proud of their new website because they were careful to design a website that was reflective of their student population. Ed and Di based many of the changes on the feedback of their UC students and on their knowledge gained through professional training and expertise. Having then established the theme or context for the interview Ed and Di were ready to share their roles with the UC website and webpages.

Ed: Our involvement is that basically/ we have/ I have a leadership team that spans all [of the WU] campuses// In the beginning/ we usually had maybe one or two people that we kind of help and look at the language that we want to be used on the web pages// Now/ that I have this team/ I really do each year/ really/ each year/ we kind of take a look at the web page/ Okay/ what needs updating/ What needs change/ et cetera/ et cetera/ And with this radical restructuring
um to be honest/ [WU President] sent [our
Dean] a note/ what was it about a year ago//

Di: Yeah/

Ed: And he said/ what's up with this web page/
Uh uh/ ours was not NEW and SHINY like
all the other COLLEGES// That was more of
a college home page rather than our advising
and some of the specific information in the
advising page// But we took that opportunity
to re-do some things and I don’t know if you
noticed our students stories now//

Interviewer: Okay/ yes//

Ed: And things like that to try to be much more
student FRIENDLY// And help the students
AND PARENTS /quite frankly/ feel like
they can relate to the information that's on
the page AND that they find it useful// So/
but in terms of our involvement/ we've
TOTALLY control the content of this web
page// So I don't know if that's what/ Yeah//

Interviewer: Okay/ okay/ that’s that’s exactly/ that
was one of the requirements for interviewing
the people's so I’m interviewing staff within
colleges// And then within one of the units that is a part of the student experience/ so academic and non-academic experiences to know that/

Ed: Right/

Interviewer: So now/

Ed: We do/ we do have somebody in the college that actually posts stuff for us/ it's [X.X]//

The impetus for the change had been a call from the university president to the dean of the college inquiring about the old and outdated look of their website and webpages in comparison to the other college websites that were bright and shiny. But this call was translated into an opportunity to transform their page into something more reflective of and responsive to the needs of the UC students and the UC students’ parents. Ed brought his team together to redesign a website and webpages that reflected a diverse population of students and the different reasons students would choose to be a part of UC.

In addition to this call from the university president, the university provost had also contacted the dean of the college.

Interviewer: Well/ if we went to the first page for the college and there's a person that is in involved in this development/ they’re within the college/

Ed: Yes/ yes/
Interviewer: This is not someone else is doing it/ Okay/

Di: The only thing I would say is we got an/

[our Dean] had got an email from [the

Provost] probably/ it was right during our
orientation season and she said/ I can't figure
out/ you know/ what/ you know/ anything
about like what tracks/ majors/ University
College is offering/ And we're like/ oh/
yeah/ you know/ we had it on like a bunch
of pages/ But it wasn't specifically spelled
out on our first page/ So we added that/

Ed: So we added it right here on this main bar
academic programs//

Interviewer: Oh/ in the gray bar// You have/

Ed: Cause these are/ these are basically all the
components of our COLLEGE web page//

Senior level members of the university members had been challenged as they tried
to navigate the former UC website. There was a need to clarify the college’s
website presence but the change also represented a larger change. It had only been
a few years since the college experienced a significant re-organization and UC’s
identity and role within the university structure had undergone a significant
change. The calls by the senior level WU administrators represented an
acknowledgment of that the college had come through a redesign and needed to
reflect their new bright and shiny identity. The university now recognized that UC’s image should reflect its new status – it should reflect the image of a WU college.

These contacts could be interpreted as representative of an institutional Discourse, established by the same senior level members of the university administration who understood that exploratory students were already challenged in determining their academic identity. The senior level administrators felt that the former UC website and webpages further contributed to the student’s identity confusion. If they as the senior leadership of the university could not understand what was available through the college, and they were the two primarily responsible for establishing the university Discourse, how then could a incoming first year student navigate their way through the UC website and webpages. The university administration was calling for a UC website and webpages that more clearly communicated the identity of the college and the expected identity of all incoming and future UC students.

Ed kept as one of the guiding principles in their UC website redesign plan inclusiveness not exclusiveness.

Ed: Again/ keeping in mind that for us/ the DIVERSITY/ the campus REPRESENTATION and the various REASONS that a student with the exploratory//
Ed did not want a student or parent who visited the website to feel as though they could not belong as a member of the UC community. The students and their parents were the key to the UC website redesign. Ed and Di were very clear about the messages they wanted conveyed through their college webpages. After what Ed called a “RADICAL restructuring of our website and the information that's provided” they both felt they were well on their way to providing the type of information that would convey the messages they knew were important for their first year students.

Ed: We just did a RADICAL restructuring of our website and the information that's provided/

Di: Yeah/

Interviewer: Okay/

Di: And we used to/ we really kind of got the hint from our students/ because they weren't really using our website very much/ And so/

Ed: And the way we know that is we've done some surveys in our [exploratory] classes to find out what they're doing/ don't know about our web pages/

Interviewer: Okay//
Ed: And it's clear to us that our students are NOT using the web as much as we would like them to/

Interviewer: Very good/ very good/

Ed: So/

Di: So what we decided to do is move toward less information and what we're doing now is putting hyperlinks in/ So the text is almost all of our pages now are just one page/

Interviewer: Okay/

Di: They aren't having to scroll down or anything else that they see all the information on page and then they can/ they can link ON based on the statements that are on the page/

Interviewer: Okay/

Ed: Right/

Di: So it's easier to read/

The increase in traffic was a desired outcome but Ed and Di were more concerned with students’ ability to use the website. Ease of use was a theme that continued throughout the data from the interview with Ed and Di.
Di: Well/ this last go ROUND/ there were just SO much information/ I mean/ and we've gotten surveys back that the students weren't really using our website/ And/ you know/ it's/ it was going back and saying/ okay/ so what's the point of the this page// You know/ what's the point/ do we need this// We took some/ we took a lot of things DOWN// We had HOMEWORK for a various student populations// We took/ we took that down// We streamlined EVERYTHING/ but we just decided/ you know/ it needed to BE more accessible and easier to use//

Ed and Di understood that any website redesign required that the website become more simplified for their students benefit. Their efforts to streamline their website, hence making it easier to for their students and others to navigate the website, mirrors the data from Rose who again and again voiced her frustration experienced due to an overload of information and challenges in navigating the overwhelming amount of information on the WU website.

The purpose of the website was to convey both knowledge to inform and knowledge for action for multiple audiences. While UC was the college home for exploratory students the parents of the students were also prominently figured in as a part of the UC Discourse. Ed and Di shared that the purpose of the knowledge
*to inform* was to help eradicate certain misconceptions held by students, parents, WU administrators, and others. Di had just finished describing an event that happened during a recent fall welcome event held in a large WU campus venue. All incoming first-year students were brought together to celebrate the beginning of the semester in this festive community-building activity. The event was one of the signature events of the fall semester and was conducted to raise school spirit. The incoming first year students were all seated together by their college affiliations and as each college name was called by the announcer the students in that college would cheer. As the announcer asked the students a series of questions about their major choices, it was the last question that moved Di to share the following.

**Di:** How many of you guys are still really kind of trying to make up your minds in what you want to do/ And almost everybody was in that situation// And our students kind of like sat up a little straighter in their chairs and like/ Okay// Well/ you know/ it's kind of cool now// You know/ were you there for with that one/

**Ed:** Yeah// Well/ and [WU] [WU] does that//

**Di:** Yeah//

**Ed:** I mean/ that's the message [WU] gives/ It's almost like “bad student” for not having a
major at this point// And it's not that bad//

It's not that bad// But I think that's kind of
the message sometimes that we get//

Interviewer: Okay// So how would you address that/ do
you try to address that at all/ through the
webpage/

Ed: I think/ with the students' stories/ I hope that
the students' stories help a little bit//

Interviewer: Okay//

Ed: And again/ not only with the students but
again I spent most of my time in orientation
with the parents [softens voice]//

Interviewer: Okay//

Ed: And I think the students' stories are helping
parents understand it/

Interviewer: What do you think the parents are thinking/
so in your experience with parents/ I mean/
since they might be a part of the audience or
if they/ yeah//

Ed: They're worried that their kid doesn't have a
major yet// But that's going to extend
graduation/ time to graduation/ meaning/
more than four years and if they're going to
be BEHIND//

Interviewer: Okay//

Ed: And I am CLEAR with them that/ you
know/ yes/ there are certain majors// If
you're looking at some of the fine arts/ if
you're looking at some of the engineering
programs even a couple of others/ that if you
don't hit the ground running/ semester one/
YES/ it will extend by a semester or two
because of the sequence of your
COURSES//

Interviewer: Okay//

Ed: But out of the 250 majors at [WU]/ that's
less than PROBABLY 30//

Interviewer: Okay// Wow//

Ed: So help them understand that starting as an
exploratory student does not mean that
you're going to extend graduation//

Interviewer: Okay//

Di knew that exploratory faced many challenges to their situated identity.
These challenges were experienced at the hands of many different individuals and
in many different experiences – even at the hands of their college peers. Di
recalled this story because to her it represented a time when the community came together and the exploratory students were the group to which others identified rather than the reverse.

Ed was concerned about the messages that had been a part of the WU Discourse as it pertained to exploratory students. There existed a binary of good student being bestowed upon all of the students who had selected a major and bad student being placed upon exploratory students for not making a commitment to a major. Ed knew that there was perception - among students, parents, and others - that exploratory students were somehow penalized or were not able to graduate on time because they had not chosen an academic major. Ed and Di understood that they had to provide knowledge to inform for the students, their parents and for undisclosed people at WU whose perceptions of the students were incorrect. Ed understood that statistical data was the type of data that was the most well-received by those within the WU Discourse and parents. The statistics proved that of the hundred of majors that were available at WU only 30 majors had course sequences that would prove to be problematic for exploratory students who desired to graduate in four year. Ed and Di were working to make sure that the students developed a healthy identity as they recognized that some of the messages the students and their parents encountered were not messages that were supportive, encouraging or useful as the students worked to construct their major identity.

Ed personalized the challenges the students had experienced by acknowledging that the UC student’s parents were concerned about their students
status. The parents were in need of certain assurances as well. Ed and Di also recognized the significant role parents played in the identity development of their students. To address the parents concerns UC also had a webpage for the parents of exploratory students.

Interviewer: And so you address some of those questions for parents and the webpage/

Ed: I try to/ I try to as much as I can/

Interviewer: Okay/

Ed: WELL/ we have a parent section and quite frankly/ that's one of the areas that I'm continuing to try to figure out how we can do more with/

Interviewer: Okay/ Okay//

Ed: So there're some stuff we do// We do have a thing the parents' page about what MEANS to be parent resources//

Ed’s goal was not to create a website or webpages that were filled with knowledge to inform when he knew that knowledge for action required students to take ownership of their own identity development. The knowledge for action required that students complete a variety of homework assignments and other self-reflective activities.

Ed and Di understood that the exploratory students major identity was more than a matter of taking particular courses. The student’s major identity
development was a part of their larger identity development. The college student identity was comprised of many different identities, a fact that Ed and Di were fully aware of. But to first begin their major identity each exploratory student was required to complete homework.

Interviewer: And so/ if you're looking at specific outcomes/ what/ when you're looking at this page/ what do you want them/ you want them to be informed/ Do you want them to do something/

Di: Yes/

Interviewer: Is there/ what do you want/ Both/

Di: Both/

Interviewer: Okay/

Di: Because what we want them to do/ there are several things on this page/ and I can't see it from here/ but I know it's on here is if the students are not going to be attending orientation/ or there's no orientation offered/ let's say/ for SPRING/ it gives them homework to do/

Interviewer: Okay/

Di: Like/ we want you to kind of learn about US/ learn about your new exploratory
TRACK/ What you need to do/ Okay/ so there's homework thing you do complete/
And then they're submitted online/ So that's ONE thing/ For the students attending ORIENTATION/ we're asking them to complete everything on this CHECKLIST on admissions website including take a math placement exam/ We're/ there are different populations the spring admits versus the fall admits/ because the fall admits will always have orientation where the spring admits WON'T/ And so/ we need to address the NEEDS of those two separate populations/ because we handle them differently/

Interviewer: Okay/

Ed: We kept changing/ and like/ we'd like/ sometime in like/ September or October/ or we change it to the spring admits/ And then we go back/ and it was like why are you/

Interviewer: Yeah/ yeah/ okay/

Di: So/

Interviewer: Oh/ that's interesting/

Ed: Yeah/
The homework was then submitted via the Internet.

Di: The other thing is with the homework/ if they're not attending orientation then they have to submit it// It goes to a campus/ it goes to a college MAILBOX//

Interviewer: Okay//

Di: And then that's checked and printed out// The student needs to have that on file BEFORE they can make the first appointment/ phone or in person appointment with the advisor//

The students are not allowed to be passive in their personal development. The homework had been provided to make the students begin to identify his or her personal goals. Exploratory students were not simply a part of one large major of exploratory as they had to identity and select one of the four major concentrations. Ed and Di recognized that action was a required step in the student’s identity development. Ed and Di knew that UC was not a final or permanent destination but supportive transitioning place where identity uncertainty was not a bad thing. This was the message they worked to convey to those who visited the UC website.

Interviewer: Okay/ so what do you think it is to be an exploratory student/
Ed: Honest/ I mean/ they're still exploring who they are/ who they want to become/ Not only academic/ they're probably personally/ socially/ culturally// I mean/ of course/ all college students are doing that// But/ I think/ you know/ that's why this whole notion of by the time these kids are 17/ 18/ 19 years old and coming to college/ they should pretty much know what their life is going to be// I JUST don't get that// I don't understand how anybody thinks that's going to happen//

Interviewer: Do you think it's tough to declare exploratory than it is to declare another major/ for a student to make that decision//

Di: I think it is// And I actually think they're kind of brave for doing it because they're being honest with themselves//

Ed: Yeah//

Di: And I think it's/ I only tell them that/ you know/ sometimes you should be proud of it because you're making a smarter decision//

Interviewer: Yeah//
Ed: Right/

Di: You know/ than all of your peers by doing this/

Interviewer: Yeah/

Ed: BUT our role in a lot of the [WU] recruitment activities now allows us to get that message out there to most students and parents/ that IF you choose to start as an exploratory student/ here is the program// Here is what we are going to do for you/

Interviewer: Okay/

Ed: I really tell them/ We're not going to let you come in and sit with your hands under your butt and think that something has been happening TO you// We're going to make you DO things to get you through that process// And that is received VERY WELL// Especially my parents/ they like the fact that we have a PROGRAM that the students can go through that are going to help them find build APPROPRIATE major for them/

Interviewer: Okay/ Okay/

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Ed: And after they hear about us and they understand that/ I think/ it's much easier for them// But I agree with [Di]/ I think/ initially/ you know/ Am I'm going to be the only one who doesn't know what I want to do yet//

Interviewer: Okay/ Okay//

Ed: And that's fostered by that notion// It's fostered by a lot of people//

Interviewer: Yeah// And do you think that that has changed overtime with the institution/ where at one point it was embraced and then there was a change// There was concern//

Ed: Yes//

Interviewer: And now/ you think that there is a recognition/

Ed: Yes/

The message Ed and Di wanted to convey was that exploratory students were to be celebrated for their bravery in having chosen an identity that few others understood. They also understood that their exploratory students were simultaneously constructing multiple identities at a point in their lives where the students might feel pressured to make decisions that would impact the rest of their lives. But being an exploratory student meant there are additional steps the
student will have to take to move from that identity to the next. That movement would not happen to them. The students were responsible for their own transition and for their own identity formation. Ed and Di worked to inform the students’ parents that this experience was not a one of perpetuity and that the staff members who were working with their students would not allow them to remain in a state of identity ambiguity. Ed and Di also wanted to inform the students and their parents that this was not simply an easy college or major, as it required more upfront identity work. Ed and Di also wanted to the students to know that they were not alone.

The redesigned UC website now featured stories about exploratory students. The stories again reflected the diversity group of students who were all a part of the same identity and Discourse. Ed and Di understood that the students who were exploratory had their individual reasons for selecting this major but were part of a college, part of a community, and there were others who could identify with what they were experiencing.

Interviewer: And the reason for adding the stories was for what/

Di: EVERYBODY comes to exploratory for a different reason// And we wanted to REFLECT those reasons// And STUDENTS process in declaring a major/ like/ how did they get to that point/ Why did they declare what they're declaring in the end/ But to
show students that their story/ they weren't ALONE/ you know/

Interviewer: Okay/

Ed: And I do think with SOME people in the administration here that they don't/ they don't UNDERSTAND that many students will be what we call exploratory or undeclared/

Interviewer: Right/

Ed: And they don't understand that a student MAY NOT have a major when they start college/

Interviewer: Right/

Ed: And so/ we felt like by adding the stories would help put a face TO the exploratory student which it’s done I think NICELY/

Di: Yeah/

Ed called attention to what he perceived as a way of thinking among “some” WU administrators that students were averse to being known as exploratory students. Additionally he called attention to the fact that some student may simply not have any idea what they want to choose as a major. Combining the two lines of thought, Ed perceived there were those in administration who thought it strange that a student would prefer to be identified as an exploratory student and that
those in administration found it even stranger that first year students would not come enter WU already having a plan for the academic career. The WU Discourse supported and was built upon an expectation that students would select a major and plan their WU experience accordingly. It was as thought Ed believed that for some administrators they believed that identity ambiguity was not a part of the WU Discourse. Ed and Di knew differently on both counts and were working to reassure those students who were considering declaring or had declared one of the exploratory tracks that they were not alone and that their exploratory identity was understood and embraced by those in UC. Not only did those in UC understand how the students were situated but there were other students in UC with whom the incoming first year students could relate.

Ultimately Ed and Di wanted students to leave the UC website feeling as though they were welcomed and that they could felt like they belonged.

Interviewer: So if you have a student kind of/ closing it/ if you had a student that/ an incoming freshman that went to your page/ what would you want them to walk away from that page thinking/

Ed: I would be welcome here// This could be a place for me//

*Multimodal semiotic meaning: University College website*. The process for selecting the photographs for the UC website was very deliberate and intentional. Ed and Di engaged in a process with others in the college to identify
students who were exploratory majors whose stories were compelling and representative of the diverse community of students who were UC students. Ed and Di used photographs to build the first year students confidence in finding a community of others who shared a similar situated identity as an exploratory major who was a part of UC at WU. Ed and Di redesigned the website to ease the distress experienced by first year students by providing an uncluttered and highly structured design so that students could easily locate the links they were seeking.

Ed: But we took that opportunity to re-do some things and I don’t know if you noticed our students stories now//

Interviewer: Okay/ yes//

Ed: And things like that to try to be much more student FRIENDLY// And help the students AND PARENTS quite frankly feel like they can relate to the information that's on the page AND that they find it useful// So/ but in terms of our involvement/ we're TOTALLY control the content of this web page// So I don't know if that's what/ Yeah//

Ed later described how the college chose to select the particular students, their stories and the photographs – in that order.

Ed: When we were doing the whole thing with the stories/ that was a little bit more
LENHTY because we need to come up
with/ okay/ what STUDENTS// The students
need to be/ let's use the word/ APPROVED
by our DEAN// And then we have to get
PICTURES taken// And so that ended up
being of MORE lengthy process than we
wanted/ but I'm very happy with the
outcome/ And now that we've done at once/
I think we'll be able to do a little bit more
quickly/ so/

Interviewer: Now/ did you all interview the students that
were featured/ and ask specific questions/ or
did someone else come in and do that for
you/

Ed: Nope/ we did a/ we did a Survey Monkey
that I had/ so all/ we had/ I think there's
what/ Seven or eight students out here/ I
think we probably had about 13 to 15
students answer a certain number of
questions/

Di: Yeah//
Ed: On using a Survey Monkey/ And then from that is where we kind of/ okay/ these are the one's we're going to use/

Interviewer: Oh/ that's/ oh/ that/

Ed: Again/ keeping in mind that for us/ the DIVERSITY/ the campus REPRESENTATION and the various REASONS that a student with the exploratory/

As Ed and Di had begun the interview, the students were their focus and remained front and center as they designed their website and webpages. The viewed their charge, as a team and as a college, as creating a website that reflected having the WU designation and an academic identity of exploratory was not synonymous with did not mean those without any identity. In fact they, as a team and as a college, viewed the redesign of the UC website as an opportunity feature the depth of diversity and the myriad of identities of those individual students who were a part of UC.

**Students’ perception of the University College website messaging.** The redesigned UC website homepage featured a banner bar with the new UC slogan. Below the slogan was a large horizontal area that featured a slideshow of featured exploratory students and links to their stories. Below the slideshow box was a text area with a descriptive paragraph and links to all of the student stories to the right
of the paragraph. Underneath the text area and the links to the stories were the six
categorical headers and corresponding links underneath.

The UC website and webpages were, of the three college or department
websites, the website that resonated the most with the focus group participants.
When Rose, Olivia, Paris and Violet first viewed the UC website, they were
immediately drawn to the student stories and the photographs of the students.

Interviewer: So/ university exploratory/ what do you see
on this page/

Paris: Kevana’s story//

Olivia: A map//

Interviewer: Kevana’s story// So the first thing you saw
is/

Violet: And oh/ Brooke's story//

Paris: And Brooke's story too//

Olivia: I looked on the map/ guys//

Interviewer: Okay// And so you see/

Violet: And oh/ Chelsea's story//

Rose: Chelsea's story//

Interviewer: And you see/ link/ how do you like this
page/ what do you think this page is telling
you/

Violet: Another Chelsea/

Rose: People's success/ how people succeeded//
The participants immediately began to call out the names of the specific students stories that were featured on the webpage and understood that the stories were going to tell about the success the students had experienced. Rose was able to identify this fact almost immediately. While Rose was drawn to the student stories, Olivia was drawn to the “map” or at least to the reference that was made to the major maps for exploratory students. Olivia and Violet were drawn to the UC slogan. All four of the participants were drawn to the various elements of the webpage and the expressed excitement as they discovered the various elements on the webpage.

Rose described the difference between the UC webpage and the webpages UH and the CLAS as “it’s just in general”. The responses and perceptions of all four participants were however completely different when they interacted with the
UC website and webpages. As the four participants began to discuss the website and support that was available to exploratory students, the participants began to question certain assumptions and perceptions.

Interviewer: And so they have different options/ for students to look at/ And they have a class that helps student’s with/ determining a major/ So why do you think it's important that they have/

Rose: I didn't know you could do THAT/

Interviewer: this information up here/

Olivia: I want you to know that you're NOT alone/

Interviewer: Okay/

Olivia: So/ you know/ like there is help for you/

Interviewer: Okay/

Olivia: That you shouldn't feel like/ Oh/ I don’t have a major/ I'm a failure/ I'm not going to go to university/

Rose: That sucks/

Violet: Yeah/ because a lot of people/ when they don't know/ like not quite sure what to major in/ and they don't really want to put down the undecided as an option/ So they just pick a major/ try to deal with it/ And then if it
doesn't work out/ end up changing their
major SO many times//

Interviewer: Okay//

Paris: Yeah//

Rose: I didn't know that was there/ like cause I
would struggle/ and like right now// I don’t
wanna/ I like/ I'm not sure of major// No I'm
done with picking my major/ but like/ I'm
still like/ I don’t wanna to go back to that
like university college cause like/ I feel like
the university college is going to put you
back like/ five years/ it will take five years
to graduate or more//

The participant’s conversation had begun to take turn and was no longer a
conversation about others but had become personalized. They were no longer
making references to others but had begun to speak about their own personal
knowledge or lack thereof. Rose’s utterance, “I didn't know you could do
THAT//” gave insight into her sense of the rules that were at work in the WU
Discourse. Rose thought that all students had to have an major and did not know
that students had agency, that they could in turn make certain decisions on their
own when they wanted to make them. It was as though Rose carried other
Discourse practices into this new Discourse. She had been applying old rules to a
new game and was beginning to wonder why no one had told her it was a new

game with new rules that she could have a say in determining.

They were no longer speaking about external processes but had shifted
their responses to discuss the internal feelings and experiences of students who
were struggling with declaring a major. When Rose, Violet, Olivia and Paris were
asked to described their perceptions of the UH webpages and the CLAS
webpages, they did so as though they were detailing a list – going point by point.
Their description of the UC webpage was wholly different in nature and in tone.

Olivia, Paris and Violet had begun to speak empathetically of the students
who were exploratory students. They spoke though they were as allies with this
student population. Violet’s comments gave the perception that she admired
students who had selected exploratory as their major because these students were
not like many other students she had come to know. She knew students who had
selected a major even when they were uncertain about their choice. As first-
generation college students Rose, Paris, Violet and Olivia understood what it
meant to follow a course that was unfamiliar. They also understood the
importance of having another who had supported them as they made their
decisions to attend WU. They identified with the exploratory student population
because as first-generation college students the entire college experience was new
and unfamiliar. They understood what it might have felt like to have to make
decisions about a major when the student was so unfamiliar with what that
decision really involved.
Rose had a visceral reaction saying, “that sucks”, as she discovered information of which she had previously not been aware. As Rose continued to engage in the conversation, she grew even more distressed. Rose expressed that she felt as though she was “forced” to select a major while she was trying to reconcile the inaccurate information upon which she had been operating.

The design of the new UC website was structurally different from that of CLAS in that the college homepage served a single student population, exploratory students. Therefore there was no need to have a second level page to direct the students to their class specific page, as they were able to access specific pages directly from the home page. While this was functionally a more direct path to for the students the presence of the links was visually problematic for the students. This however was secondary to the fact that the participants were drawn to the student stories and wanted to read them.

Interviewer: So what do you think is helpful for you to be able to see the stories/ Why do you think they put up there the pictures with each of the student's stories/ What do you think it’s/

Paris: I think they’re the people who didn't know what they wanted for their major/ and they took/ they went here and/

Olivia: Now they’re successful/

Interviewer: That's good to know// Okay/ and so what did they do/ they put text underneath the
picture// Do you read the text or do you even pay attention to the text or you look at the pictures and then you see what's on the right//

Paris: I want to read their stories//

Interviewer: You want to read their stories/ That's a good thing to know// Okay/

Paris: I wanna know about people’s lives//

Interviewer: Okay// So you have links at the bottom// And you see all of the/ do you like the links/ is that helpful for you/ is it/

Violet: I just like/ how it's ORGANIZED// That's like the main thing but it's like A LOT of links//

Interviewer: A lot of links/

Olivia: Yes/ that's my problem//

Olivia made a distinction as she shared her perceptions about the reason for sharing the exploratory students. Olivia believed that the reason UC placed the pictures with the stories was due to the fact that “now they’re successful”. Her statement would give the impression that the students were at one point unsuccessful, as in the time when the featured students were exploratory students. Olivia was however validating the featured students by stating that they were now
successful students and that through their experience the students had found success.

As the students viewed the second level UC webpage they were no longer situating themselves outside of the students who were being addressed but were now personally identifying with the webpage content. This had been the first time Rose and Violet had been exposed to the UC website. This was also the first time they felt someone at WU recognized the uncertainty they had experiencing as it related to selecting a major. Rose and Violet transitioned from the role of passive observers to activist participants.

Interviewer: Okay// So let me show you something//

Here's a link here for incoming freshmen//

We're gonna click on that//

Olivia: Fall Welcome//

Interviewer: So what do you see/

Paris: Welcome//

Violet: Welcome//

Paris: University College//

Rose: Welcome/ Fall Welcome/ a welcome from/

Interviewer: Okay/ any pictures/

Violet: No/

Paris: No/

Interviewer: Okay/ So/ and you see/ what does it say/

Congratulations on being admitted to [WU]/
achieving your academic goals requires thoughtful preparation and hard work. You and your academic success specialist advisor will work together to create an academic plan that works for you. Would you have known what an academic success specialist was if that's all they used before? So I guess it helped that they put the word adviser there.

Paris: Yes/
Olivia: Yeah/
Interviewer: You think they wrote that because there are students that don’t know/
Paris: Yeah/
Rose: For future references/ University College should advertise more/ That’s all/
Violet: Yeah like when they go/ and like the [WU] representatives come to the high school/ they should really let people know that/ it's okay to/ be/
Paris: To not have a major/
Violet: Be undecided/ to not have a major/ We have an opportunity here/ like/ University College that will help you//

Interviewer: Okay// So you like the idea of the university college/

Violet: Yes//

Paris: Uh huh [yes]//

Rose: Yes//

Olivia: Yeah//

Interviewer: You really didn't know about it/

Rose: Nuh huh//

Paris: Uh uh [no]//

Violet: Nope// I know I really didn’t know/ until right now//

Rose: Yeah// I know// I really just knew now because/ like I said I thought it was like/ if university/ cause mostly/ you go to/ if you are not sure/ if you are not sure about your major/ you go into community college/ and THEN you transfer to the university//

Although this was the last webpage the participants reviewed there was not one complaint about the lack of photographs. The participants were fixated on the fact that they had not heard about the opportunities available to incoming first year
students through UC. Rose and Violet were determined not to let the moment pass without declaring that no other student should enter WU and be made to feel as though they had to select a major. Moreover they were willing to make an example of themselves to ensure that other students, who were unknown to them but with whom they could identify, were afforded an opportunity they felt they had not had. As first-generation college students they were doing as best they could to get information about what it meant to be a college student and all that it meant to be a college students attending WU. Yet for all of the research they had conducted and for all of the steps they had taken to become literate in the Discourse they were discovering there were major gaps in their understanding of the Discourse. It should be noted that during the interview the students were asked if they knew anyone who worked for UC and they replied “no”. They were then reminded that one of their summer transition program instructors was in fact a staff member in UC. When they recalled that this fact they disclosed that they still did not understand what exploratory meant.

Paris: Okay/ I got exploratory things from her when she said it/

Violet: Yeah/ that was like the first time that I’d ever/

Rose: I didn't know/ I thought it was like a career or something//

Paris: Me/ too//
The participants understood the messages from UC and beyond that made very personal connections with the messages conveyed through the photos and the student stories. There was a level of connection with the UC webpages that had not occurred with any of the other websites selected for this study. While the UH brought up the participants feelings of concern and challenge, the UC website was the first and only website that directly addressed their fears and concerns as it related to identity development. This was the first time they were allowed to feel as though there were individuals at WU who would not treat them as less than if they had chosen an exploratory major track.

They called attention to the fact that the Discourse of WU was oriented toward students who knew what they wanted as a major. Students who did not know what they wanted to major to be were marginalized and made to feel as though they were less than the students who had selected a major. Rose and Violet had called for a shift in the Discourse, a shift that moved the marginalized exploratory student from the periphery to the center of the Discourse along with all of the other students who had declared their majors. Rose and Violet were calling upon WU to support students who were uncertain or who felt unprepared to take on a specific major identity. They did not believe title of exploratory student was punitive nor should this matter be dismissed as a non-issue as they had personally given witness that this was a significant and personal matter and highly influential to a student’s sense of belonging.
University Housing. The UH website and webpages for all four WU campus locations were developed and maintained by a small staff of three professional staff members and a few student employees. The lead staff member for this team, Amy, was interviewed to discuss their webpages and her role in the development of the UH website and webpages. When asked about her role her response was quickly rendered,

Interviewer: And so what I'll ask is as we're looking at the webpage today to move through a couple of different pages/ The first question I will ask is what is your role in developing the webpage for [university housing]/

Amy: Okay// Well/ I'm the marketing specialist for housing and also for the [student union]/ so I kind of double duty//

Interviewer: Okay/ Okay//

Amy: So I'm responsible for the marketing messaging and communications to all current residents/ prospective residents and then parents as well/ obviously/ because they're sort of in that same grouping//

Interviewer: Yes//

Amy: So I oversee our graphic designer/ we have a Web developer// So everything from the
media messaging that happens to the website/ to our print publications/ all communications eventually pass over my desk//

Interviewer: Very good/

Amy: So I report to senior director/ [X.X.] and also obviously then are overseen by [Y.Y.] who is our director of the program/

Interviewer: Yes/ Yes/

Amy: So that's kind of my responsibility/ so/ ABSOLUTELY/ development of the website/ working in tandem with/ you know/ other heads of departments WITHIN university housing to get the messaging right// Obviously/ there are lots of little subgroups WITHIN housing/ and we want to make sure the fact that I'm presenting THEIR information correctly/ and that we're doing it in a cohesive manner across the site//

Interviewer: Okay// Okay/ very good/

Amy: So/ yeah//
Amy’s response was organized as though describing an organizational chart. Her understanding of her role in developing the webpages for UH was as clear as her role within the unit. Amy knew her responsibilities and was just as well versed in understanding her role in relation to her staff, her supervisors, and other unit members. However when she was asked to share the purpose of the UH webpage her Discourse changed. Amy moved from framing her role from that of an organizational perspective to that of her own “area of study”. She attributed her role to the external factors of the organization but she attributed her understanding of the website and defined the existence of the website through another one of her identities and Discourses - that of a student.

Interviewer: So as you're developing the webpage/ and this has been a question that I ask in all of my interview persons/ what/ based on your understanding with the Web/ what is the purpose of having the university housing webpage/  

Amy: That's a really interesting question// I approach it probably a little bit differently because this is actually my area of study/ 

Interviewer: Okay//  

Amy: Was media arts// So NEW media was a very big portion of my concentration/ so
everything for me I see it as just another TOOL in marketing

Interviewer: Okay

Amy: Obviously as technology gets GROWN and the public's ACCEPTANCE of technology has grown it's the number one information provider

Interviewer: Okay

Amy: We know from statistics the fact that 60 percent of our applicants NEVER come to our campus tour NEVER see us in their counseling centers in their high schools They're completely like cold sells And they see the website they are unknown hits and they apply

Interviewer: Okay

Amy: So for me the website is important

Interviewer: Okay

Amy: We've also obviously as we try to be more sustainable and reduce our paper usage and stuff like that the online technology has been REALLY important

Interviewer: Okay

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Amy: So our housing APPLICATION PROCESS is completely online/

Amy had assumed a heteroglossic voice. The first voice was that as of a student who received specialized training that distinguished her from others who had not been similarly trained in that Discourse. As such her certified or expert perspective and resultant response were not going to be like the response of another person who was not from a similar background or experience. The second voice she was speaking through was that of a university staff member who could provide, unprompted and without hesitation, data and statistics to support her work with the UH webpages. Moreover, the efforts she led were not only beneficial for the students who were driving the need for a change in their business practices but they were also beneficial as they were sensitive to and reflective of an environmental sustainability practices. The use of the UH webpages had both short term and long term benefits and ultimately the larger society benefitted from the practices she was leading her staff to employ.

Amy: You still want pictures to be INTERESTING// You still want things to be ENGAGING// A lot of time/ you know/ we have a mandate at [WU] to reduce our printing usage by 30 percent over the next three years// Housing has managed to do that in my FIRST year in this position already simply by condensing what we have
and RELYING on our website to convey the more specifics/

As the web designer for WU UH, Amy knew it was her charge to develop a website that met the needs of the unit. First and foremost the website had to convey messaging that educated incoming first year students about the benefits of living on campus while facilitating a connection between the incoming first year students and their new home, the WU community, while supporting UH’s underlying business enterprise.

Interviewer: And it's says/ Live at campus and be at the heart of it all// So/ I'm putting on my first-year student hat and I’m saying/ we're talking about messaging to a first-year//

Amy: Uh-huh [yes]/

Interviewer: And research shows/ okay// Did you write that sentence/ Do you know what that means/ or what that/ 

Amy: Oh/ YEAH/ Absolutely// Yeah no/ all the copy and stuff that gets written is either language copy that we traditionally use to talk about housing//

Interviewer: Okay//

Amy: Or else it's new development// Yeah/ and and and as part of our going through the 363
redesign/ I'm REFRESHING all that language//

Interviewer: Okay//

Amy: Yeah/ because this/ that's important//

Interviewer: Okay//

Amy: That is ABSOLUTELY important//

Interviewer: Okay//

Amy: I believe that ANY copy in text that is on the website is important/

Interviewer: Okay/

Amy: It's another place to reinforce your MESSAGE// It's another place to confer certain things// In our new/ in a new PRINTED publication/ which often comes first before the website unfortunately we're changing the way that messaging is// We're trying to talk more about campus LIFE// We're trying to talk more about COMMUNITY/ the EXPERIENCE/ less about the halls and amenities/ [changes speech pattern to sound more structured and uses pinkie side of hand to make a striking motion on her desk] which is difficult 364
because REALLY WHAT THEY WANT TO KNOW IS THE HALLS AND AMENITIES// [softened voice as she speaks and uses pinkie side of hand to make a striking motion on her desk]// So/

Interviewer: Okay/ Okay/ Okay// So then when you write this and when say you live at the heart of it all/ what do you mean by that/

Amy: [begins speaking softly] At the heart of all/ we're trying to convey the fact that if you live on campus/ you have access to the [student union]/ you have access to ALL of the programming and activities that happen ON campus// You WALK to your classes// You walk back to you hall//

Interviewer: Okay//

Amy: You can walk to the football games// You can walk to basketball games// [speech takes on a rhythmic like cadence]

Interviewer: Okay//

Amy: You need the library/ you are STEPS away from the library//

Interviewer: Okay//

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Amy: We're trying to convey the idea of on campus means you have EVERYTHING at your finger tips/

Interviewer: Okay/

Amy: If you are off campus/ if you are a commuter student/ it is HARD to have ACCESS to that stuff/

Interviewer: Okay/

Amy: YOU HAVE TO COME BACK TO THE UNIVERSITY// [softened voice even further]

Interviewer: Okay/

Amy: WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO DO THAT/ [by now her voice is almost a whisper]

Interviewer: Yeah/

Amy: You want to be right there in the middle of everything// [speech is now getting a little louder]

Interviewer: Right in the middle of it/

Amy: Yeah// So/ THAT'S [elongated speech] what we're trying to convey/

Interviewer: Okay//

366
Amy: So you know then we show the whole research shows and we USE THIS OVER AND OVER AND OVER AGAIN [whispered] that students who live on campus transition more easily to campus LIFE// They graduate FASTER// They're more involved in extracurricular ACTIVITIES and more connected to the university than students who don’t//

Interviewer: And the reason you say that because to make it more convincing for the students is it to let them know/

Amy: It IS a little bit more convincing// It's/ and part of that/ too/ is when you put the expectation for first-year to live on campus//

Interviewer: Okay//

Amy: We HAD to tell them why/ Parents demanded WHY// WHY are you forcing us to pay to live on campus and HAVE TO have a dining plan/

Interviewer: Okay/

Amy: We had to explain why and we’re like/ OKAY/ SURE// THIS IS WHY [voice is
raised in pitch]// We’ve got the data to
SHOW/ [slight pause in speech] at WU
AND nationally that/ what is it/ Um/ that
first-year/ people/ students who live on their
first/ live on campus their first-year year
graduate at 20 percent higher rates than
those that don’t// THAT'S pretty
significant// That's enough of a retention
thing//

Interviewer:   Right//

Amy:          However/ it gets better// The longer you stay
on campus/ the more exponential that goes//
So YOU live on campus for four year/ it's
LIKE 95 PERCENT OF THEM

Interviewer:   Wow//

Amy:          Well/ of COURSE/ they lived on campus for
four years// It's a COMMITMENT to their
college education//

Interviewer:   Okay//

Amy:          Even more/ [pause] FOUR YEARS//

Interviewer:   Uh-huh [yes]//
Amy: They graduate in FOUR YEAR// That's not always a trend that HAPPENS at WU//
Sometimes once they get off campus/ they take lightened class loads// You know/ it takes LONGER for them// So/ if you live on campus you condense//

Interviewer: So that means a lot// This means a lot//

Amy: It does means a lot/ but we don't do/ we're not trying not be a HARD SELL// That's the problem with higher ed/ you’ve kinda gotta be a soft squishy sell// You can’t/ I'm like I would to love LAY all that out for everybody/ but the university doesn’t really want us to message that way// [softens speech]

Interviewer: Okay//

Amy: You know/ not only is my message having/ do I have to work with the operation but operation and our process//

Interviewer: Okay//

Amy: I want/ I have to make sure that our SENIOR leadership is okay with the message// I ALSO have to make sure the
fact that our department/ and that's [student affairs]/ [SA]/ that THEIR department is strategic marketing and communication is okay with my message/ that Dr. [Y.]/ Who is the HEAD of the department/ is okay with my message// AND THEN IT STILL ALSO GOES TO PUBLIC AFFAIRS/ THE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE// [speech becomes rhythmic as she says this last sentence]/

Interviewer: So/ how do you get anything out if it has to go through all those/ do they just look at it/

Amy: Most of the time it goes up to strategic marketing and communications// They stay on the beat of what's being conversed across the department//

Interviewer: Okay//

Amy: There's also always the thing that it's fine until somebody notices and it comes back at you// That’s also bad// And that's the reality// But this stuff is HEAVILY/ HEAVILY reviewed// But/ admittedlly/ we do sort of have a library a repertoire of
The lengthy interaction is primarily the result of the initial question. In responding to the initial question Amy provides an extensive array of facts, figures, statistics and data to support the messaging she developed for the webpage. What was evident in this data was the marginalization of students who had chosen to live off campus and the preference given toward students who had chosen to live on campus. Because of the requirement that all first year students live on campus, this marginalization was even more specific to students who lived in the local vicinity as they were the members of the incoming first year students population who could elect to live on campus or elect to live at home.

According to Staklis (2010) the predominate number of first-generation students attend college in their home state and are less likely than students whose parents have earned a Bachelor’s degree to live on campus – 8.6% compared to 23.9% live in on-campus housing. Given these statistics and a WU Discourse that favors students who live on campus, any first-generation incoming freshmen who lives in the local community but elects not to live on campus has been marginalized to be among those who would be among the group of the others.

Their identity as a member of the others is equated to being among the first year students who would struggle to successfully construct their situated identity as a college student, experience difficulty in making connections to WU and experience a delay in graduation. Amy asked why would a student choose to live on campus but when that same question is posed in a different way it could
result in a series of different responses – why would a students choose not to live on campus. Those responses could be rooted in additional characteristics of first-generation college students which included that the predominate number of first-generation college students were from low-income families, were more likely to have children, and again were more likely to not live on campus (Staklis, 2010).

Amy’s use of the social language of those who are professionals working within residential life illustrated her situated position within this Discourse, she was an insider. Amy, while disclosing that WU UH staff is never to engage in the practice of the “hard sell”, was engaging in that very practice. Amy recognized and acknowledged that the type of Discourse that she had exchanged in was by WU Discourse and by overarching Discourse of higher education housing professionals’ standards a “hard sell”. This approach to convincing students and their parents about the benefit of living in on-campus housing was not an acceptable approach within the UH Discourse, at WU and within the larger higher education community. Rather Amy understood that the preferred approach was a softer sales approach, as Amy called it a “squishy sell”.

The term “sell” and this facet of the UH practice were significant in the data. Amy used the word “sell” 18 times throughout the interview, repeatedly emphasizing the fact that the she and her team did not engage the “hard sell” in the messaging to the first-year students; however, in the midst of her admonishments it was the task of the WU UH website to sell the product – the “campus life … COMMUNITY … the EXPERIENCE” and not simply “HALLS and AMENITIES.” On the surface their task seemed to be to sell the physical
amenities but upon deeper analysis their task was to sell what could not be seen or felt or experienced through the physical plant alone. They were selling an experience – a community in which every student had the potential to feel they belonged. Amy was clear that first year students were the priority population for UH at WU.

There was another more significant theme to the Discourse of UH located on their webpages. During the interview Amy, disclosed that UH office was engaged in work that was of a legal nature. Around 00:04:58 minutes into the interview Amy first introduced the term which would prove to be a fundamental factor in shaping the Discourse of the UH website.

Amy: We have 13,000 residents on campus// Yes// We're huge [softens voice and slows speech]//

[0:04:58] And/ you know/ [Campus C] alone has 14 housing and three apartment complexes// It's A LOT of information to try to convey in a PRINTED piece that students really don't need to SEE//

Interviewer: Right/

Amy: And they're just going to flip through and move on// Their PARENTS might spend a little more time going through it/ BUT THEY DON'T REALLY CARE ABOUT THAT//
They want to know the PRICES// They want to know the LEGAL things//

Amy used the term *legal* or *legalities* 14 more times during the interview. The legalities involved in the *knowledge to inform* and the *knowledge for action* affected every aspect of Amy’s website practices – from posting housing rates and figures to the types of documents she made available to the students and their parents.

Amy: So they tend to see stuff in there/ they can also see their meal plan options// We have/ you know/ PDF forms of these room and board rates so that parents can look at THAT// They can download and print those OUT// Our housing exemption request is also included as well// We have a LOT of PDFs/ I ONLY use PDFs in our website because I don't like to use Word docs [softened voice]//

Interviewer: Really/

Amy: Well/ here's the thing// Word docs are open gateway to security risks for the user/ NOT FOR US/ but for the user//

Interviewer: Really/

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Amy: If somebody was to hack into a Word document, they could attach a script to the end of the binary code of that and that's a virus or malware. It can get attached. PDF is a more secure way of doing it.

Interviewer: Okay.

Amy: If somebody is using a PC or Mac platform, it will ALWAYS open up in PDF.

Interviewer: Okay.

Amy: It is one of those like alright everybody's got a reader, but it can open it up. Not everybody's always got the most up to date reader [softened voice], but smack them on the top of the head, thing they need to download the new readers. DEAL WITH IT [changes voice]. But this one, too, I can also make sure the fact that in NO WAY can students go in and change the text of this and submit it. That's another thing with using a Word doc versus a PDF. PDF is locked.

Interviewer: Okay.

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Amy: SO MUCH in what we do and we what we have to convey is legalities [slower softened voice]//

Interviewer: Okay//

Amy: Ya can't fudge with that [slower softened voice]// I mean/ people kind of go/ Oh/ but/ you know/ Your site's a bit confusing// You got this over here and this over here// They don't understand us// Oye/ I know but/

Interviewer: Yeah/

Amy: But a lot of what we do is legal/ legal process// So we're going to make you go through our steps [slower softened voice with a degree of seriousness]//

The UH website had to communicate both knowledge to inform and knowledge for action with an added legal tenor. There were policies and procedures, the student code of conduct, and a binding housing contract that were all made available to the students and their parents through the website. As beautiful and as “pretty” as the photographs and images might have been, as sincere as the tone of the messages about the welcoming community of similarly situated individuals, as exhaustive as the information about wide variety of campus resources and dining options, and convincing as the statistics about the benefits of living on campus might have been they were all situated within the context of a legal agreement
between the student and the institution. This fact would be evident in the data collected from in the Campus B pilot study participants as well as from the focus group participants.

There was, however, a disconnect in Amy’s perceptions about the first year students population. Her first assumption was about the difference in perception between students who live in the local vicinity and those who are from out of state.

Interviewer: Yeah/ And in terms of just thinking about/ you know/ who we see these/ our students to be/ when when when a freshmen comes to the page/ you know/ what do you think/ is there a different feeling/ uh/ uh/ residence of student that lives in the vicinity and that student that's out of state/

Amy: Absolutely// absolutely// I think students who live// IN-STATE students/ especially IN-CITY students/ they have SEEN the campus// Higher percentage of them that have actually been on a tour// They KNOW what it's like// They know what's AROUND// It's harder to FOOL them with the/ Look/ how great this campus is// [Raises pitch of voice to a higher lighter
pitch] No/ they know what's around [lowers voice with a sense of ‘here’s what you get’ tone]// You know [Campus D] they know// they know there’s A WALMART and A TARGET and that's about it//

Interviewer: Yes/ yes//

Amy: You know they KNOW where it IS// So you CAN'T do that “Oh this great campus LIFE// because you don't just SELL them that// They LIVE here// They KNOW//

Interviewer: Okay//

Amy: But they might not/ you STILL have the opportunity to/ I think to ENLIGHTEN them to DEPTH of POSSIBILITIES// And that's what you/ that's HOW still focusing in that message with that out-of-STATE/ out-of-the-city student will HELP those in-state students// because they'll be like/ Oh/ oh/ wow/ that's a REALLY pretty picture// I haven't/ DID NOT KNOW that was [Campus A]// I DIDN'T think [Campus A] to LOOKED like that// Oh/ okay/ that's cool//
Interviewer: Okay

Amy: So they might not realize// The out-of-state ones have NO [elongated] frame of reference// That's why it cracks me up when [pause] we traditionally do a photo shoots like in OCTOBER and NOVEMBER// We're all wearing PANTS/ and long sleeve SHIRTS/ and SWEATERS/ and SWEAT SHIRTS/ and HATS// That is NOT how our campus is//

Amy believed that students who lived in the local vicinity were more familiar with the WU campuses than students who were from out-of-state. The data collected from the focus group participants, who were all students living within a 50 miles of WU, indicated that at least two of the students had no familiarity with WU. Additionally the participant’s friends were unaware of WU and they too lived in the vicinity. What Amy was referencing was the physical locale and not the college experience itself. She made reference to the landmarks and other physical attributes around the campus locations and the surrounding vicinities. But what Amy did not address was the fact that a student could live within miles of the campus and be completely ignorant about WU. Those few miles could be equivalent to the distance to another state, as was the case with Paris and Olivia and their respective friends. More than that, the out-of-state student could have greater familiarity with the WU experience and Discourse than a local first
generation college student as out-of-state student could be a continuing generation student with the benefit of parents who understand the college experience.

Distance is a relative.

Another piece of data reflected a second disconnection between Amy’s perceptions about the existence of differences between the students living on the different WU campus locations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewer:</th>
<th>Is there a difference between a student that lives on the [Campus C] and a student that lives at the [Campus A]/ a freshmen/ is there a difference//</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy:</td>
<td>There should NOT be a difference//</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer:</td>
<td>Okay//</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy:</td>
<td>They're REALLY should not be a difference//</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer:</td>
<td>Okay//</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy:</td>
<td>They’re a resident of university housing//</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer:</td>
<td>Okay//</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy:</td>
<td>The policies and procedures are exactly the same// Now/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer:</td>
<td>Okay/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy:</td>
<td>THE ROOM THAT THEY’RE LIVING IN [said a little more slowly and in a slightly softer voice]/ will be different//</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interviewer: Okay//

Amy: The ROOM will different even if they were living in a different hall in [Campus C]//

Interviewer: Okay//

Amy: Um but we don’t see a difference between them//

Interviewer: Okay//

Amy: We DO NOT see a difference between them// Their EXPERIENCE will be different because the CAMPUS experience is different//

Amy viewed the students through commonality of the accommodations available on each campus and in relation to the rooms. Her approach was to view the students through the manner in which UH would interact with the students in terms of process, but in terms of identity the students strongly expressed that there was a difference between the students who elected to attend the different WU campus locations. Olivia and Paris were intentional in choosing to attend WU and even more intentional with their decision to attend Campus A. Both Olivia and Paris used the WU website, Olivia also attended a campus tour, to research their campus of choice. Amy was however adamant that she and her team purposefully worked to showcase the distinct characteristics of each WU campus.

Amy: What's the path they have to take/ What do they click at/ What do they do/ Two/ we
deal with the uniqueness of WU as the fact that we have four campuses/ one university in many places/ but these places like to be identified as themselves [changes speech pattern]/

Interviewer: Yes// Yes// Yes//
Amy: So you got to be nice about that//
Interviewer: Okay//
Amy: And for us/ that actually is pretty natural because each one of our campuses has a very different experience/ different housing set up/ different options// Sometimes like on the [Campus A] in [Campus B]/ there is one housing option//

Each campus had distinct characteristics that Amy thought important to feature on the website. Olivia and Paris were drawn to the features of Campus A and those reasons were why Olivia and Paris decided to live on Campus A. Olivia and Paris both disclosed their perceptions of the differences between students who were living on Campus C and students who were living on their home campus, Campus A. Those distinctions ranged from the need to fit in and please other people, to how students chose to dress, to the level higher level of personal attention a student could get from faculty members on Campus A as compared to Campus C.
Olivia and Paris were specific in drawing their distinctions between *visiting* and *living* on the other campus.

Interviewer: Okay// Now/ and so/ if that's the case/ would you/ how would you feel if you had to go to [Campus C]/

Olivia: I wouldn't care//

Interviewer: Now/ do you go to the [Campus C] to visit//

Olivia: Every so often//

Interviewer: Okay// What if your major got moved to [Campus C]/

Olivia: I would cry// [stated immediately]

Interviewer: Would you/

Olivia: I would//

Interviewer: Like the/

Olivia: I don't like [Campus C]//

Interviewer: Okay//

Olivia: It's too big//

While Amy did not perceive a difference between the students who chose to live on each of the WU campus locations, the study participants vehemently expressed opposing positions.

Amy realized there were limitations to print media and enjoyed using the UH website as way to extend those limitations. Amy found that the UH website
provided the venue through which she had been able to create an environment that supported the multiple audiences who used the UH website.

Interviewer: And so/ ultimately your goal with these/ with the webpages is to do what/

Amy: Is to CONVEY the experience of living on campus/ to prospective students// Then also to continue really great relations with our residents ON campus// So they can continue to see the BENEFIT of LIVING on campus// And also to be REASSURANCE and a RESOURCE for parents/ so/ THAT'S really kind of the three pronged thing I want to do with the web//

Interviewer: Okay//

Amy: I wanted to SUPPLEMENT my print publications// But I also realized the WEB is where I can take it FURTHER//

Amy crafted messages that were particular to each audience. Moreover, she knew what each of the audiences needed or required so that she could craft the appropriate knowledge for action and knowledge to inform for each audience.

Because of the nature and complexity of the information that Amy and her team provided through the UH website, she worked to minimize the level of distress individuals might feel as a result of their interactions with the UH
website. That distress could have been the result of the use of the technology (e.g., using PDF documents) or due to the legal elements of the policies and of the information they were required to provide to incoming first year students and their parents. Amy also realized that it was not possible to completely mitigate those feelings, as the work UH was engaged in was complicated.

Interviewer: So that when/ when you/ when a student comes here/ were talking about a freshman// What do you want them to feel when they come to your page/ what do you want them to feel/

Amy: Hmm/ we’ll talk about where I WANT them to go [laughter]/ Not necessarily where they are right now/ I want them to be/ um I want them to be excited about their housing options//

Interviewer: Okay//

Amy: I want them to/ ONE I want them to feel they have options//

Interviewer: Okay//

Amy: Um two/ I want them to kind of REALLY get to feel for the great CAMPUS LIFE that we’ve got going on//

Interviewer: Okay//

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Amy: You know that's kind of goes back to that age old debate of you know saying residence HALL versus dorm// I don’t like to USE the word dorm// DORM is just a BED that you sleep on//

Interviewer: Right//

Amy: You want a RESIDENCE HALL/ some place you LIVE/

Interviewer: Wow/ okay//

Amy: Some type of place you experience// Um/ I also want their process with us TO BE as PAIN FREE as we CAN make it//

Interviewer: Okay//

Amy: Um/ I want the information to be CLEAR/

Interviewer: Okay//

Amy: Um because I KNOW if my information is clear on the website// If it’s easy to find [hand tapping on the desk as she speaks] / if the process is as simple as we CAN/ I make it life EASIER for operations/

Interviewer: Okay//

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Amy: In the front/ you don’t get the angry PARENTS// You don’t get/ you get LESS of that CONFUSION happening/

Interviewer: Okay/

Amy: If the information is clear/

Interviewer: Okay/

Amy: As best we CAN/

Interviewer: Okay/

Amy: Some of our stuff is COMPLICATED/

Interviewer: Okay/

Amy: The LEGAL aspects of things make it difficult/

Amy placed the complexity of their work on the legal aspect of their work. As the UH website was a conduit for the information as well as a marketing tool, Amy worked to minimize the negative feelings parents might experience. It was her goal to create a website experience and environment that allowed incoming first year students to move past the challenges and discomfort they were experiencing in using the knowledge for action to finalize the contractual elements of their new situated identity as a college student. As a result of the students interaction with the UH website, Amy wanted the students to feel excited about their housing options. She wanted the students to have a real sense of what their new identity as a college student would involve, especially as a student who would be living on campus. Amy envisioned their new residential status equivalent to moving to a
new home and it was her goal to make sure students and their parents could envision the students as a college student, living in a residential hall, attending classes but moreover experiencing life as a college student at WU – fully engaged in the students’ new situated identity.

**Multimodal semiotic meaning on University Housing website.** Amy used a variety of photos and text on the homepages and second level pages and true to the webpage developers best practice guidelines there were no photos on the third level pages. The homepage had one very large photo and two lines of text that expounded that research showed the benefit and value of living on campus. The second page displayed a photo slideshow depicting students engaged in an assortment of activities around the campus – watching a WU football game, sitting around a common area (an indoor scene with a group of students and an outdoor scene with a pair of students), as well as a couple of photos of students sitting in residential hall rooms. The third page displayed just text. Amy was very intentional with her use of photos.

Amy: So we've got visuals of ACTUAL students on campus life kind of a thing/ obviously/ we our our photography always takes in account/ showing campus life/ showing students actually in the residential settings/ like that was [Campus C hall]// Diversity is always something we want to focus on too// So/ it's not like we
specifically like okay “United Benetton” [said as though she is crazily looking for different types of students with a slight laugh] photo shoots// But we've/ I mean/ wanted to make sure like/ you know/ [WU’s]/ student bodies is very [inaudible] and we want to showcase that/ you know// Internat/ and talking about international housing AND NOT SHOWING PICTURES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IS STILL AS SILLY [softened voice]//

Amy used photographs to depict realistic scenarios an incoming student might see on campus, to show the actual WU residential facilities, or to reflect the residential community in action. Amy’s interest was to provide the viewer with the most realistic portrayal of the WU campus – its people and its facilities. This approach to crafting the messages for the website visitor was in keeping with a business practice that required a business engage in a practice known as _truth in advertising._

Amy: This is what your room is going to look like which is GREAT// And by having/ you know/ our photography styles change from this super crazy POSE pictures to more _NATURAL_ photography// So/ it looks more
Oh I wasn't really trying to take a picture. Please don't look like your taking a picture. I mean, that just happens.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay.

Amy: But like this one, okay. this is POSED but this is a scene you would actually see on campus. So, we're looking to take THESE and get that feeling here on the website. So, it looks more like the homepage here where you've got actual photos that convey information.

Posed scenarios were out and natural scenarios were in. The use of photography brought together all of the UH practices as the photographs provided a static image of the facilities as they had been represented in written description, they allowed students to see other students who shared common interests or ethnic or racial identities, and it allowed students to view other WU students engaged in the very activities that had been described in the text. The photographs supplemented the text in that they allowed the viewer to see and vicariously feel the happiness and sense of belonging with other students were experiencing.

**Students’ perceptions of University Housing website messaging.** When the students in the focus group first viewed the UH homepage, the participants expressed the extreme excitement about living on campus. Immediately following their exuberant declarations, Paris and Olivia stated a reoccurring issue they seemed
to have with the WU website. As first-generation college students they had only heard stories from a few family members or mentors, but they were going to be the first in their families to move away from home to live in the residential halls of a university. They recognized the significance of this move – it represented that they had finally achieved a goal they had each worked so very hard to accomplish. With this accomplishment came newfound independence and a sense of responsibility. They had been looking forward to the day when they would be living in the residential halls as WU college students and that day was quickly arriving. Their excitement was however quickly tempered as they discussed and revealed their perception of the UH homepage messaging.

Interviewer: We're going to look up residential life/
Have you all been to this page/

All Four: Yeah/

Paris: Yes/ like EVERYDAY/

Olivia: Everyday/

Olivia: I’m so excited/

Paris and Olivia: I love it!/ I’m so excited to move in on campus/

Olivia: [to Paris] What side of the building are you going to live on/

Paris: [Names her side of residential hall]

Interviewer: Okay!/ Tell me what you see on this page/
Can you talk out loud/ So/ tell me what you
see/ tell me what you think/ what do you see on this page/

Olivia: Why does it have to be [Campus C]/ Why can't I see [Campus A]/

Violet: Calm down/

Paris: Usually everything/ when you open something it usually goes to [Campus C]/

Olivia: Yeah/ I know/

Interviewer: Alright/ I heard you/

Olivia: I hate [Campus C]/

Interviewer: And you're students/ at the [Campus A]/

Olivia: Yes/

Paris: Us two/

Paris and Olivia immediately expressed their feelings of marginalization. Paris clarified to say this had been her experience whenever she had opened a WU webpage, an experience that Olivia confirmed as having been her experience as well. This sense of marginalization caused Olivia to express her strong dislike for Campus C as it seemed to always be the featured campus on the WU website. Olivia wanted to know why her campus was always second to the other campus. She wanted to know when her campus would be featured first. But Olivia’s concerns were larger than a concern about the photographic or textual depictions on this webpage. She was referencing a much larger issue about campus prominence, campus significance and campus pride and campus identity. She was
proud to be a student on Campus A but somehow her campus never rose to the level of being featured first, before Campus C. This issue continued to be found throughout the data.

**Level 2 webpage: Fun and exciting.** As the participants viewed the photographic elements that most strongly resonated with them were the fact that the students looked like they were having fun. They also recognized the diversity of the students in the photos and the various locations where the photographs had been taken.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paris:</td>
<td>And they all look so happy [she laughs]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer</td>
<td>Okay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia:</td>
<td>I think they're having a blast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer</td>
<td>So is that/ what impression do you get of college life/ of being a college student/ what do you get from that/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia:</td>
<td>Have fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paris:</td>
<td>Being with different people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer</td>
<td>Okay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violet:</td>
<td>Fun and exciting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer</td>
<td>Fun and exciting/ okay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violet:</td>
<td>Something you really want to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paris:</td>
<td>Boys in your dorm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer</td>
<td>Boys in the dorm [lots of laughter from the group]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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They shared that the photographs projected images of experiences they were looking forward to having and that living in the residential hall was something they really wanted to do. The images on the webpages portrayed experiences the participants were looking forward to experiencing on their own. Moreover the combination of the photographs and the text were more preferred than that of the first page. There were more photographs and the text was more descriptive of the experiences the participants were going to have while they were living in the residential halls on their respective campus locations. Paris knew that boys in her room was something that would never occur in her parents’ home and the fact that she dared to mention it in this environment represented her recognition in that there had been a change in her identity. She was going to be able to make whatever decisions she wanted to make about who could be in her room and when. Yet she used the word “boys” as though expressing a child-like excitement – as though a boy crossing the threshold into her room was crossing a much larger boundary in her life.

While the homepage had a single sentence that began with “Research shows”, the second-level webpage had a paragraph that used similar language and expanded on the text from the first webpage.

Olivia: And you have/ more info// Like/ it's not like the first where it just "research shows"/ No/ it's showing/ it's portraying/ how fun it can be/ and it's giving you info that you MIGHT need/ and that you're looking for//

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Olivia’s responses gave some insight into her desire for more information but Olivia was not alone in having a preference for this page with the expanded text and photo slideshow.

Interviewer: What are you laughing at?

Rose: Because I realize it's the same thing as the other one/

Interviewer: Oh/

Rose: It's like basically kind of same thing/ just said differently/

Paris: This should be the homepage/

Olivia: They're just trying to/ [pause] hook you in/ To reel you in/

The data reflects that the participants preferred this page because it provided a more detailed explanation of the text that was on the homepage. The participants preferred this page as it had more detailed text and additional photos. Olivia however felt that the page was trying to “hook you in/ to reel you in/”. It was as though recognized the business enterprise element that Amy had tried to minimize in her webpage text. Olivia sensed the sales undertone present in the text. Olivia’s statement was also reflective of business-like approach she had to her college – a very salient part of her identity.

The interviewer read the remainder of text under the photo slide show.

Rose: I like it that way better/ It's more like detailed/ and it tells you/ like/ the other one/
was just like the heart of/ you'll be in the heart/ this tells like you actually/ get access like/ what I meant by the heart/ like for me/ it's like saying the same thing// Like/ you'll get access to everything//

Interviewer: Okay// So it gives you a little more information which is what you like//

Rose: Yes//

Interviewer: So/ it gives you a better idea of what to expect when you get into college//

All Four: Yes// Yes// Yes// Yeah//

Interviewer: The other one/ you're looking for stuff and it's not giving you the information// Okay/ so you see you have/ well/ on the left side/ you have links on the left side and links on the right side/ more information in the middle/ you like this page a little more//

Olivia: Yes//

Rose: Freshman are loved more//

Interviewer: Huh/

Rose: Freshmen are loved more//

The text and photographs on this webpage had been the type of information Rose had been looking for on the WU website. Her response revealed her preference
for WU webpages that contained slightly more detailed information that the previous webpage. Moreover the information on the webpage provided specific information about the resources that would be at her disposal while living on campus. For many of the other WU webpages Rose had to fill in the blanks or work through an overwhelming amount of information. Rose did not have to fill in the blanks that were left for her to fill in from the UH homepage.

As first-generation college students Olivia, Paris, Rose, and Violet were not privileged to have had family members with previous knowledge about resources that were available to students who lived on campus. Rose was at a greater disadvantage as she indicated that her only resources had been her family and while they were supportive they could offer no insight to Rose. It was Rose who indicated that the detailed information made her feel that “freshmen are loved more”. Rose may not have been as literate as the other participants in the WU institutional Discourse but she could perceive from the text and the pictures that the freshman population was a priority group for the UH office. She and the other participants felt affirmed by the messages on this webpage.

**Level 3 webpage: “A contract”**. When participants were shown the UH page specifically addressing the incoming first year students, all four of the participants expressed similar sentiments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewer</th>
<th>This is the page//</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Olivia:</td>
<td>Boring//</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violet:</td>
<td>Boring//</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paris:</td>
<td>Boring//</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Violet: No pictures to look at//
Rose: I know what that is there//
Interviewer: What's your feeling inside/
Olivia: Mad//
Interviewer: Mad/
Olivia: Frustration//
Interviewer: Frustration/
Paris: Money//
Interviewer: Money/
Paris: Yup//
Interviewer: Okay// Does it seem like/ what do you think the point of all the writing this/
Olivia: To get us informed/
Interviewer: Okay// Do you think it's/ so if we look at/ what does it kind of look like/
Olivia: A lot of blah//
Rose: Like an essay//
Paris: Like a journal paper//
Interviewer: Like a journal paper/
Olivia: Like a lot of blah//
Interviewer: A lot of blah/ Okay// So/ what do you get a sense of from this/ did you get the same sense of fun/ or information/
Violet: No/

Interviewer: What is it/

Rose: It's / it’s/ it’s boring/ but I think it's like important/ it's important because I remember getting to this page it's like/ what’s gonna like/ it talks about your dorm and you're dining/ like that/

The change in the webpage content provoked a very different response from the participants than the second level UH webpage. While the photos and the text on the previous pages prompted the students to express feelings of excitement and feeling of care and concern, this page brought forward the feelings of concern they had previously expressed. Paris and Rose each responded in ways consistent with their previously expressed areas of identity challenge - for Paris it brought up issues of money and for Rose it was a matter of literacy as she thought the document reminded her of an essay.

Although Rose struggled to display her literacy in the WU Discourse, Rose recognized that the text represented important information that she needed to know. Rose later stated that the text on this webpage resembled a contract. Rose was not the only study participant to arrive at this same observation as one of the pilot study participants felt it resembled, “It’s more a formal kind of a legal thing”. Rose may have struggled with her literacy but Rose was highly perceptive and willing to express her fears or concerns where others might have remained
silent. The layout of the text represented another of the invisible element of the UH Discourse – the legal contract.

Olivia: I think/ requires us being responsible/
because/ we have to go through all of that/

Rose: I feel like it looked like a contract/

Interviewer: Okay// It looks like a contract// Okay/ very good// And so/ have you all completed the forms that it requires you to do/

Rose: Yes//

Interviewer: Have you all gone to this page/

Rose: I've gone to it and kind of like/ sometimes from my computer/ it doesn't want to open/

Interviewer: Okay// So/ do you feel this is serious business when you're looking at something like this or you're like/ "Okay// Well/ we have to do this"/

Paris: Yeah/

Olivia: Yeah/ very much/

Olivia deduced from the text on the webpage that UH was placing responsibility for their housing arrangements upon the students. Her use of the term “have to go through all of that” alluded to the many steps that had to be taken and the requirements that had to be met as a part of this process. Because Olivia had completing all of these steps by herself she all the more aware of the magnitude of
her responsibilities. She was financially responsible for all aspects of her college experience. What also resonated with Olivia was the use of the headings that were in red.

When taking notes for her classes Rose’s used various colors to represent different points of emphasis or details she needed to be aware of as she studied her notes.

Interviewer: You're forced to read it// Okay// So do you think/ does it give you a sense of excitement or do you get concerned/ do you think about money/

Olivia: That's an interesting word/ concern from this page//

Interviewer: What do you think of/

Olivia: I wouldn't use concern but/

Interviewer: Okay// Well/ what would you have used/

Olivia: No/ I was trying to think of a word but you said that and I think it's perfect because it talks about cost like just quickly skimming like/ because/ see/ I'm a color person/ I color code everything// So because the red section headings/ they’re red obviously// I'll skim I’ll read those first/ and then depending on
what I'm trying to find or what it tells me/ I will read that paragraph/

Interviewer: Okay/

Olivia: So/ you know/ it talks about housing and dining confirmation FEE// Automatically/ that's a cost// That's concern//

Interviewer: Okay/

Olivia: Confirm or modify your housing and dining options/ that SOUNDS important/ but not as important as the fee at least for a person that's looking at it/ you know/ for financial things//

The text headings in the red color drew Roses attention and prompted her to feel compelled to read the text. As a business minded individual and as the responsible party in this agreement, Olivia was keenly aware of the financial implications of her decisions. She understood and was able to use the social language of a financially minded individual and she acknowledged that she knew the difference between confirming her housing and dining fee and confirming her housing and dining options. Olivia knew there was a significant difference between the two types of confirmation. She also called attention to the use of the color red. In the figured world of finance the color red indicates deficit and in other figured worlds the color red indicates other things - stop, caution, hot, error or mistake. In all of those instances the color red is used to tell an individual to take corrective action,
be cautious or take heed – all of which Olivia was careful to do when reading the UH webpage. Although the color red in another figured world experience represented love, Olivia perceived that this was the definition being used by UH.

**College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.** At the beginning of the interview Maggie, as had been done with all of the other WU staff, was asked to share her role with the CLAS website. She set the theme and the context of the interview by providing a brief history of the CLAS website. As she told it the CLAS website had been under a complete redesign when she began her employment with the college. In the years since she began working with CLAS Maggie perceived that CLAS, or at least the core college, had been experiencing identity ambiguity. In turn the CLAS website and webpages reflected their state.

Maggie: And I came in the middle of that project// It had been contracted out to the Provosts Communication Group so those/ and UTO// So/ pretty much whole hog/ I mean, there was a committee here/ that would oversee/ the college CORE/ What was happening with THAT/ and it would sign off on/ redesigns of the academic units but they were largely/ you know/ responsible for the LOOK/ and for the advice they were giving units so those are kind of/ And there was an effort at that time/ Which required a larger
Her introduction was an effort to establish that she was not responsible for the current state of the website and had limited influence over a process that was already in place when she began. Maggie named the other WU groups who had
been “contracted” to oversee the project and the college committee that “would sign off on the redesigns”. When she was hired she was to take her directions regarding the website from the Dean’s office. She was charged with the design and the content of the core college pages as well as supporting the other college units who are in need of more advanced technological support. She was also working under “new branding standards” - having then established the two or three layers of oversight that impacted her ability to make changes to a website that was several years old and with many units that were no longer organized as they were depicted on the website. She had established from the outset of the interview that she was aware that some of would be discussed was beyond her area of influence and control.

When asked the purpose of the core college webpages, the CLAS website home page and larger topical landing pages – Undergraduate Studies, Graduate Studies, About Us - Amy summed up the state of the website while providing insight into the identity challenges CLAS had been experiencing.

Interviewer: So uh what/ as you're talking about the core/ and based on my outside looking in/ what's the purpose of the core pages/ So/ when you go to the first page and it's kind of the/ it is the landing page the first page// What's the purpose of that page/

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Maggie: So/ this is a difficult question/ because the purpose of the college is a difficult question/
I think//

Interviewer: Okay//

Maggie: When I first came to WU/ That's more than a couple of years ago/ there seemed to be a lot of talk of pushing things down to the college level// You know/ colleges were supposed to make a name for themselves/
And on their own// They were expected to do MORE recruiting themselves/ Than perhaps they had in the past// They were expected to do/ you know/ alumni relations// So/ ALL the functions that/ you know/ it's kind of where do these functions fall in the university and it seems like there was more effort to push that to the college level// So/ I think that was part of the impetus for that redesign at that that time// But it's a CHALLENGE/ for a college like the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences/ because/ almost nobody identifies themself
as a member if the College of Arts and Sciences [she laughs]/

So/ because it's so/ LARGE/ And it's/

Foundational/ And it's not niche/ And I'm not using niche in a pejorative sense but/

You know/ people see themselves as Business majors or History majors and English majors// So/ you know/ sometimes it can be a challenge affiliating with the SCHOOL/ Let alone with a college// Like for instance/ I don't know/ what college I graduated from// In my university/ I'm assuming it was something like the College of Liberal Arts and Science as it was [her major]/ And I/ in fact/ SPOKE at the graduation [laughter]/ So/ I presume that they had mentioned it there//

Interviewer: I understand/ I have a key tag that's what tells me what I graduated from//

Maggie: So/ you know/ it’s particularly/ I means it’s challenging even when we’re dealing with are the students who are currently IN the college/ So/ they will see that name
somewhere// For instance/ in My[WU]/
where they see the academic program/ the
link is NOT to their unit website/ it is to the
college website//

Interviewer:  Oh/ okay//
Maggie:  But we have students who don't know
they’ve graduated from the College of
Liberal Arts and Sciences [softened voice]//
So/ MOST of our alumni don't know they
graduated from the Liberal Arts and
Sciences/// And prospective students/
Don't know AND don't care// So [she laughs
as though this is simply their reality]//

Interviewer:  Right/ Right/ Right// You've got a
challenge//
Maggie:  Okay/ So/ the challenge that/ you know/ so
part of the/ you know/ the college as an
administrative structure/ what it should be
doing and what its role is/ I think it's a lot
grayer//

The CLAS’s identity was as questionable as its purpose. The college, by sheer
size and design, was unremarkable and questions surrounding the college’s
identity were further compounded by changes in the scope of institutional

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responsibility placed upon the all of the WU colleges by the WU administration. In addition to being the home to the largest number of undergraduate academic majors, the college was then expected conduct a range of additional activities from increased recruitment activities to alumni relations. Amy acknowledged that students affiliated with their majors and not with their colleges – she knew this from her experience as an employee of the college and from her personal experience.

Amy recalled a personal experience when she, as an undergraduate student, had risen to the point of being a featured speaker at her own graduation did not know what college she had graduated from. Amy believed that if, having played a key role at her own graduation and she did not know the college that was granting her degree then how and why would a student who was a member of the largest college at WU know their college affiliation. Amy understood that students did not identify as members of CLAS. The students’ ability to construct a college student identity was further challenged because of the way the WU website situated students within the WU Internet portal – MyWU. The students of each college were required to choose a major and not a college therefore causing the students to identify with their major and not their college. This linking and bridging of students to their majors overarched the students’ connection with the college that was the home to the students selected major. The manner in which WU categorized the students by major versus college challenged the student’s ability to identify with and feel a sense of belonging to the student’s college home. Due to the fact that the university would link the students to their college
and not to their major the university exacerbated the disconnection between the 
students and their college home. Amy attributed this practice and the fact that 
CLAS served as an administrative functional area further clouded CLAS’s ability 
to clarify the colleges role for incoming first year students, currently enrolled 
students, CLAS alumni, and within the WU Discourse.

The identity challenge CLAS was experiencing was further perpetuated by 
the overarching WU website design – a fact that Amy was well aware had 
changed the number of visits they were getting on their CLAS website.

Maggie: Okay// So/ the challenge that/ you know/ so 
part of the/ you now/ the college as an 
administrative structure/ what it should be 
doing and what its role is/ I think it's a lot 
grayer//

Interviewer: Amorphous/

Maggie: Yeah/ and because currently/ right now/ I 
see actually/ A movement/ on the top levels 
of [WU]/ To KEEP people up there/ And 
NOT actually pushing them out of the 
college//

Interviewer: Okay//

Maggie: So for instance/ This has been a subject of 
discussion/ [turns to type on her 
computer]
This LINK/ Colleges and Schools/ has just changed quite dramatically//

Interviewer: Yes/ it has// Yes/ it has//

Maggie: So/ that we are no longer here//

Interviewer: Right//

Maggie: And/ we got a LOT of our traffic/ from this page/ and that traffic has/ decreased/ Significantly// And you know/ I/

Interviewer: When I did my focus group/ the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences was listed there// And/ so/ I went there and clicked//

Maggie: Oh/ NO//

Interviewer: Well/ it seems/ when you're not familiar with the colleges and schools like at the top/ but their incoming freshmen in the summer program and they've just never used that/ they didn't even realize their mistake/ And/ so/ when you go in/ and now the way that it's set up/ you have to click on Arts and Sciences and then know that you're going to College of Liberal Arts and Sciences//

Maggie: Yeah/ if you WANT to// I mean/ It doesn't even tell you/ WHY are there THREE/ And
what's the difference between the two// I mean really what they/ And I understand/ I think I do/ the thinking behind it is that/ what they want is people to/ why SHOULD they care about whether psychology is in/ The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences// But then/ here comes the issue of/ okay/ Why do we HAVE a website/ And this is again/ this is the core site// So/ you know/ we're setup differently/ than I think MOST of all the other colleges/ in that we DO have a COLLEGE site/ and/ our academic units have SEPARATE and DISTINCT/ sites// Like you are going to another visit/ you know URL/ But you know/ So I think of [the business college]/ which I think it's next to us in size// They're all under the umbrella of one large site//

Again, Maggie attributed some of the identity confusion students had experienced as being a direct result of the organization WU website. Moreover the identity confusion was not restricted to the students who were enrolled in majors that were in CLAS but included all students enrolled in all of the colleges that had been categorized by a common theme but those common themes were not explained to
the reader. This was another instance where the identity challenge experienced by CLAS and their affiliated students were the product of the way WU situated the colleges. Maggie knew that those outside of the WU Discourse, particularly incoming first year students, would be challenged to understand why there were three college listed under the single heading of *Arts and Sciences*. In addition to that, the reader was required to intuitively know to select the *Arts and Sciences* link that would then expand to show the three colleges identified under the common heading. There were no directions on the webpage that assisted the reader in making any further distinctions between the three colleges or what makes them different from one another. This data revealed that the Discourse on the WU webpage required some insider knowledge when visiting the *Colleges and Schools* webpage as there is no information to tell the reader what they were to do once the arrived at the page.

Additionally, CLAS had a *college website* that hosted webpages for the *core college*, the administrative arm of the college, as well as websites and webpages for all of the other academic units. Maggie drew a distinction in classifying that the academic units were “SEPARATE and DISTINCT/ sites// Like you are going to another visit/ you know URL/”. Her distinction was stated as if the visitor or reader, when beginning their visit on the CLAS homepage, had begun their experience in one world and yet when the visitor or reader selected to visit the *separate and distinct* websites for the academic units they were entering another world – a world that had no connection to CLAS. Maggie recognized that the business college, that was of equivalent size, had somehow managed to do
what CLAS had not been able to do – organizationally clarify a core identity under which all of the CLAS academic would fall and that this clarified core identity would then be reflected through a single well organized website.

The homepage for the CLAS website was a part of the website redesign that had Maggie had previously mentioned. The homepage had a series of photos that were displayed like a slide show. The photos were of various scenes – a woman hiking on a path lined with large tropical plants that leads into a forest of mature trees; a group of eight young children of different racial ethnicities lying head to head in a circle in T-shirts in the order of colors of the rainbow – red, orange, yellow, green (mint and lime), blue, indigo and violet; a seated aged white male affectionately kissing the arm of a white infant that is resting in a baby bouncer; a scene from space showing large gas clouds, etc. A quotation that represented each of the scenes in the photos overlaid each photo. Underneath the large area where the slide show was displayed was horizontal bar with text that had five words or short phrases underneath. As each of the photos was displayed the corresponding word that was in the horizontal text box would display changing colors from a black color to a gold color. In the center of the page, between the menu bar that ran the length of the left side of the webpage and a small box that listed news, events and announcements was a caption that described the themes displayed thought the photos and captions on the webpage.

Interviewer: So/ then/ the page that's currently in place/ with the pictures of the clouds and the picture of the older hand holding the infant
hand/ that was a part of a previous campaign to kind of show what the college/

Maggie: Right/ So/ we had a strategic plan [tone in voice sounded like “yeah your going to ask and yes it is unclear and yes I know so go ahead and ask so I can explain”] / those were five themes/ [tone in voice sounded like/ ok I know it doesn’t make any sense to me either]/

Interviewer: Now/ who would know that internally/ So/ if the reader is looking/ how would they know that/[voice trails off due to her non-verbal response] that's what it was/

Maggie: No kidding [whispered]/ Cause you can't even click on/ this [softly stated]/ Like REALLY [louder yet]/ you know you think/ Oh/ I'll CLICK on this/ and they'll tell me more about sustainability//

Interviewer: And when we were going through with the students and I was asking them/ show me what you see/ and they were looking at the picture/ so I was asking them/ Tell me what you think that is in this/ and maybe that's
what they do in the college and trying to get a sense from them how they imagine that/

That's why I'm asking the question/ it only goes with something else within the college/ okay/

Maggie: Ooh// Yeah// Embarrassing [whispered]//

Interviewer: No// It's just things that/ you know/ we see//

So/ you have multiple audiences and multiple purposes that are used and you track utilization of the webpage// So you can see the traffic that even you try to make some determination about whose visiting and why/ what pages are going forward// So then/ if I can ask who picked the photos that are there/

Maggie: Yeah/ uh huh/ we have a graphic designer//

Interviewer: Okay//

Maggie: But we have a communication team [pause afterward that bordered on silence]//

Interviewer: Okay// And so/ they work together/

Maggie: Mas o menos [in Spanish, at a whisper]//

Interviewer: Come si com sa/ asi asi/ so so/ a veces/ at times [laughter]//
Maggie: You know/ website management by committee is not ideal/ and you know and this is part of the reason why we've ended up/ with something that's/ Probably not functional// You know/ this was the five themes/ so this was everything that people could agree on/ and then you had to agree on the images// And then they were suppose to And this was supposed to happen at the Deans level [softened voice]/ um/ um/ come up with something/ that could sit BEHIND/ each slide/ but that/ never really/ never really gelled// Um [pause]/ So/ this is what very thin/ as you're saying like/ you know it’s/ I think/ you know people are hopeful that it’s saying something about/ the bigness of the work that we DO/ and/ you know/ these are all IMPORTANT to us/ But yeah/ it doesn't help them/ take the next step with that information//

Maggie established the theme of her ensuing speech act stating “Right/ so we” as thought she understood she was going to have to set the record straight on what this page, the CLAS homepage represented. Maggie use of the word “we” to
show her membership as a part of CLAS and that CLAS as a college had a strategic plan and that these were the five themes that were the drivers behind the strategic plan. Maggie however distanced herself from the themes by using “Those” as thought the themes were selected by other individuals in the college. Maggie’s separation continued to be evident when she acknowledged the challenge others outside of the college would experience when encountering the homepage. The themes were internal to CLAS and without explanation or substance to assist an external reader to understand and personally connect to the themes. Maggie, as the person in charge of the CLAS homepage, was embarrassed by the challenge the students in the focus group experienced when trying to make sense of the CLAS homepage however Maggie was not responsible for the selection of the photos or the theme. There had been a committee that, after coming consensus, selected the photos and the themes. As the person who was hired to oversee the CLAS website and the webpage in question, Maggie did not agree with the process of “website management by committee”. Moreover her use of the pronoun “we’ve” represented that as a result of the decisions that they had done she and her staff now had to work with a webpage that was not “functional”. The themes were the result of what could be agreed upon by the committee and what the committee felt represented the scope of the work as perceived by a committee without consideration for those who might be external or outsiders to the college or institutional Discourse. Furthermore the homepage redesign project was incomplete as the leadership of the college had not completed other key elements that were necessary to make
this webpage clearer to the reader. Ultimately, in Maggie’s professional experience, the final product of the committee was for benefit of the committee and not for the benefit of the reader. The Discourse of the homepage kept the person who was external to CLAS as an external reader and ultimately the homepage did not allow the external reader to progress from an external reader to an insider or a person who had made a personal connection to CLAS through the CLAS homepage – as Maggie stated “take the next step with that information”. 

Maggie had been working with her staff and with CLAS to redesign the CLAS website that would address the specific needs of incoming first year students. Maggie understood that there was an “angle” or perspective that was unique to the perspective student, the first year student, a non-committed student, and a student who was already a CLAS student. Moreover, Maggie understood that first year students were not familiar with the Discourse of WU and that it was important that this new webpage incorporate lexical word and phrases from Discourses that the first year student were already literate with, e.g. using the word department instead of program. This step would be critical to the first year students being able to connect with their academic program. Maggie envisioned that creating these connections, between the first year students and their academic program, would also feature the faculty, students and events on the CLAS as well as using other features of the MyWU web portal.

Interviewer: Right/ because one of the questions that I ask is when/ so if a student comes to the
Interviewer: And if so/ what is it that you want them to do when they come to the page/

Maggie: A perspective student/

Interviewer: An incoming freshmen/ what would you want them to do or a perspective student/

Maggie: Well so we are working on a perspective student/ ANGLE/ um/ both with a redesign of the SITE/ and I think/ and the focus of the landing page/ will be more about the units/ because REALLY what we want/ perspective students to do/ and what it seems that THEY want to do/ is connect pretty quickly to the program that they're interested in/ and I wouldn't actually use the word programs/ I knew that's what's used now/ a program/ because I don't think it particularly suits it// But/ you know/ they still/ well you’ll know this better than I/ I think that/ that there's a department that/ you know/ there's an English DEPARTMENT/
there’s a Physics DEPARTMENT/ it’s still words that kind of sense to students/ even though that's not the way we’re organized that much/ anymore [she laughed]/ So/ you know/ and my sense is that they want to/ kind of see the/ kind of faculty that are there/ and the kind of STUDENTS that are/ in that/ and the kind of things going on// So/ getting them/ TO the unit sites/ and really/ showcasing our UNITS more/ and BETTER/ is something that I think/ that we want the perspective students to do/ is to take the next step and go down further// So/ you know/ I believe there would be some value that we've added/ at that step where they/ move/ to units/ but I would be fine if they skipped up all together and got to our unit// For the/ Incoming FRESHMEN/ so the people who have already made the commitment/ I'd be surprised/ that they ended UP in our site/ and I would be/ you know what [she begins to laugh]/ they don't have [inaudible]//
Interviewer: And that's part of my question is that there's a very different approach in getting the student to buy in and to see themselves here/ And then once they've gotten here/ so all of the effort that's put in/ in the recruitment piece/ here's where you belong and being a part of it and to explore your future/ But once they've made the commitment to come in and they are now a member of the community and they go to the webpage/ it's what happens in this web environment that continues to kind of connect/ can they connect/

Maggie: Well/ so we/ treat/ this a little different/ So I would say the website/ you know one thing you're concerned about with the website and perspective students is this little [inaudible] of/ I don’t can’t remember what the call them but/ you know hidden/ seekers/ You know/ people come from/ and/ you don’t know who they are/ are they the perspective students/ maybe/ maybe NOT/ So you wanna/ you know/ make with the website/
completely OPEN/ designed for that in
mind// With INCOMING students/ what we
have been doing/ is using web PAGES/
we're really using/ the way that we use the
web/ is to go through the college box of
My[WU]// So/ we have a channel/ that's set
up/ for INCOMING and for first year/ first
year/ first-year freshmen// And so/ we use
the COLLEGE box/ to DIRECT them to/
POSSIBLY specific messages/ on our
website/ or/ other pages/ at [WU]/ that we
think are relevant and important// But/ we
DON'T/ use our website/ so much as a
WHOLE// like we don't anticipate/ that/
like/ a perspective student might come and
browse and explore// We don’t antici[pate]/
we think that once they've made that
commitment/ they're more/ they’re gonna to
be more/ transactional use of the web/ so
that's why we like the My[WU] space/
because IT IS a transaction space BUT it
allows us to put messages in there OF the
kind that you're talking about// Helping
them to imagine what life would be like when they’re here hearing about events that we will be specifically relevant to them making suggestions like this is where we advertise the CLAS hall And we have a SET of pages that we’re currently kind of still under design that CONNECT them to messages they may have HEARD when they were being recruited but provide more depth like ahumm [begins softened tone in voice] information about study abroad about how research might fit into their into their their CLAS hall and how to make choices to live [ends speaking in a softened voice] So that is that’s a different yeah that’s a different route so those are and those are HERE But again I can’t just imagine a A CURRENT student like So if you know if you go to

Maggie called attention to the two types of information disseminated through the WU website and webpages as well as the CLAS website and webpages – knowledge for action and knowledge to inform provided different types of information to the students. By developing the MyWU Internet-based web-portal,
WU created a conduit for the dissemination of *knowledge for action* that fostered the students “transactional use of the web”. Within the MyWU web portal was an area, called the “college box”, for the dissemination of targeted *knowledge to inform* that could be tailored to each student given their college affiliation, e.g. CLAS students could receive CLAS specific information. This *knowledge to inform* would help provide the students with information that would help them in their situated identity development. Together both *knowledge to inform* and *knowledge for action* helped students construct their situated identity as a college student. The more specific the information they received about their particular college the better informed and prepared the students were in understanding and being prepared to carry out the tasks and responsibilities associated with their college student identity.

The website was used as a resource for multiple audiences – from advisors seeking information to advise their students, to currently enrolled students who were looking for information about a required course sequence required by all CLAS student, to prospective students and incoming first year students. Ultimately, Maggie was well aware of that the information for first year students was important and should have a place of prominence on the website.

Maggie: But um/ so/ I think that’s more// So both both of those things/ Science and Society/ list of classes/ and who you know/ list of advisors/ are in my mind kind of internal business functions// And you know I’m/ Not
great you know/ so/ it's not great that [she
laughs]/ the website/ delivers THAT// So/
you know/ if you're thinking of from a use
perspective/ Yeah those are important pages/
they should be right up front// But actually/

Interviewer: If your intention is to have students or others
using it and you're not finding that they're
using it/ the people that work for the
organization that are using it//

Maggie: Yeah/ like the/ probably there is a better way
to deliver that//

Interviewer: But the problem is/ instead of having a
phone list/ they use the website//

Maggie: Right// Yes// They use the website/ because
it’s all the listed advisors there/ it’s up to
good/ blah blah blah blah blah// But the
probably that/ you know/ could be

somewhere else/ like I’m not going to put
that on the front page just cause it’s the most
visited [she begins to laugh]// You know/
the same with the Science and Society/ its
current students// But that/ you know/ the
website has to do with/ helping them
understand the COLLEGE/ and helping them to understand/ how the UNITS of the college are/ connected/ TO the college and to each OTHER/ and/ you know/ If they/ need a class for requirement they should be able to get that easier than trying to browse through our webpage [voice started softer and rose in volume to a laugh]//

Interviewer: Right/ right/ right//
Maggie: Cause our webpage isn't setup for that/ I’m sorry just let me take this off the MENU [realized there was some information on the page that wasn’t supposed to be there]//

Maggie admitted that the CLAS website was setup to support those engaged in carrying out internal business functions. The CLAS website was not setup to facilitate students getting information about classes or the more complex issues regarding the identity and role of CLAS within the greater WU organization, the relationship between CLAS and the units that were a part of the CLAS, and the relationship between the various units within CLAS. As Maggie was making her insightful admission there was a moment of irony as Maggie realized someone else had placed incorrect information to the website menu. Throughout the interview Maggie voiced her plans redesign the CLAS website, make right the work of others who had good intentions but created a website that did not serve
the needs anyone but those who were internal to CLAS. Within seconds and with
the click of her mouse, Maggie had identified and made right the error of another
or others.

*Ensuring updated, accurate information: “This isn’t in her bailiwick at all”.* In her capacity as the staff member responsible for the College of as Maggie
also recognized the importance of ensuring that the webpages for the schools and
departments in her college had the most current and accurate information
available; however, there were challenges to ensuring that practice.

Maggie: There's a couple of units/ that/ are able to
kind of/ be more thoughtful about their
websites/ but um/ So/ you know/ if you just
think the/ No staff/ NO// So SOLS/ it’s a big school/

Interviewer: Okay/

Maggie: They have a lot of web people/ and they
have a pretty sophisticated site [she begins
typing to bring up their site]// And they have
a BIGGER site than a [she begins to laugh]/

Interviewer: Oh/ wow/

Maggie: Yeah/

Interviewer: Yeah/

Maggie: They have a bigger site than US// They have
way more pages/
Interviewer: Really/

Maggie: Well they have more staff/ Than the Dean’s office does/

Interviewer: Ah/ wow/

Maggie: Um, you know/ they have/ how many faculty do they have/ we want faculty/ [she is typing and scrolling on the SOLS website]/ I mean they're almost the size of a [she lets out a laugh]/ of a small university/

Interviewer: Wow/

Maggie: This is just the faculty/ So they have a lot more/ so they actually have a/ a web group/

Interviewer: And so do you help in all or their web group does all of the support for them/

Maggie: They do/ they do mostly/ Yeah/ they all/ we ARE helping them move to Drupal/ back-end technology/ because they didn't have deep experience in that/

Interviewer: Okay/ So the people within the department could control/ could/ do have input on what they put/

Maggie: Yeah/ Drupals a way of managing the content so that you can/ distribute/ the the
responsibilities for keeping content up to date/ Um but um Politics and Global Studies/ very big school/ No one/ Literally no one/ They don't have someone to keep the CONTENT up to date/ They have an administrative assistant [almost a whispered voice]/

Interviewer: Really/

Maggie: Yeah/ who can/ and nothing against her she’s very capable/ but/ you know/ this isn't in her bailiwick [she lets out a little laugh]/ at all/ 

Interviewer: You're right/ right/

Maggie: Like/ you know/ she can maybe change a PHONE NUMBER or post a PDF but/ 

Interviewer: Yeah/

Maggie: Yeah/ Psychology [never says a word but implies they don’t have someone either to oversee their website]/ 

Interviewer: Really/

Maggie: Yeah/

Interviewer: Wow/ that's an/ I mean/ it's something when you realized the additional responsibilities/
because with the advent of the web/ there's
like anything else you've got/ You have to
maintain it/ You have to have it/

Maggie: Yeah/ And then you have a director or chair
that has to make decision/ Well/ I’ve got to
take a staff/ you know/ I have this
[inaudible]/ do I get another adviser or do I
get [Inaudible]//

Interviewer: Yeah/

Maggie: Now/ recently some of the units have kind
of I think had an OPPORTUNITY/

Interviewer: Okay/

Maggie: A hiring opportunity/ realized how
important this is/ so the School of Social
Transformation/

Interviewer: Okay/

Maggie: And it's hard/ and it has been in the past/
hopefully it's getting a little bit a/ it’s
difficult to hire one person/

Interviewer: Okay/ Wow/

Maggie: Cause you know/ you have all that stuff that
you’re talking about/ kind of understanding
students and thinking about their needs//
Maggie: And how they might process information/ and how you can communicate with them/
Well then it has like technical stuff// You know/ so it's not like you hire one person and can/you know//

Maggie: But that's one reason we brought Drupal in// It hopefully takes much of the tech and that's what we're using in our UTO contract/

Maggie: Take a lot of the technical stuff off// So people are now maybe/ better hire like a School of International Languages and Culture which is also a very large/ but they hired one person who's a web communication specialist//

Maggie established the topic of this interaction at the very beginning of her opening statement. She was going to speak about the couple of units that had the ability to be more thoughtful in their website and webpage development. She established a binary between the couple of units who had the ability to be thoughtful about their webpages versus the many units who did not have the ability to be thoughtful about their webpages. Maggie clarified that the units who
had the ability to be more thoughtful were the larger units that had more staff as
compared to the smaller unit that had an administrative assistant “keep the content
up to date”. Maggie was very conscious in admitting this unfortunate and
seemingly embarrassing truth, so much so that she lowered her voice to an almost
whisper as she made this revelation. Maggie was however careful to separate the
“capabilities” of the administrative assistant from what was not within the
administrative assistants control. Maggie recognized that the administrative
assistant was capable of performing very basic tasks in maintaining the
department’s website, however these basic tasks were not in her “bailiwick” - her
field of specialized training or area of expertise. Maggie’s “bailiwick” was
website and webpage management and development. Maggie, using the social
language of those who worked in the field of website development, made further
distinction between the different varied level proficiency in carrying out the
responsibilities associated with website and webpage development and
maintenance. Maggie and her staff members were the most proficient, as they
were the staff were helping the web group from another group within the college
with their “back-end technology because they didn’t have deep experience in
that”. It was also Maggie and her team who helped to lead a larger college-wide
initiative to implement the use of Drupal, the new software application, which
helped the smaller units without a dedicated staff member or web group keep their
website content up to date. Maggie drew a significant distinction, another binary,
between “you have all that stuff that you’re talking about/ kind of understanding
students and thinking about their needs/…And how they might process
information/ and how you can communicate with them/?” and “Well then it has like technical stuff/”

It was as though there was a line drawn between the functional areas and the concerns of one area never crossed into the realm or practice of the other and vice versa and just recently a new kind of practitioner had evolved, one who brought together both functional areas so that all of the considerations being discussed were within the professional training and experience of one person.

**Making the connection for students.** Maggie, like Ed and Di and Amy, hoped that the CLAS website would help students form, as early as was possible, connections to their academic programs and to other groups or opportunities available to them.

**Interviewer:** Okay/ okay// If a freshmen would want to go to the college core pages/ what would you want them to walk away/ from the pages feeling/ if you could create a [inaudible]/

**Maggie:** I mean/ I think the best that I would hope for is that they would connect with one of the college level programs/ that was relevant to them// Um So they’d take a step in being engaged with the university/ you know/ experience/ cause all of the college level programs/ the priority ones are about/ you know/ getting and connecting them early
enough with something/ that is meaningful to them/ club or/ so it doesn't even to be a college level one/ but the pages were able to/ that they saw something in there that was meaningful for them/ and that they went away and did something/ whether it's scholarship or talk to an advisor or join/ you know/ find a club that they liked/ or doing/ you know/ whatever/ peer program or something/ or I guess it's too late if they find a CLAS hall/ or/

Interviewer: Right/ and if they are going to the core page as you're envisioning/ you know/ that new page would be//= What would be the one thing that you want/ would want to see included in the new/

Maggie: Well/ for FIRST year / again/ I don't anticipate the landing page/ the main landing page as being focused on them/

Interviewer: That's fine//=

Maggie: And that I would/ and so/ I would hope that they will be delivered/ more DIRECTLY/ to/ the page that they were interested in/ To
Amy knew that the focus of the redesigned CLAS homepage would not be directed toward incoming first year students. She also knew that the core college webpages might continue to serve as a conduit to other link to other CLAS or WU webpages. She was however committed to designing a website that was simple to use regardless of the way in which the students found themselves on the CLAS website.

Maggie: So one is/ Again/ The different structure that we have/ Everyone recognizes that the unit pages are/ very important/ we put a lot of resources/ at the college level/ behind the unit pages/ Um you know/ theoretically they should/ um resource that aspect of their respective unit operations themselves/ and they get money/ when they get very big/ they get A LOT OF money/ But because of/ the college/ for COLLEGE level initiatives/ recruitment/ alumni/ we know that that’s so important/ the college/ provides the resources/ or A LOT of resources to help them take care of the website/ But again the
Maggie soon after revealed that in fact the vision of CLAS was ambiguous within the greater WU community.

Maggie: You know/ and because there is this/ and I think its GENUINE/ ambiguity/ throughout the WHOLE university/ about WHAT the college is/ as far as vision/.

Maggie’s used the word “genuine” as thought there were other kinds of ways people could raise a question, i.e. a disingenuous, insincere, hypocritical. Her use represented a questioning by others that was sincere, honest, forthright, without any intended malice, or heartfelt. Maggie understood that others within the WU community were looking for greater clarity as to the way in which CLAS perceived its own identity and role within the university Discourse. She was representing the confusion others were experiencing. She was not speaking of her volition and her statement represented the authentic thoughts and feelings of those across the whole of the university. It was a question she could not answer and one she may have also been trying to answer for herself as well.
Maggie also used the word “vision” but in a larger context. Her use of the word “vision” represented the CLAS identity and role. Because CLAS was the largest college and had the largest number of undergraduate students, whatever the outcome of the ramifications had the potential to impact the greater WU Discourse. Size was not to their advantage as their size was a contributor to their identity ambiguity.

Maggie: But/ Where CLAS is kind of invisible/ because we're on the MAIN campus and we're the MAIN college//

Interviewer: Do you think/ Okay//

Maggie: We kinda ARE [WU]// So/

Interviewer: So/ because I/

Maggie: People don’t come/ you know/ No one comes/ People go to [College of Business]/ People go to [College of Engineering]/ Nobody comes to CLAS//

Interviewer: Huh/ that's interesting//

Maggie: People/ You know/ “I’m signing up for/ psychology” and [inaudible]//

Interviewer: They sign up for the major

Maggie: Yeah/ absolutely//

Interviewer: Not realizing that the major is a part of CLAS//
Amy’s statement was representative of CLAS’s core identity challenge. People could draw a correlation between academic majors and correlated career fields but the CLAS was neither a major nor a career field. Meanwhile the majority of students were taking courses that were provided through CLAS yet they had no idea this was the case. Amy knew the website could be a useful tool and resource as she worked to address this issue.

Maggie: So/ we're going/ I think more/ with a recruitment message/ On the landing page//
Um/ and yeah I haven’t like/kind of/ got/ buy in from EVERYBODY/ But what I’d WANT is/ for WHOEVER goes on that page/ to understand our colleges role in university/

Interviewer: Okay/

Maggie: And the central role that it plays/ and the diversity of offerings/ um and the excellence of particular units/ So/ you know/ we’re a VERY LARGE college// And we have some of the MOST exemplary programs//

Amy was going to rally to get the support of college to buy in to her new vision. She also recognized that her vision for the website required a overcoming a much larger challenge which was not her personal or singular challenge to overcome. The leadership of the CLAS needed to better define the colleges core identity and
role, in all regards, before she could clarify this information for the CLAS website visitor. Once the leadership within CLAS established a more distinct core identity, Amy could do what been waiting to do and what she had professionally trained to do - highlight the many great things about the CLAS.

Multimodal semiotic meaning: College of Liberal Arts and Science website.

Interviewer: So/ when you selected those photos/ kind of what/ do you know what you're thinking was/ is there/ was there some/

Maggie: They needed to be horizontal/

Interviewer: Okay/ they needed to be horizontal/

Maggie: And they needed to meaningful in that little space [she let out the slightest laugh]/ Which/ Alright/ well [says this entire utterance as though well you wanted the truth so that’s what it is]/

Interviewer: That's okay/ I mean again/

Maggie: Um/ Um/ [three seconds pass since well statement as she looked at the other photos to respond]/ So/ I don't know if these ones were/ As [inaudible - slick] as they need to be/

Later in the interview Maggie revealed more about her photo selection process.
Interviewer: And on some pages you will see very large pictures/ a very short message// And then on other pages you will see a very small picture and are very text heavy// So what are they doing in combination/ and so/ when you're looking at the picture/ you know/ again/ when I'm looking at it now from outside without talking to anybody and I'm going/ Oh okay well/ they picked the pictures/ because they want/ to show/ a diversity of students//

Maggie: That’s a generous measure// And you’re like ok good/ WHY do you choose/

Interviewer: But sometimes/ its function/ that's/ you know/ you're trying to do both// So you're trying to/ match the picture/ something that will be relevant to the page/ but you've got a/ kind a of a/ construct// You've got some things that are/

Maggie: Right//

Interviewer: Parameters that you have to FIT in STRUCTURALLY within the design of the page// So as you're looking/ in the FUTURE
and saying that will you have any influence over the DESIGN of the page/ You know/ how much space you might have for a picture versus text/ or is that something that's driven through the university/ Maggie: Well/ I mean that/ you know/ the university/ the new brand/ the new Now brand is/ Interviewer: Right/ Maggie: I think more/ image intensive/ right// Interviewer: Okay// Maggie: Recognizing the POWER of images/ and uh/ so everyone is moving that way/ getting a bigger VISUAL element/ um because I think you know there’s/ probably a fairly unsophisticated awareness that you knew you have to brand yourself as a unit/ like you have to COMMUNICATE something/ and/ [rethinks her direction and says] BETTER// Interviewer: Okay// Yeah// Maggie: The intent/ you can say/ we are great/ But/ somehow there's a belief that pictures [inaudible]/ which I think is true/
Interviewer: Yeah/
Maggie: DISPLAY greatness/ rather than description
greatness/ can do/
Interviewer: Well/ and/
Maggie: And so EVERYONE yeah is / a LARGE
visual element on the FIRST page again
where/ we're addressing the WIDEST scope
of audience/ we really want to/ make an
impression about who we are/ the college/
and the units/
Interviewer: The college is/
Maggie: Pushing people to those types of designs/
Interviewer: Okay/
Maggie: Less TEXT on the front page/ They've NOT
made a commitment to you on the front
page/ so why would they READ anything
you have to SAY/ Whereas if they SEE
something that they're interested in/ they
become a little more engaged/ then you can/
RISK I guess/ integrating more TEXT/
because um/ they're looking for/ they’re
looking for more/ They want more/

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Maggie’s use of photographs and the layout of the website were functional. More than that, because the layout and thematic approach to the website were inherited, Maggie adopted practices that fit within the framework that was already in place – literally and figuratively. Maggie stated that I had provided “a generous measure” when I asked about her thoughts behind the photos she had selected for the core webpages. Her purpose for selecting the photos was located the expression of her own approach to the website – “They needed to be horizontal.” When she heard her words restated to her, she added “And they needed to meaningful in that little space.”

The layout of the website was, through the most direct route possible, get the students to the information they were seeking. Maggie had previously stated, “Um/ So/ if you take the traffic alone/ I would say the purpose of our site is a pass through the site.” To say for certain that this was a product of Maggie’s own way of thinking prior to her employment with CLAS or if this was the result of her work environment is not possible. What is possible to say about the data is that both the selection of the photos and the layout of the webpage were about serving a functional purpose. There was not an intention or purpose behind the photos or the layout, rather they were like mile markers showing the visitor where they were
and the upcoming exits so that the visitor could prepare to exit when the time came. But then Maggie voiced that she valued the power of the picture and that a picture had the capacity to draw the attention of a non-committed viewer. The layout on the home page was based on an old theme that Maggie knew did not have the effect it was intended to have, yet within the organizational structure her expertise was or had been marginalized to that of a functional role. It was her hope to be able to reconceptualize the webpage under the new WU branding effort, because this university-wide effort was more in alignment with her philosophy, practice, and professional expertise.

From Maggie’s perspective, students were only interested in finding out what they need to know about a specific item or the students are extremely focused on finding what they are looking for. Maggie’s utterance expressed an striking piece of data - the reader has to make a commitment to the webpage before they will read further on “your” front page but that a photo had the ability to engage the visitor in ways that text alone could not. Rose proved that not all students strictly visiting the web for specific information, they are using the web to help construct their identities.

**Students’ perceptions of the College of Liberal Arts and Science website messaging.** When the participant viewed the CLAS homepage it was the slideshow of the various pictures that first caught their attention.

**Interviewer:** So tell me/ what do you see on this one that's like what is there/ what's here/

**Violet:** Colors//

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Rose: Arts/

Paris: It's like really entertaining/

Rose: I see those pictures are like flyers they’d give out/

Interviewer: Okay/ Like flyers/

Rose: They're like/ how do you call it/

Violet: Brochures/

Rose: Like um they’d have in school like the little cards/ that say things/

Interviewer: Okay/ And so/ what do you think the sayings are about/

Paris: They're quotes/

Interviewer: Quotes/ And they're on each of the slides/

Okay/

Olivia: I think/ the quotes are kind of trying to get you engaged/ for me/

The photographs did not draw any correlation to the college student experience. Rather the photographs prompted the participants to equate them to flyers or brochures or postcards. They understood the sayings that were displayed over the pictures were quotes but when pressed to give a response Olivia was the only participant to attempt to respond. Olivia’s comments were in reference to the quotations and she was only speaking on her own behalf. She perceived that the quotes were to get you engaged. There was no reference in any of the
participants’ responses that the page in any way reflected anything specific about what the College was trying to tell them about the college experience or what it meant to be a college student. Other than to say that there was a lot of information on the homepage, even with the large photographic slideshow, the participants had little other feedback regarding the layout of the homepage.

**Level 2 webpage: “Straight to the links”**. In contrast to the homepage layout, it was the layout of this second level webpage that drew the greatest attention from the participants.

Interviewer: Okay/ So when I click on the first link/ which is undergraduate studies/ and there you get to see/ this page differs from the previous page/ how/

Rose: Because it's bullet pointed/

Interviewer: Ah/ bullet pointed// Does that matter for you/

Rose: I like it better like that/

Interviewer: Okay/ because it goes straight to links/

All Four: Yes/

Paris: It goes straight to the point/

Interviewer: Why do you like it best/ because it goes straight to the point/

Rose: Yeah/
Interviewer: Okay! And so you'll see what's at the top/

Or what you see on that page/ kind of talk

me through it// So/ you're looking at the

page and what is the first thing you look at/

Rose: Undergraduate/

Paris: Summer session registration is now open/

Interviewer: The thing in the middle of the page// Okay/

that's good/ that's good/

Olivia: Really/ I kind of thought more the links/

Interviewer: Okay// So the links and that do you ever

look at the pictures/ Do the pictures matter/

Rose: I saw the pictures/

Violet: I did// But I didn't look at them that long/

Olivia: Yeah// I think it's just what I would like/

Violet: I went straight to the information because it

was organized and straight to the point/

This webpage featured a rectangular box placed horizontally across the top of the

page, in the center of the page were five categorical headers and corresponding

links underneath the headings, a menu of links along the left side of the webpage.

Rose was the first to comment as again this was the type of webpage she preferred

to use. Rose had complained of having too many webpages with an overwhelming

amount of information, this webpage was the antithesis of the others she had

experienced. All of the participants commented that they preferred this page as it
was “straight to the point”. The photographs on the other hand were of little consequence to the participants. These were the photographs that Maggie had selected to fit the small area that had been set aside for photos. Unlike the photos on the first page, these photos were unremarkable to the participants.

**Level 3 webpage: “Ish”**. When the participants were shown the third and final page, they expressed a strong sense of familiarity – it looked just like the previous page. The participants were at this point resistant to looking at another page that was text only. The participant’s feedback reflected a negative response to this CLAS page that had been created for first year undergraduate CLAS students.

Rose: OH// Oh [she laughed]/ it looks like the other one/

Olivia: Change it now Carol/

Interviewer: It's like the other one/

Violet: YES/

Interviewer: So/ what do you think the point of this information is/

Paris: All the programs/your freshman year/

Interviewer: All of the programs of your freshman year/

Rose: They're like/

Violet: Oh my God/

Rose: It doesn't look interesting because I really like a bullet point// Like if they say/ okay/
whatever one program is and then maybe explain a little bit/ or /but it’s like/

Interviewer: Okay/

Olivia: Like/ like it was important/ but this doesn't grab my attention as much as/ the housing/

Interviewer: Okay/ And so what do you think is telling you about your college experience/ If you were just looking at this page and saying this is what college is going to be like as a college freshman/ As a college student/

what do you think you'd get from this/

Olivia: Now/ are we biased and have we seen the pages previous or/

Interviewer: You could have or just this you were talking about it right now/ So/ you've seen the pages/ what do you think this says to a college freshman/

Rose: Nothing but reading/

Interviewer: Nothing but reading/ okay/

Rose: I would/

Interviewer: So do you expect that of your college experience/ that this is what it's going to be like/

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Violet: Yeah/
Olivia: Ish/
Interviewer: Ish/
Olivia: Kind of/
Interviewer: Okay/
Olivia: Not living [inaudible]/ [laughter]

At this point even Rose had grown weary of the text-only webpages. While Rose had been asking for a clean uncluttered webpage she also did not prefer text only webpages. When Rose stated “but it’s like” at the end of her utterance she was indicating that although the simplified approach to providing information was a good approach to take these webpages were bordering on taking this approach too far to the extreme. Olivia took it a step farther to indicate that even given the contractual appearance of the UH webpage, the UH webpage at least grabbed their attention.

When asked what meaning they drew from this website Olivia, as she had done previously, asked for permission to tell the truth. But even as Olivia was asking if she should tell the truth she was telling her truth. In her mind it was unfair to compare this page to the other webpages because this page would come up lacking. Rose was the participant that responded to the question and her perception was that a first year student would perceive that the college experience was about “nothing but reading”. The four participants – Olivia, Paris, Rose, and Violet – had no knowledge of the website industry practice which stated that by a third-level webpage the person should arrive at whatever information they were
seeking. The lack of photographs had become problematic in that the participants perceived the message from CLAS to say that the college experience would be limited to studying. They participants were however were at this point able to view recognize that the information was academic information from a college, that it was pertinent for a student during their freshman, and that it gave some indication of what the college experience was going to be like – using Olivia’s term “ish”. Although Olivia clarifies that she meant kind of, neither her response nor that of the other participants was a resounding statement affirming they knew anything more about the college experience or what it was to be a college student than when they first visited the CLAS website or webpages.

**Conclusion**

To answer the four research questions presented in the beginning of this chapter it was determined that the Discourses of the institutional webpages varied from one unit to another. The Discourse were shaped by the context of the situation, the identity of the staff members charged with designing and maintaining the websites, the identity of the institution and the college, and the populations for which the webpage has been designed. The study participants used a variety of resources and tools to help them as they constructed their situated identity of a college student. There were significant differences in the Discourses of the resources they used, however the end result in using each was to gain *knowledge to inform* or *knowledge for action*.

The staff members who were charged with designing and maintaining each of the websites and webpages were all cognizant that the website had
become a significant element in the WU Discourse. UC had been able to recently redesign their website and webpages, yet UH and the CLAS had inherited webpage designs.

Amy: Constantly evolving/ work like a very strange patchwork// So you're dealing with something that might have been originally developed in 2006// Technology is better// Coding is better//

Interviewer: Okay//

Amy: So you constantly have to kind of mess in and mesh with it in the middle of doing everything else you do//

Interviewer: Yeah/ Yeah//

Amy: So/ you know/ there are standards of Web design/ which is very/ very visual/ and then there's programming/ there tend to be more programmers/ they're very logical//

Interviewer: Okay//

Amy: So you kind of try to find a good marriage between the two of them [softens voice]//

Interviewer: Okay//

Although Amy’s speech act was made in reference to the WU website and the UH website, her utterances best sum up the experience of the first year college
students, the WU staff, and the WU website and college and department websites and webpages. The first year college students, WU staff members, and institutional websites were each “constantly evolving, like a very strange patchwork”. Each of the three groups were each a unique blend of identities and Discourses. The Discourses for each group were based in social contexts that were inherited from previous groups. Over time the Discourses changed and the tools used to demonstrate literacy in the Discourses improved. Technology had improved and the first year students had access to a myriad of specialized technological resources as they matriculated through WU. The Internet became the preferred tool for first year college students as they conducted research on and gathered information about WU. The same held true for WU staff in that they promoted the use of technology and the Internet among the first year students. The staff incorporated their new understanding of the “coding” that operationalized computer programs used to support their Internet interactions with the students. The staff worked to incorporate the student’s Internet practices as they developed this important tool.

The blending of the Discourses proved to be distressing and problematic, in different ways, for each of the first year students as they sought to use the WU website to help construct their college student identities. To compensate for these challenges in becoming literate in the WU Discourse and in the construction of the situated identity of a college student, they incorporated or “meshed” the Discourses in such as way as to enact their multiple identities in the midst of the multiple Discourses. The first year students had to learn how to demonstrate
multiple-literacies in the midst of all they were experiencing as new college students. The students and WU staff members each worked to find a way to bring together their different Discourses so as to help the students in the construction of situated identity – a WU college student.
CHAPTER 6

Multiple Identities at Work

The focus of this study was the situated identity development of first-generation college students and how their interactions with institutional website messaging affected their identity construction. First-generation college freshmen students were, in the course of experiencing their situated identity of a college student, enacting multiple identities simultaneously (see Chapter 4). It was unbeknownst to the researcher until data analysis that the simultaneous engagement of multiple identities occurred with all of the participants – the student and the staff. Additionally, the websites that were analyzed for this study represented and addressed multiple identities. As participants engaged in the identity for which they were asked to be study participants, they enacted and discussed other salient identities.

The findings in this chapter illustrate how the study participants (i.e., students and staff) worked through their multiple identities while reconciling those identities with their core identity. Findings also illustrate the multiple audiences or identities addressed through the representative websites and webpages, addressing the question, *How are multiple identities enacted as roles being performed?*

This study was conducted under the principle that individuals have a core identity and a set of multiple identities. It was through his or her primary Discourse that each participant’s core identity was formed through. Primary Discourse was practiced at home with family and in the local community.
Through their primary Discourse, participants recognized what it was to be an “everyday person”.

The participants’ set of multiple identities is comprised of many other identities that were each constructed in a secondary Discourse. Recall from Chapter 2 that secondary Discourses are learned or acquired in schools, on the job, or in stores, businesses, places of religious worship, clubs, or other organizations. Through secondary Discourses an individual learns to construct public identities. Identities (i.e., core and multiple) and Discourses (i.e., primary and secondary) are socially constructed. A salient identity is an identity that is called into play as individuals enact another identity (McCall & Simmons, 1966; Stryker, 1968, 1994).

In this chapter, I illustrate the multiple and salient identities at work as Olivia, a representative student participant, enacted the situated identity of a college student. Similarly, I explore the multiple and salient identities at work as Amy, a representative WU staff participant, enacted the identity of a WU staff member who was responsible for the UH website. Last, I explore the WU website itself, as it was a tool used by multiple audiences and reflected multiple identities and Discourses webpage managers worked to address the phenomenon of multiple identities at work – in the website visitors, within the website environment, within the students and within themselves.

**Olivia**

Olivia constructed her core identity in a primary Discourse that was spoken in the Spanish language. Olivia was the daughter of parents who were
born in Mexico. She was an older sister of a younger brother. Her mother was educated in Mexico and earned her GED after leaving high school after her freshman year. Olivia’s father dropped out of school in the seventh grade. Her father had other children from another relationship, two of whom were older than Olivia and one of whom was younger than her younger brother.

Spanish was the primary language in the home Olivia shared with her mother, her brother, her grandmother, and her aunts. Olivia’s father spoke Spanish more often than she spoke English, which was problematic for Olivia.

Olivia: I was always a Daddy's little girl but daddy was never really there because he was always taking care of business/

Interviewer: Okay/

Olivia: So/ it was one of those/ because I have been absent/ I'll get you whatever you want and I'll do whatever you want// But there still wasn't that/ sense of/ familiarity with him in/ kind of the way it is with my mom/

Interviewer: Okay/ Okay// Okay// So/ now did he speak Spanish/

Olivia: Uh-hmm [yes]//

Interviewer: Did he speak English because of business or did he/

Olivia: Very little/ Even less than my mother//
Interviewer: Really/

Olivia: Uh-hmm// He knew what he wanted to say//
Like I would/ he'd be like I love you or like little phrases like that//

Interviewer: Okay//

Olivia: I remember one time/ we were crossing you know/ the border to go see him/ and he called me up on the radio we had and he was like/ Bring me a number five// I was like/ what are you talking about/ He goes/ Bring me a number five from Jack in the Box// I was like/ So/ you want the sour dough/
Yeah// I want the sour dough [sowver with a rolling “r” and gddough pronounced with the a heavy Spanish accent that caused it to be mispronounced] // I was like the sour dough [she enunciates each word with/out a hint of Spanish accent with the rising contour at the end recognizing it was a question]/ The sour dough [she again pronounces both words with a heavy Spanish accent that made them words sound mis-pronounced]// I was like/ Okay// Fine
Dad// Bye [she said in almost a defeated tone]//

Olivia drew a distinction between the type of familiarity she had with her mother and the kind of familiarity she had with her father. Olivia felt that she and her father had a close relationship but not with the same type of closeness she had with her mother.

Unlike her mother, her father was not often around because he was taking care of business. Olivia experienced a similar situation as a senior in high school and as a college student. Olivia was away from her family taking care of her business – earning her Bachelor’s degree at WU. She had learned from her father early on in her life that despite a close and loving relationship, one could not always live around loved ones. As it had previously been identified, Olivia’s mother also reinforced this practice of self-sacrifice for the betterment of the family by sending Olivia to live with her grandmother for a several years while her mother was living in Mexico. Olivia had learned that love sometimes meant sacrifice from all parties involved.

It was important for Olivia that her father and her mother learn to speak English but she found they were not as pressed to adopt English as their primary language. In these data Olivia was enacting the identity of a teacher in the midst of enacting her identity of a daughter. She also enacted the role of a customer who frequented Jack in the Box enough that she could tell her father the name of the sandwich he was ordering simply based on the number he had stated. Olivia
demonstrated multiple literacies as she exhibited her ability to pronounce, using the correct inflections and accents, the same words in English and in Spanish.

Olivia’s mother spoke in English more often than her father. Again, Olivia felt it was important that her mother speak English more frequently, either with Olivia or in interactions with other individuals.

Interviewer: And so/ the language in your household is/

Olivia: Mainly/ Spanish//

Interviewer: Mainly/ Spanish// Do they ever/ do they speak English regularly or they prefer to speak Spanish/

Olivia: Well/ to new the generation/ my cousins and I/ my aunt/ some of my aunts prefer to speak English//

Interviewer: Okay/ Okay//

Olivia: Like we still talk in Spanish// But for us/ it's mainly/ because we're so into the education system and we've been brought up/ you HAVE to learn English//

Interviewer: Okay//

Olivia: You have to learn how to read and write// It's more for US using the English language than the Spanish language//
Interviewer: Okay/ Okay// Now/ did you speak Spanish first or English first/

Olivia: I spoke Spanish first/

Interviewer: Did you/ Okay// And so/ when you're talking with your mom/she speaks in Spanish// You speak it/ Spanish/ to her/

Olivia: I speak both/

Interviewer: Yeah/

Olivia: Because I'm trying to get her to start speaking English back// But she isn't grasping that idea/ which is not fun/

Interviewer: Okay// Is it a struggle to get her to speak English/

Olivia: Yes// She very/ unconf/ I don't know if that's right word unconfident in yourself/

Interviewer: Okay/ Okay/

Olivia: She is just like/ Oh/ I don't know at lot// People make fun of me// You guys make fun of me/ because I speak it in funny// I'm like/ but even though we make fun of you/ we're trying to TEACH you// You know// Yeah I would say/

Interviewer: Did she say that in Spanish or in English/
Olivia: She says that in Spanish// She can't say it in English//

Interviewer: Oh//

Olivia: Like at the beginning/ I'll start having conversation with her in English over the phone/ for example// And she'll go along with it// But when I ask her like something and she doesn't know how to say it/ she just reverts to Spanish// And then/ the whole conversation from then on just goes into Spanish//

Interviewer: Okay/ Okay//

Olivia: So/ I was just like that was futile//

Olivia’s first language was Spanish; thus, Olivia’s primary Discourse was constructed in Spanish. She acquired her literacy in Spanish through engaging in various interactions and activities with her family. She learned and acquired all of her secondary Discourses in her second language – English. She learned to speak in the course of her becoming educated in schools in the U.S. She emphasized that she and her cousins and aunt had to learn English as a part of being educated in the U.S.

In these data Olivia displayed several of her multiple identities – a daughter, a cousin, a student in the U.S. educational system, an English speaker, a Spanish speaker, a teacher, and a member of a younger generation. It was as
though Olivia wanted her mother and father to adopt the language practices she now used so that they could enjoy the same level of access as a result of speaking English. In the midst of enjoying her identity of an English speaker she experienced a conflict between her core identity, first language and primary Discourse and multiple identity, and secondary language and secondary Discourses. This conflict was significant, in that the conflict was experienced as she interacted with her parents – the source of her primary Discourse and first language.

As a part of her core identity Olivia celebrated her heritage as a Hispanic female.

Olivia: See/ I am Mexican because both of my parents are Mexican/

Interviewer: Okay/

Olivia: BUT overall I consider myself Hispanic/

Interviewer: Okay/ okay/ And so do you celebrate your heritage/

Olivia: I LOVE being Hispanic/ it's just/ I don't know/ It's so much FUN just knowing that MEXICO in ITSELF is so diverse/ It's just/

Interviewer: It's pride/

Olivia: Yeah/

Olivia lived in Mexico with her parents for part of her childhood. She was proud of her Mexican heritage. Olivia attributed her being Mexican to the fact that she
was born to parents that were Mexican but she considered herself and defined herself as Hispanic, as opposed to Mexican. Her use of this larger categorization was a reflection of her expanded definition of her own identity. She felt that Mexico, as a country, was very diverse, and as such, she did not limit her self-identification to that of one group that was a part of a much larger community. She defined herself as greater than the socially constructed identity given due to her birthright.

Olivia came from a very large family. Her mother had nine siblings and her father had several siblings as well. In April 2008, Olivia’s father passed away, and in January 2010, Olivia’s mother and brother moved to be with her father’s family. Olivia was born in California and was proud of that fact as well.

Olivia was very close to her mother and her brother. Her mother and brother were a significant reason why she decided to pursue a business degree.

Interviewer: No/ I mean/ be honest// Why did you/ why do you think you picked a business major/

Olivia: Okay/ honestly/ for two reasons// One/ because I know that the major that I chose will allow me to travel and learn about everything else and still focus/ on something that I LIKE being which is business and communicating and talking to people/ while still being that life-long learner that I've always got myself to be// And the second
reason is because/ I figure that being in business will help me set up a sort of foundation so as to help my mom// Because my mom is one of the main drives of my life/ her and my little brother mean a lot to me// So knowing that someday I MIGHT have financial stability to help HER and help HIM/ you know get him to [WU] or maybe not [WU] but the university of HIS choice to do what HE wants to do// And knowing that I can provide that someday makes me feel awesome//

As a college student attending WU Olivia worked two different jobs. Between her two jobs and her scholarships Olivia assumed full financial responsibility for herself. Additionally, Olivia provided financial support to her mother. Olivia was an employee – in two offices – a financially independent female, a college student, a financial resource to her mother, a high achieving student, and a scholarship recipient.

Since high school Olivia had been very involved in extracurricular activities (e.g., she was a member of National Honors Society and other clubs) and tried during her senior year, albeit unsuccessfully, to organize a campus tour to visit WU for her high school class. She continued to find ways to be engaged in co-curricular activities as a WU student. Olivia had organized a new student
organization with “another freshman, a friend of mine”. Their “goal [was] to do community service to hospitals, to children of the hospitals for sick and suffering like, you know, from illnesses”. Olivia was the publicist for her new organization.

In addition to founding a new student organization Olivia was a member of three other student groups and organizations and had signed up for a campus-based student support program. All told, Olivia was involved in five different organizations or programs as a first-year undergraduate, each in a different capacity. For Olivia, having multiple roles and responsibilities was not a new practice; rather, it was a part of who she was. She said, “It's still a lot to take on, but ….” Olivia knew that she was very involved, but the utterance was not simply in reference to her involvement with multiple student organizations. Olivia was referencing the full scope of what she had undertaken as she pursued her degree at WU. In as much as she knew the entire endeavor was a large responsibility, she felt it was what had to be done. She left the rest of the thought to be completed by me. It did not matter what she said to end the sentence, she was not going to justify or try to explain her decisions – they were her decisions and no further explanation was required. Even though she was active in multiple activities, Olivia was mindful of the number of roles and identities she was taking on.

Olivia: Other than TRiO/ no// I don't feel like I'm very involved// I really do want to be more involved but at the same time I'm kind of like/ with my work schedule I really CAN'T DO much anyways//
Olivia acknowledged that there was a limit to her level of involvement, given her work schedule. Her work schedule represented both her paid employment as a student worker, as well as her academic work, and time was finite. Olivia had a strong work ethic and prioritized her life in such a way as to keep the scheduling of her time a priority. Even as she admitted to being a procrastinator, she worked hard to take care of the business at hand. In this instance, it was to be a reliable student and worker.

As Olivia constructed the situated identity of a college student she simultaneously constructed other new situated identities and enacted and reconstructed other salient identities. The process of constructing and enacting multiple identities in multiple Discourses was not without conflict, as would be found in the data. The Discourse of Olivia’s identity as a Hispanic daughter of a mother who believed in familioso and the Discourse of Olivia’s situated identity as a first-generation college student were the two Discourses that were most often in conflict.

As a Mexican oldest daughter, Olivia was expected to act a certain way, as a young woman and as a member of her family. In her role as a college student, there were other distinct expectations associated with this identity/role. To construct and enact the two identities simultaneously, Olivia engaged in a practice known as “strategic compliance” (Lacey, 1977, p. 72) between the two Discourses so as to not jeopardize her belonging in either Discourse. She was not willing to sacrifice either identity. An example of Olivia’s strategic compliance would be the daily telephone calls Olivia would make to her mother even though she did
not want to call as often. Another example would be when Olivia made a trip to visit her mother even though she wanted to stay at WU. She was on the surface complying with her mother’s requests but privately doing what her mother asked because it kept her their relationship free of distress. Olivia engaged in this practice with the goal that she would be able to successfully renegotiate her mother’s expectations for her now that Olivia was in college. Lacey (1977) coined this practice “strategic redefinition of the situation” (p. 73) which meant that Olivia was complying with her mother’s request so that at some point she would be able to persuade her mother to see and accept a change in their interactions. The change would result in Olivia being able to call a little less often and not visit her mother at her mother’s home during all of her breaks. Olivia wanted to become more fully engaged and to develop her sense of belonging and connection WU. Olivia wanted her mother to see that Olivia’s new practices were good and necessary as she constructed and engaged in the new Discourse associated with her new situated identity of a college student.

As a Hispanic oldest daughter who was also a first-generation college student, Olivia was in a position none in her family had experienced.

Interviewer: Okay/ okay// And so/ as you're talking to her now about you being in school/ do you think she understands what it's like for you as a college student/

Olivia: No/ in a way/ because/ she keeps trying to/ I don't want to say manipulate/ But /in a way
/she's really holding on to that "We should be together as a family// We should never be torn apart// Dadidadilaladah// And every time I tell her "Oh/ I'm struggling/ like you know/ holding classes/ and balancing things out// And I told YOU// You should've come with me// You COULD apply in to college here// You COULD'VE applied into community college and then we could've paid that off and you could've gone/ you know/ to university// And I'm just kind of like I didn't need that right now/ I needed you know [sounded disappointed in mothers response]/ Interviewer: You need what/ Olivia: I needed like her support or her you know/ Interviewer: So/ she/ how do you think she thinks she should be now/ I mean does she/ is there an expectation that she'll call so many times or that she'll come and visit/ Olivia: Yeah// Interviewer: Okay//
Olivia: Yes/ there is/ There is an expectation that I'll call at least once a day everyday/
There's the expectation that I will be going over for every holiday/ every day off/ There is the expectation that you know I'm just going to stay with my family when I can/ if I can/ And I'm kind of like/ No/

Interviewer: Okay So/ to her/ which comes first school or family/

Olivia: To her/ in my opinion/ it's all/ mixed/

Interviewer: Mixed up/

Olivia: Because she always talked about you know you're NOTHING without an education/
You are NOTHING [strikes table with side of her hand] without an education and if you DON'T [again strikes table with side of hand] GO further in life and get some type of degree or try your hardest/ You know you're not going to get anywhere/

Interviewer: Okay/

Olivia: However/ she's very persistent in saying you know/ But you need to support/ You need your family to be by your side/ You can't do
it all alone/ dadidah// I'm like/ Yes/ I can//

I'm doing it right now// It's frustrating//

Interviewer: Yeah//

Olivia: And I do need your support// But as far as/
you know/ needing other things/ I'm DOING it//

Interviewer: Now/ is she the only person that does that or
your aunts/ how do they/ do they understand/

Olivia: I think the majority of family thinks along
her lines// The only one that doesn’t is my
youngest/ aunt//

Interviewer: Okay//

Olivia: She's very independent//

Interviewer: Okay//

Olivia: I think that's a big difference because
everybody else is not// They were always
brought up/ you know/ co-dependent of each
other and she/ because I think being the
youngest and everybody already you know
having made their mistakes/ tried to make
her not do whatever//
Interviewer: Okay// So/ are you doing something that/
you're doing something/ are you doing
something that no one in your family has
ever done/

Olivia: Yes//

Olivia’s mother had raised her to value education. It was through an
education that an individual was determined by society to be of value – the greater
the level of education, the more society would value Olivia. Olivia’ mother
understood the social capital and social goods earned through pursuing their
education, such as better paying jobs, increased control over the decisions in
Olivia’s life, security for Olivia and her family, respect, Olivia would have the
opportunity to be the agent and not the object in her own life. All of Olivia’s life,
her mother and father had sacrificed to provide their oldest daughter with every
opportunity to pursue her education. All of the years Olivia had been separated
from parents, earning the highest academic honors, taking the most challenging
courses possible – it had all been done with the intention of attending a university.
Pursuing her college degree was the goal she and her parents had sacrificed for
her to attain.

It was not the pursuit of Olivia’s college education that had become the
point disjuncture between Olivia and her mother – her only surviving parent;
rather, it was all that the role required of Olivia that had become problematic. The
Discourses were at odds. Never once in all of the interactions with Olivia did she
ever even slightly hint that her mother did not want her to attend college. Instead,
what Olivia’s mother was contesting was the change in Olivia’s level of attention to her family.

_Familismo_ – a strong sense of family pride, family interdependence to achieve goals, and obligation to family first (Sy & Romero, 2008; Vega, 1990) – was a celebrated cultural norm and expectation in her mother’s household. This was the practice of many Latino families – Paris and Rose also experienced the same challenges with their Latino families. Olivia drew distinctions between the two generations of women on her mother’s side of her family and the varying levels of independence or dependence found between them. She also drew a distinction between the two generations of women on her mother’s side of her family and the corresponding level of _familioso_ between Olivia and her youngest aunt, who were independent, as compared to the level of _familismo_ practiced by her mother and other aunts. Olivia’s perception was that there was a generational difference based on the corresponding level of independence; Olivia, however, was different yet from all of the other women in her family as she was going “to university”.

Rose, Olivia, and Paris had all used the phrase “to university” in their utterances, rather than the formal English “to _the_ university”. Each of them used this phrase when they spoke in the voice of a family member and as they spoke in their own voices. Again, the influence of their first language, Spanish, was present in the data. As learners of English as a second language, Olivia’s family members did not use articles (e.g., _the, a, an_) in speech, reflecting their acquisition of, and not formal learning of, the English language.
It is the practice of individuals who live in the U.S. and who learned English as their first language to use articles in speech. In the U.S. there is a distinction made between colleges and universities, and as such, there they are not referred to as one in the same – as a single institution. When references are made to the practice as a whole, one would say “go to college” as has been made with other practices or in reference to other institutions (e.g. “go to work”, “go to prison”, “go to school”). Olivia’s voicing of her mother’s phrasing, “go to university”, gives insight into the difference in language in use, as well as the different way Olivia’s mother is situating Olivia’s attending a specific institution, WU, rather than the practice of going to college. The lack of an article identified the speaker as an outsider to the Discourses of native English speakers and to the Discourse of those who are insiders to higher and postsecondary education. The smallest thing, like a missing article, can distinguish an insider from an outsider.

Olivia’s most salient identities in relation to her identity of a college student were a daughter, a sister, Hispanic, a female, a friend, a high achiever, a financially responsible student, independent, a scholarship recipient, a procrastinator, a student worker in one office, a student worker in a second office, a residential student, and a community service volunteer. Depending on the context some were more salient at times than others.

Amy

Amy introduced herself as the marketing specialist for UH and for the WU student union. In that role there were certain responsibilities she was expected to execute.
Amy: Okay// Well/ I'm the marketing specialist for housing and also for the [student union]/ so I kind of double duty//

Interviewer: Okay/ Okay//

Amy: So I'm responsible for the marketing messaging and communications to all current residents/ prospective residents and then parents as well/ obviously/ because they're sort of in that same grouping//

Interviewer: Yes//

Amy: So I oversee our graphic designer/ we have a Web developer// So everything from the media messaging that happens to the website/ to our print publications/ all communications eventually pass over my desk//

Amy understood that her work role required her to fulfill particular tasks. She was able to clearly recall the primary tasks and duties associated with her role as the marketing specialist with the UH office; Amy, however, claimed another identity, an identity not ascribed to her through her job but through her own sense of identity.

Amy: We just want it to refresh a little because we know we can/ my backup designer or my
web designer and myself/ we're all artists/
We're all designers// So/ we constantly want
to be CREATIVE// We're/ like/ Oh/ we want
to do something COOL//

Interviewer: Yeah/

Amy: We want to WORK/ we want it to convey
the information/ but we want it to look
COOL// That's why for us/ even our current
website hurts us just a little cause it’s not
[deep breath as a exhaled sigh] COOL//

Recall from Chapter 5 that Amy identified herself as an artist and a
designer, not as a higher education administrator or as a marketing specialist. The
latter two identities were identities ascribed to her through her employment status
with WU. She also attributed the same identity to that of her staff members. In
contrast, Amy further declared that she, and her staff, also identified as creative
individuals. In carrying out the task of developing and maintaining the UH
website in its current iteration, Amy was not able to be her true self, to bring forth
her true identity. She felt that the full scope of her abilities was truncated because
the UH website was not “cool”. She and her staff had been constricted by the
situation to withhold certain elements or characteristics of their real identities as
creative individuals.
As Amy developed the website and corresponding materials for UH, she drew upon other salient identities to help inform her practice. Amy incorporated her identity as daughter and as a sister in designing the WU webpages.

Amy: At the same point and time/ too/ we're dealing with this HUGE GAP OF FAMILIARITY WITH TECHNOLOGY// I always have to think will my father be able to go through this site// It's a great thing at the back of my mind because my man could get a little confused// He'll click somewhere and I'm/ like/ Why did you do that/ You know/ when you study Web design/ if they start talking about left-hand navigation versus horizontal navigation//

Interviewer: Okay//

Amy: You know/ and that kind of tends to be/ in some ways they tend to be a little bit of like I'm a leftie// I'm a righty/ not that it always corresponds that way/ but the idea of the fact of like people have a natural preference// Like some people will never enjoy a horizontal menu structure/ and it felt a LITTLE ODD for me personally//
In this speech act, Amy spoke through a *heteroglossic* voice – that of a daughter and that of a website designer. Bakhtin (1983) recognized the power of heteroglossic speech or “*double-voiced discourse*” (p. 324) whereby the speech act carried the power of two speakers – “the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author” (p. 324). In this example Amy switched between her two salient identities, at times being using her speech to convey her identity as a daughter but through her experience as a web designer while in another instance she was “directly” speaking as a web designer who was the daughter of a father who was technologically challenged. She identified as the daughter of a technologically challenged father, whose challenges influenced her website-design practices. She thought of him as she designed webpages considering his logic, through the eyes and experiences of an individual who had had limited experience with websites generally. She introduced two other salient identities, of a student and a web designer, as she spoke of the specialized training she had gained to consider the particular needs of all users. She employed the used of specialized language of a web designer to further enact this particular identity.

She also considered her father’s way of learning and her parents’ limited computer skills as she planned webpages for UH.

Amy: And get people's feedbacks because every brain is different// I mean// beyond even thinking about just like/ okay/ visual
learners/ auditory learners/ spatial// Spatial is VERY big//

Interviewer: Oh/ really/

Amy: I THINK it's really big// I don't think/ well/ and again/ it goes back to the fact that I keep my dad at the back of my head when I Web design// He's a spatial learner//

Interviewer: Okay//

Amy: So/ you know/ my parents have limited usage with a computer// I used a computer in kindergarten// Our students have used it since they were three//

Amy perceived herself as being very computer literate, compared to her parents, who had limited experience with a computer. Amy situated herself with the students for whom she was designing the websites - she was a digital native. She and the incoming first-year students had, since childhood, used a computer, whereas her parents, and the parents of the student participants, did not have the same level of experience or time spent using computers. The binary was significant as she situated herself as the type of individual who understood both populations – the students and the students’ parents.

Amy also considered her younger sister as she planned other webpages that were being designed as a part of a special partnership between WU and a local community college because her identity as an older sister to sister who had
attended a community college provided her with an insider’s perspective to the community college student’s experience. This in turn provided her with an understanding of the Discourse of community college students.

Interviewee: So imagine instead of going directly to the university/ you decided to do two years of community college//

Interviewer: Wow//

Interviewee: Again I have INSIGHT into this because this is what my SISTER did// So AGAIN I think of my sister// HOW would she have gotten interested in LIVING on campus//

As Amy developed a website and webpages that were targeted toward community college students who would be living in WU housing through a special arrangement between WU and their community college, Amy drew from her identity as a sister of an individual who had attended a community college. She could draw from the perspective this identity afforded her as she had an insight that allowed her to better understand this population. In her role as website designer, she was able to benefit from her other salient identity.

Amy understood that the information she and her team provided through the website had ramifications for others in her department. If the information on the website was unclear or complicated, the staff members who responded to the questions by telephone would experience an increase in telephone calls. Additionally, she understood that there were times when a student or parent had a
simple question that did not involve a lengthy telephone call with a representative from UH. As a result, she developed an Internet-chat option that could be used for parents and students to interact with a staff member in an environment that was developed for this particular reason. Both of these practices evolved from her experience as the daughter of a mother with a disability.

Amy: Yeah/ because it was like/ AH MAN [softened voice] usually we get HUNDREDS of phone calls every day// ONE of the big complaints about the housing department is the fact/ okay you CALL IN and then you're on a wait forever/ You know and like/ okay NOTHING can be worse the being on the help line for Social Security cause THAT ONE you sit on the phone for several hours// I KNOW [pause]/ that one [pause]/ PERSONALLY [elongated]// MY MOTHER WAS ON SOCIAL SECURITY [alters voice]// When I turned 18// I she's she’s actually classified as disabled/ So when I turned 18// I GOT the social security checks that she would get every month for ME// So I had/ she was like crying/ You want THEM/ you're gonna have
to call THEM and get this SET UP because you need to call it IN/ because she tried to call/ she found what I found out she tried to call it in// they won't let HER do/ I needed to do cause I was over 18// I WAS ON THAT WAIT LINE FOR TWO HOURS

[whispering with an aggravated irritated tone in her voice when she said hours]// Two hours on the phone/ THANK GOD FOR SPEAKER PHONE [stated with sense of relief]// I’d just had it//

Interviewer: Wow//

Amy: I was just like/ Ahhhugggg THIS IS KILLING ME [stated with great emphasis]//

Your wait time is 40 minutes [imitating the voice of an automated system recording]//

Ahhh MAN// You know EVERYBODY’S been there//

Interviewer: Yeah/ yeah//

Amy: It's an unfortunate THING// but VOLUME of calls/

Interviewer: Right//

Amy: You know/ 483
Interviewer: Right//

Amy: Yeah we might have ten people responding to callers//

Interviewer: Right//

Amy: its still volume of calls/ it's HUGE//

Interviewer: Wow//

Amy: So CHAT is a great way sometimes for quick questions to get answered kind of stuff like that// We're really specific the fact that the personal information/ ID numbers/ your room number/ your roommate details should NOT be done in chat// This is for quick questions//

Amy had experienced frustration and stress that she hoped to eliminate for incoming freshman and their parents. She identified with the parents and students who were frustrated by the automated systems used in offices or agencies that experienced a high volume of calls. Amy also identified with the staff members who had to answer the telephone calls that were the result of a complicated process. She spoke from the perspective of an individual who had been frustrated as a result of a bureaucratic process that she had no way to circumvent. To get the financial benefits she was due from the social security administration, she had to wade through a process that little considered the inconvenience and frustration for those who had to wait their turn no matter how long the wait. To support both the
staff in her department, as well as the students and their parents, she introduced an
Internet-chat feature that would meet the needs of both groups.

Toward the end of the interview, Amy’s most salient identity was
revealed, as Amy had been a first-generation college student. Amy recalled her
experience as a first-generation student and the feelings associated with that
identity.

Interviewer: Do you think/ do you think that first
generation freshmen have a different
experience than other freshmen/

Amy: I think absolutely// ABSOLUTELY
[elongated]/ Nobody knows/ in that family
[softened voice]/ I/ I was a first a freshman/
first-generation freshman/

Interviewer: Oh/ okay//

Amy: And nobody KNEW// Nobody had any
IDEA/ NO frame of REFERENCE
WHATEVER at ALL in my family// I’m
ABSOLUTELY the first one to go to
COLLEGE//

Interviewer: Wow//

Amy: So/ for ME/ it was COMPLETELY new
learning experience/ But I'd GONE to the
campus// I knew EXACTLY what hall I
wanted to BE IN// I was good to GO// I
signed that for it// Done// Simple easy
process for me// That was GREAT//

Interviewer: You're right//

Amy: That’s not ALWAYS the CASE for them/
So that's again why we try to convey the
information cleanly/ That's why when we're
designing the new site we're really looking
at// Okay/ ONE/ we’re gonna showcase our
four campuses and then our other services//
TWO// We think about our audiences/
current residents/ prospective students/
parents// So those experiences paths have
got to be really clear//

Recall from Chapter 5 that as a first-generation college student, Amy
knew the challenges the current first-generation college students faced as the first
in their families to go to college. She understood the new experiences and the new
Discourse that the current students who were visiting her website experienced;
she, however, drew a distinction between her experience and that of other first-
generation college students. She had gone to visit the physical campus, whereas
many of the students who enrolled in the WU had never been to visit the campus
prior to enrolling. Amy had a clear idea where she wanted to live on campus and
she put her plan into action; she also knew there were some students who were
challenged by the housing selection process. Whereas she had had a “simple easy process”, the process students had to use on the WU UH webpage was far more complicated. Amy’s goal was to develop a website that could be constructed to support the diverse campus needs, as well as the needs of the multiple website users.

**Western University Website and Webpages**

Each of the WU websites and webpages are used to reach multiple audiences, to name a few students, faculty, local community members, investors, researchers, and alumni. The multiple audiences each use the webpages to get either *knowledge for action* or *knowledge to inform*. All of the institutional unit websites address multiple users. Of the college websites CLAS seemed to have the largest audience.

Maggie: So that/ One that/ One difficult/ WHY is a difficult question/ Is a difficult question/

What we’re expected/ to do at the college LEVEL [she gives a little laugh]/ Like are we supposed to do recruitment/ Cause so much more recruitment is happening at the top of the university levels/ Are we expected to do alumni/ And then the other problem is that/ Which every site has/ there's a lot of audiences/ And/ Which audience/ Should we be/ Would we be/ Addressing//
Interviewer: So/ what are you consider are the audiences that you all are/ so the alumni/ prospective students/ current students/

Maggie: Yup/ Alumni/ Prospective student/ Current students/ Prospective/ You know/ Prospective students being both/
Undergraduate and graduate level/ and then COLLEGES/ Adding supposed to supposed to add some VALUE/ It's not just to be a collection of academic UNITS// Then you think of also the internal audiences like/ The administration/ Policymakers/ You know external audiences is like policymakers/ or possible funders/ private or public funders/ or foundation funders//

Interviewer: Right// International community members/ those across the globe/ behind the valley/ not familiar//

Maggie: Right/ yeah// And that generally/ as you may or may not understand/ doesn’t produce a great site [she laughs]//

Interviewer: There's a lot/ there's a lot going on//
Maggie was speaking on behalf all webpage designers who had to design webpages that were targeted toward multiple audiences. She shared the challenge experienced by website designers to design a website that met the needs of many different audiences – multiple identities. She differentiated between the different undergraduate and graduate student populations, the internal audiences (e.g. students, faculty, staff), external audiences (investors, researchers from other institutions, as well as national and international audiences. Within each of these audiences were many other categories of users. Maggie concluded that trying to address multiple audiences “doesn’t produce a great site”.

Maggie had come to a similar conclusion when she discussed the *multiple voices* at work in the development of the CLAS website.

Maggie: You know/ website management by committee is not ideal/ and you know and this is part of the reason why we've ended up/ with something that's/ Probably not functional//

Maggie’s words were representative of the frustration she felt in performing the duties associated with her role as the website administrator for CLAS. Maggie wanted to produce a great website for the multiple audiences who would visit. Maggie recognized that a new approach to addressing the multiple audiences was required to improve the experience and address the needs of website visitors.
Identity Construction and Discourse

Figure 4 below illustrates situated identity construction. The construction of a situated identity is an iterative process whereby the individual in continually assessing and constructing, evaluating and enacting the situated identity.
Figure 4. Conceptual model of Situated Identity Construction through Discourses.
This model of situated identity construction brings together the elements of the models by Hamid and Lejeune (2009), Harrod (2008), and Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) and introduces primary Discourse and secondary Discourses as separate elements of the situated identity construction process.

Prior to engaging in a situated activity individuals have both a core identity and a set of multiple identities. This model posits that an individual, prior to engaging in the situated activity in which the situated identity is formed, has a preconceived perception of the situated activity and the situated identity. The individual’s preconceived perceptions establish the framework for the unconstructed situated identity. This pre-identity framework is a part of his or her set of multiple identities (i.e., textured figures). Within this set of multiple identities are identities that are more or less salient to the pre-formed situated identity. Degrees of saliency are determined by the way in which the individual has made meaning of the messages received from persons within their primary Discourse and secondary Discourses, as well as from others within the Discourse in which the situated activity occurs. In this study, the first-generation college students constructed pre-identity frameworks based on the manner in which they made meaning of messages from their family members, friends, high school counselors, and the WU website.

As individuals enter into the particular situated activity they begin to construct the requisite situated identity. This constructive process involves the individual’s drawing an understanding of the perceived expectations located in their primary Discourse, secondary Discourses, in comparison to the comparator
identity. The entire identity construction process is shaped by the situated activity. The participants in this study made distinctions between the perceived expectations and attributes made of them as new college students by those in their primary Discourse — their family members and childhood community members, their *society of intimates* (Givón, 1979, p. 294) and those within their secondary Discourses — other friends, teachers, work supervisors, counselors. Previous identity formation models combined the primary Discourse and the secondary Discourses as though they were mutually equivalent in influence and credibility; however, the participants in this study did not blend two Discourses. The individuals *filtered* their expectations through their primary Discourses and secondary Discourses separately. With each of these steps the participants also experienced different feelings, e.g. with their families, in their primary Discourse, they felt responsible and at times frustrated yet with their secondary Discourses they felt excitement.

The third level of perception in the model is that of the comparator identity. The study participants completed the questionnaire comparing the college student identity to that of two other comparator identities — a high school student and a college professor. Within the process of constructing the situated identity of a college student the study participants determined that the high school identity was a procrastinator and dependent, the college student was ambitious and independent and the college professor was respected and experienced. The students experienced another set feelings as they considered the attributes of a college student in comparison to the two comparator identities. This third step
provided them with another set of attributions to use as they considered the situated identity in the context of the situated activity of being a college student.

The fourth and external layer of the filter is that of the situated activity. This outermost layer shapes, and at times constrains, the construction of the situated identity. As the individual continues to construct his or her situated identity, he or she perceives the appropriateness of potential actions and behaviors and the resultant reactions of others within the Discourse. The individuals also make meaning of messages they experience within the Discourse and takes cues from others who are in the Discourse. The individual attributes the role expectations to the combination of messages experienced. From the meaning they made from the messages they experienced they also experienced various feelings.

In this study, the participants perceived the messages on the WU webpages, the messages from WU counselors, summer transition program instructors and staff, and from their fellow classmates and students at WU. They also used other sources of Internet-based information to aid in constructing their situated identity of a college student.

Bordering and vertically intersecting each layer of the filter are the linear structures that represent Social Constructs and Context. Each has the potential to influence the conditions under which the individual constructs situated identity. Both Social Constructs and Context are textured as bricks, as they are both constructed through human interaction. Berger and Luckmann (1966) described the creation of social constructs as a process that occurs through the shared and
habitualized actions that occur in institutions and are often transmitted from one
generation to another.

Man’s self-production is always, and of necessity, a social
enterprise. Men together produce a human environment, with the
totality of its socio-cultural and psychological formations. None of
these formations may be understood as products of man’s
biological constitution, which, as indicated, provides for only the
outer limits for human productive activity. Just as it is impossible
for man to develop as man in isolation, so it is impossible for man
in isolation to produce a human environment. Solitary human
being is being on the animal level (which, of course, man shares
with other animals). As soon as one observes phenomena that are
specifically human, one enters the realm of the social. Man’s
specific humanity and his sociality are inextricably intertwined.

_Homo sapiens_ is always, and in the same measure, _homo socius_.
(p. 48-49)

By virtue of being human, humans are social. Berger and Luckmann
(1966) identified that through the course of repetitive actions and interactions
man’s actions had the ability to become _habitualized_.

All human activity is subject to habitualization. Any action that is
repeated frequently becomes cast into a pattern, which can then be
reproduced with an economy of effort and which, _ipso facto_, is
apprehended by its performer as that pattern. Habitualization
further implies that the action in question may be performed again in the future in the same manner and with the same economical effort. This is true of non-social as well as of social activity. Even the solitary individual on the proverbial desert island habitualizes his activity. When he wakes up in the morning and resumes his attempts to construct a canoe out of matchsticks, he may mumble to himself, "There I go again," as he starts on step one of an operating procedure consisting of, say, ten steps. In other words, even solitary man has at least the company of his operating procedures. Habitualized actions, of course, retain their meaningful character for the individual although the meanings involved become embedded as routines in his general stock of knowledge, taken for granted by him and at hand for his projects into the future. Habitualization carries with it the important psychological gain that choices are narrowed. While in theory there may be a hundred ways to go about the project of building a canoe out of matchsticks, habitualization narrows these down to one. (pp. 50-51)

Over time these habitualized actions become expected ways of thinking about particular traditions; customs; shared interpretations and definitions; reification of shared characterizations of individuals based on race; gender; socioeconomic status; and forms of capital (i.e., social, cultural, economic). Habitualized actions become institutionalized and institutionalized practices. The members of
institutions adopt the habitualized actions (i.e., inclusive of ways of thinking), which then impact the ways in which a new member is expected to act or behave in situated activities and in their new situated identity. All of the factors are also considered in context, “a subjective construct, constrained neither by logic nor by reality, in principle then anything goes. For reality is but a whim of the observer-framer, an artifact of arbitrary chosen perspective” (Givón, 2005, p. 6). Context varies from person to person and situation to situation, given the individuals’ past and present experiences.

As the individuals move though this filtering process (Abes, Jones & McEwen, 2007), they make meaning of the messages made by members of their primary Discourses, their secondary Discourses, from the comparator identity or identities, by those who are situated within the context of the situated activity, and social constructs that inform all of the messages and actions of those within each layer of the filter. As a result, the individual makes attributions about how to demonstrate that he or she is a member of the new Discourse. This final step results in the first iteration his or her newly constructed situated identity. It is at this point that an individual begins to try to demonstrate literacy in the Discourse. They take action and construct the situated identity.

As the individual enacts the situated identity, he or she also enacts other identities, some being more salient to the situated identity than others. Givón (2005) wrote the following regarding saliency and context, “The notion of saliency is fundamentally pragmatic, since the salience of a figure depends on how it stand out vis-à-vis some ground, i.e. its context” (p. 11). The saliency of a
multiple identity is, in part, affected by the surrounding conditions. Whereas other identity models have depicted identities in similar size, shape, and texture, this model takes into account the uniqueness of each identity, given the way they are constructed, given the filtering process that occurred for each to be constructed and enacted, as well as the ways the identities are experienced in relation to the construction and enactment of a new identity. Context or Social Constructs may affect any of the various stages of the filtering and construction process, including the situated identity or the individual’s set of multiple identities. An identity that may be salient to the early iterations of a situated identity may become less salient, or vice versa, as the iterative process continues; the individual’s core identity, however, remains constant as it is “not as susceptible to outside influence and more at the heart of who they are” (Jones, 1995, p. 170).

In the final steps of situated identity construction, the individual enacts the situated identity. As they enact this identity they may experience “an error or discrepancy that represents the difference between their perception and the identity standard” (Burke, 2007, p. 2). If as they are enacting their situated identity the individual has an experience in which he or she perceives that they are acting out of alignment with the expected “identity standard” then he or she reflects on their behaviors and “changes them in such a way as to counteract the disturbance and reduce the discrepancy to zero” (Burke, 2007, p. 2). The individuals take steps to construct and then enact the identity in accordance with the expected behaviors thus entering the filtering process once again. For those who construct and behave in a manner that is in keeping with the expectations
made by others of an individual in the situated identity they experience
“congruence” (Burke, 2007, p. 2) and continue to act and behave as they have
been. The model however reflects an arrow returning to the top of the filtering
process. This was done as there are always new experiences to be had within each
identity and with each new experience there is a new set of expectations, either by
someone in his or her primary Discourse, secondary Discourse, as a comparator
identity or within the situated activity. As identities are constructed within
Discourses, the process of situated identity construction is an iterative process –
as identity or Discourses change so will the other.
CHAPTER 7

Discussion and Recommendations

Introduction

I began this study because I believed that college and university websites were the equivalent of the brick-and-mortar entryways physically located at most colleges and universities. Some institutions have extremely ornate entryways – intricately scrolled wrought iron, marble pillars, sculptures of mythical creatures, brick-and-mortar archways with institutional mottos written in Latin – whereas others have a subtler, more simple path leading to a classroom building. An individual might have different perceptions of an institution and its members based on the level of grandiosity of this welcome area (or lack thereof). He or she might also feel the institution was conveying different messages about the institution, via their entryway. The messages might convey the particular type of people who belonged on the inside or the outside of the entryway. The entryway demarcated a point through which insiders knew they were insiders and outsiders knew they were outsiders. Open gates could convey one message, closed gates would convey another message, and no gates conveyed yet another message.

Having completed my research study I believe that institutional websites are the virtual entryway to colleges and university. As the beauty and decor of the brick and mortar structures conveys powerful messages, so do messages within college and university websites and webpages. There is power in the virtual pen. This tool used by those in the Discourse creates powerful messages that have the potential to have lasting effects on all who enter. But like the brick-and-mortar
entryways and physical structure the website can also perpetuate the hidden
curriculum in higher education. Costello (2001) wrote the following regarding the
hidden curriculum found in the physical spaces and settings in higher education:

> Sociologists have long acknowledged that individual’s identities
> are shaped by their physical surrounding…. Even a casual observer
> of a typical college campus is likely to notice that some
> “neighborhoods” look opulent – commonly sports arenas and the
> physical science buildings – while other facilities appear shabby
> and run down – perhaps including the humanities and social
> science building. Some individuals are clearly aware of and able to
> “read” the socializing messages sent by these variations in the
> campus-built environment…. Of course, physical settings do not
> function as socializing agents *sua sponte*; they are things. The
> people who design, ornament, and maintain them are the true
> sources of socializing messages, and the settings are merely the
> means by which these messages are propagated. Yet physical
> structures persist and continue to affect the people who inhabit
> them long after those who designed and built them have passed
> from the scene … new generations of students may “read”
> structures in a manner that differs from that originally intended, as
> meanings change over time. (pp. 44-45)

In like manner, I wanted to understanding what messages were being conveyed to
first-generation students as they accessed the institution through the *new*
Chapter 2 illustrates that more than ever before college and universities are using their websites to reach larger numbers of students. At the same time, more students than ever before are using the Internet as their primary mechanism for conducting research on colleges and universities. Additionally, more first-generation students are attending colleges and universities, and the number of students in general is projected to continue growing. The U.S. Department of Education projects that “college enrollment is expected to continue setting new records from fall 2010 through fall 2018…. Enrollment is expected to increase by 9%” (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009e). The projected increase would result in an increase in enrollment from 19,103,000 in 2008 to 21,341,000 students enrolled in post-secondary degree-granting institutions in 2018. I was most interested in researching the messages first-generation first-year college students received after having been selected to attend WU – moving beyond the proverbial gate of the admissions and recruitment webpages. How did the messages now reflect the institutional Discourse so as to allow incoming first-year students, and specifically the first-generation first-year students, to understand what the college experience was going to be like and what was to be expected of them as college students? I was particularly interested in understanding how first-generation students experienced the messages as they did not have the benefit of having a parent who had earned a college degree and who understood Discourse. First-generation students had to acquire literacy in the Discourse of higher education. Moreover, did the students interpret the messages
on the webpages – including the text, photos, and webpage layout – differently than what had been the intended message from the webpage designer or architect?

**Discussion of the Findings**

As noted in Chapter 2, I began this study with what I thought was a very simple question: *How do new incoming first-generation college students make meaning of and experience the messages within institutional websites that are directed toward incoming freshmen as they develop the situated identity of a college student?* My rationale for this undertaking was that I believed that college and university websites contained messages that were reaching a broader audience, but at what cost to making students feel as though they belonged to the community being addressed in the messages? Although my research covered many intersecting elements, at the heart of the study was how first-generation students perceive, interpret, and make meaning the institutional website messages and the subsequent impact of institutional website on the situated identity construction of these select students. I wanted to discover how first-generation college students used university websites to as a tool or resource as they constructed their college student identities. Specifically, I desired to investigate whether the institutional Discourse on the website and webpages was transparent enough for first-generation students to learn what to expect and what was expected of them as WU students. This not-so-simple question required a multifaceted research approach to answer.

Although my findings generated data on the technology use, website practices, and situated identity development of continuing-generation and first-
generation students attending WU, my focus was on the experience of the first-generation students. Findings showed that first-year college students attending WU used various forms of technology and the Internet, as well as the institutional website and webpages, as tools in constructing their identities and to understand the institutional Discourse. In addition, although there had been some consensus on the descriptors used to describe the situated identity of a college student, there were also some remarkable differences between the ways first- versus continuing-generation students considered themselves in that moment in time as college students. After gathering comparative data in the early stages of the study, my focus for the latter half of the study was specifically on the first-generation participants to understand their the identity development and how they made meaning of the messages on the three identified websites – UC, UH, and the CLAS.

While the first-generation participants were constructing their college student identities, they were, at the same time, enacting and constructing identities in other areas of their lives. Some of their other roles or identities carried over into their college student identity. This was not to say that everything was going smoothly, as the first-generation students had to find ways to be good daughters, as well as responsible college students.

First-generation college student participants faced challenges as they tried to negotiate the institutional Discourse on the WU website and webpages but found other ways to gain the information they were seeking. The challenges affected the construction of their situated identity of a college student. At times,
these challenges impeded their ability to feel like they belonged to the students addressed through the messages on the website, as well as to the larger WU community, who were sometimes considered other than themselves.

At times, first-generation students in this study felt marginalized by the WU Discourse. This was particularly the case when the first-generation student relied on the website as a primary tool or resource. In the midst of the first-generation students’ challenges, WU had provided tools that proved to be highly regarded by the students. The personalized Internet portal, MyWU, and the Major Maps were the breadcrumbs (i.e., a technical term used in webpage design to allow the viewer to find their way back from one page to the landing page) the students found most helpful in finding their way through the WU Discourse. The data also revealed that the first-generation participants recognized hidden elements the website messages that were embedded within the messages – the hidden curriculum within the WU Discourse.

Retrospectively, I could not have anticipated how the insights gained from the data related to the WU staff members. I had anticipated learning more about the students’ experience with the website messaging, but I had not anticipated learning anything more from the staff than the professional standards to which they adhered as they designed and maintained the various websites and webpages. In fact, situated identity was also a factor for the staff members. The staff members’ multiple identities played a significant role in the design and messaging on the webpages.
Participant demographics and national data. In Chapter 2, I presented current data on the characteristics and postsecondary enrollment trends of first-generation college students. Research found that being a first-generation college student was the most significant disadvantage affecting student’s success and persistence (Choy, 2001). First-generation college students also have lower rates of immediate enrollment in college than students whose parents had attended some college of. Data was also presented that illustrated lower 4-year university enrollment and retention rates of first-generation students as compared to students whose parents had not graduated from high school and those of students whose parents had earned a Bachelor’s degree or higher. The 4-year institution enrollment difference between first-generation students and those whose parent had earned at least a bachelors degree was 38% while the difference between first-generation students and students with parents who had earned their first-professional was 57% (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2008b). Just as striking were the difference in 4-year institution four-year attrition rates between first-generation college students and students whose parents had earned at least a bachelors degree. The percentage difference between the two groups was 22.6% (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2008a). Although the participants in this study were, in some regards, representative of the national composite of first-generation college students, the data also showed that they were among the exceptional group of first-generation students who had beaten the odds to even be attending a 4-year university. They were in certain regards exceptions to the
national norms. The National data collected by Staklis (2010) was used to create a profile of first-generation college students attending postsecondary institutions in the U.S. In some ways the participants in my research study were very much aligned with this National profile. The participants in my study were primarily Hispanic or Black, female, low-income, attending a college in their home state, qualified for financial aid, and working at least 18 hours of community service per month. While the study participants reflected the National profile in several ways, they were also exceptions to the extant data. To begin the participants in this study were all 18 years of age whereas previous literature indicated that first-generation students tended to be between the ages of 19-24 years of age. Not one of the 23 study participants, inclusive of the four focus group participants had children unlike the National data that reflects a higher proportion of first-generation students have children. All of the study participants had graduated from high school and all four of the focus group participants graduated from high school with at least a 3.0 cumulative grade point average. Of the four focus group members all four lived on campus in the residential hall in the Fall and had not worked more than 20 hours per week. The National data however reflected that most first-generation students did not live in on-campus housing and were most likely to work around 20 hours a week in a job. My findings contribute additional details about first-generation college students and their perspectives that adds to the existing literature.

**A working-class foundation.** Two key themes emerged from the data relating to the situated identity construction of the first-generation college
students – *responsibility* and *hard work*. The two themes are rooted in their working-class identity.

Class cultures are created specifically, concretely in determinate conditions, and in particular oppositions. They arise through definite struggles over time with other groups, institutions and tendencies. Particular manifestations of the culture arise in particular circumstances with their own form of marshalling and developing of familiar themes. The themes are *shared* between particular manifestations because all locations at the same level in a class society share similar basic structural properties, and the working class people there face similar problems and are subject to similar ideological constructions…. As these themes are taken up and recreated in concrete settings, they are reproduced and strengthened and made further available as resources for others in similar structural situations…. Despite their similarity, it is a mistake, therefore, to reduce particular social forms and regions too quickly to the obvious central class dynamics of domination and resistance. They have simultaneously both a local, or institutional, logic and a larger class logic.

The larger class logic could not develop and be articulated without these regional instances of struggle, nor could, however, these instances be differentiated internally and structured systematically in relation to other instances and the reproduction of
the whole without the larger logic. The state school in advanced capitalism, and the most obvious manifestations of oppositional working class culture within it, provide us with a central case of mediated class conflict and of class reproduction in the capitalist order. (Willis, 1977, pp. 59-60)

Willis’ words reflect the shared ideology of Olivia, Paris, Rose, and Violet. They all shared similar perspectives that had been passed on to them from their parents. Paris, Olivia, Rose, and Violet had been raised to believe that they were responsible young women and that hard work paid off, a prevalent theme in the data. Their working-class worldview, shaped by parents who worked in labor related industries, is reflective of Paris, Olivia, Rose, and Violet’s primary Discourses. This was a value learned at an early age, which had become a lens through which they viewed the world and others. These themes are particularly relevant given that the four students were students of color and that three of the participants were first-generation U.S. citizens, English Language Learners, and students. It is also relevant given this study was conducted the southwest region of the country, where persons of Mexican heritage are facing unparallel challenges based on their identity.

“Give me some credit for being responsible”. The first-generation participants in this study felt a tremendous sense of responsibility, a theme throughout the data and a factor in the participants’ identifying as college students. From the data collected from the questionnaire eight of the first-generation participants selected this adjective because they felt it was a adjective
that described how they felt about themselves at that moment in time; however, it is also significant that none of the continuing-generation students selected this adjective as describing the way they felt about themselves at the time. First-generation students are concerned about the many responsibilities they have to address in their freshman years, e.g. getting a job; handling their housing, financial aid, and other WU business matters; doing well in class; making new friends; staying connected to their family. As they are taking on many new responsibilities students are also trying to learn many new Discourses. The first-generation students are living and working in a new environment and learning new ways of acting, thinking, speaking, and engaging with others, all while carrying the responsibility for making sure they meet all of the business matters that must be addressed. They had never before had this level of responsibility and they could not ask their parents, who had never experienced college, for advice.

This theme was further substantiated in findings from the focus group meeting and one-on-one interviews. Although Olivia, Paris, Rose, and Violet shared that they felt a considerable amount of financial responsibility as college students, they also felt a responsibility toward their families, friends, communities, and themselves. They were committed to making the most of their college experience and they did not want to let down any of the supportive individuals in their lives. It was because of their own and supportive others’ efforts that Olivia, Paris, Rose, and Violet could attend WU. Olivia, Paris, Rose, and Violet understood that attending college and earning a degree was also meaningful for many other individuals.
These findings expand previous work that first-generation college students are at a disadvantage because of their first-generation status (Choy, 2001). The first-generation students carry a significant sense of responsibility and indebtedness to others. In addition, the first-generation students were more challenged to demonstrate multiple literacies while learning the multiple Discourses at work. They were going to have to put forth more effort to maintain their status as college students. What I did not find in any of the data was that they were unwilling to take on the additional responsibilities required of them as college students – taking care of the business matters, working at a job, helping support their families, continuing the provide community service to others. This was a new perspective for me in that the students were not rejecting the additional responsibilities in as much as they were glad to know as a result of their taking on these additional responsibilities and by working hard they were able to help their families now and hopefully in the future. The participants in this study viewed themselves as emerging young adults, full of ambition, celebrating their new independence, and motivated to achieve their baccalaureate degrees.

“I think it's more of … a lot of hard work: You have to put in your effort”. The second theme found in the data was that of hard work. Olivia, Paris, Rose, and Violet referenced hard work when the spoke of what it took to get admitted to WU, regarding what it would take to remain at WU, and when speaking of the descriptions others shared as it related to the college experience. There were instances when participants referenced what they perceived as messages in the WU website that made them believe college was going to be
about hard work. One example from the data occurred during the focus group meeting as Olivia and Violet were discussing their excitement over their Major Maps yet a sense of trepidation at the work it would entail to complete all that it listed. They knew it was going to be hard work but this was their goal, earning a college degree, and they were committed to the work it would take to make it happen. They also referred to hard work as it related to handling the multiple responsibilities of being a college student – working a job, going to class, being involved in co-curricular activities, making friends, and studying. It was a significant factor as they considered the college experience.

The fact that they had been admitted to WU was not due to their intellectual abilities but in the work they had put forward to earn the 3.0+ grade point averages they earned in high school. Participants shared that anyone who was willing to work hard and wanted to pursue a college degree should be afforded that opportunity. They did not see their academic accomplishments as anything innately exceptional but as the result of long hours of hard work. Olivia shared it this way:

Olivia: Out of those/ because/ you don’t HAVE to be smart I think/ to go anywhere// I think as long as you try hard enough/ and GET what you're doing/

Interviewer: Okay/

Olivia: You'll get places//
Interviewer: So do you think it was your WORK/ that got you here/ to the university/

Olivia: Yeah// I personally believe that/ so//

Rose, Violet, Paris: Yeah/ yes/ yeah [simultaneously]//

Even as they had each earned the high academic honors, including merit scholarships, participants did not attribute their academic honors to intellectual abilities but to hard work.

The students were confident in their intellectual abilities but they would not speak about their academic accomplishments in a boastful manner. To the contrary, they were very conscious about treating others fairly and not belittling others. They would not treat others as inferior because they knew from whence they came and were sensitive to the plight of others who were working as hard as they could to do their best. Tangential to this the data was data collected from the questionnaire reflecting that the larger participant group left the attribute of intellect to that of the college professor. The data seems to reflect a separation from language this is used on the WU website, which correlates the word scholar with the undergraduate population. It would appear given the data that this message is not one that would be received by the students in this study as they did not identify themselves or others students in this regard.
Shared Themes across Western University First-generation Students and Western University Staff Members: “My Sister,” “My Mother,” “My Father,” “My Brother”

The two themes shared between the focus group participants and the WU staff members were the importance of family and their experience with multiple identities and multiple Discourses. With the exception of Ed and Di, every other participant made reference to a family member as influential to the construction of their situated identities. Every student mentioned at least one family member, including at least one parental figure, as playing a significant role in who they were as college students. Amy and Maggie, the WU staff members, also spoke of the influential roles of at least one parent in their lives.

As first-generation college students, the participants were unable to gain insight from the perspective of a parent with an insider’s perspective. What their parents were able to offer was support and encouragement to attain a college degree; their parents, however, offered a worldview from a working-class perspective. In the midst of the parents’ admonitions about the challenges of a working-class life and the challenges of going to college Olivia, Paris, Rose, Violet and knew that their parents supported their decision to attend WU. They knew they mattered to their parents and belonged to a strong, accepting family unit. In the absence of material items, what mattered most were their relationships with others.

Of the four, both Olivia and Paris had younger siblings. Both served a parental role to their younger siblings. Paris had served as an interpreter for her
Spanish-speaking parents at parent/teacher conferences for her younger brother. She had decided to become a teacher because of her brother. She was paying the monthly cellular phone bill, on a family plan, for her cell phone and that of her 16-year-old sister. Paris was doing for her younger sister what her older sister had done for her. Likewise, Olivia decided her major because she wanted to be able to take care of her family; she wanted to be able to help her brother go to college. She called him her “baby” and did all she could to help her mother raise him. Both Rose and Violet also mentioned their siblings as influential factors in the construction of their college student identities.

Amy made reference to several of her family members – her mother, father, and sister – when discussing her role as the marketing specialist for UH. Amy was a first-generation college student and was similarly situated to the students in this study. Amy understood what it was like to be a first-generation student whose parents could not offer any insight into the experience. Amy drew upon her experiences in other salient identities and used them to help her construct and enact her situated identity as the marketing specialist for UH. As Baumeister and Leary stated (1995) “both actual and potential bonds exert substantial effects on how people think” (p. 505). The family bonds experienced by the students and by the staff affected the way in which each individual interacted with others. The strength of the family bonds was a driving and sustaining force in their lives, in contrast to the assertion of Vincent Tinto that a pre-condition for success was that a student “separate from one’s native culture”
Family, for the participants in this study, was the wind in their sails and their anchor.

Multiple Identities, Salient Identities, and Multiple Secondary Discourses

As they constructed the situated identity of a college student participants were simultaneously constructing and enacting other salient identities that had been constructed within other new secondary Discourses. Olivia was also constructing the identity of a business student enrolled in the college of business at WU. Paris was constructing her identity as a college student while constructing her identity as an elementary education student in the college of education at WU. The data reflect this was true of all of the students – first-generation and continuing-generation students.

These findings further strengthen the finding that counters the assertion made by Tinto that a student must “separate from one’s native culture as a precondition for persistence in appropriate or applicable experiences of minority students” (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005, p. 418). Each of the students maintained their connection to their native cultures; Paris and Olivia, in fact, celebrated their Mexican culture. Both Paris and Olivia remained very involved in activities and service projects that serve Hispanic youth in the local community.

Whereas the students were in the early stages of building their situated identities, the staff members had been constructing their situated identities since they began their employment with WU. Just like the students, the staff enacted multiple salient identities constructed in multiple secondary Discourses. Ed and Di were both staff members within the UC, website administrators, supervisors of
other staff, and committee members, but each in different capacities and from different positions within the same Discourses. Amy and Maggie also enacted multiple salient identities in multiple Discourses while enacting their situated identities as website developers.

These data illustrate Amy’s continued identification with her first-generation college student identity further counters Tinto’s claim that “first-generation students, movement into the middle class requires a ‘leaving off’ and a ‘taking on,’ a shedding of one’s social identity and the acquisition of another” (London, 1996, p. 22). Amy continued to claim her first-generation identity as a part of her set of multiple identities. Moreover, it was because of Amy’s identity as a first-generation college student and her resultant literacy in the Discourse of first-generation college students that Amy was able to incorporate the specific needs of first-generation college students into the messaging in the UH website.

For some students, learning to become literate in the multiple secondary Discourses was a challenge. Rose struggled to become literate in the WU Discourse. Rose would often struggle to find the correct words as she spoke during the focus group meeting. When she was unable to find the correct words, Paris, Olivia, and Violet would either provide her with the correct word or complete her thought. Rose acknowledged that the only webpage she was able to connect with was the MyWU web portal. The only other document she had made a connection with was her Major Map – a comprehensive document that outlined the course she had to take for her major. As Gee (2011a) concluded,
The key to Discourses is “recognition”. If you put language, action, interaction, values, beliefs, symbols, objects, tools, and places together in such a way that others recognize you as a particular type of who (identity), engaged in a particular kind of what (activity), here and now, then you have pulled off a Discourse (and thereby continued it through history, if only for a while longer)…. If it is not recognizable, then you’re not in the Discourse. (p. 35)

Rose was still working to become recognized as a particular kind of who doing a specific kind of what – demonstrating to others she was a WU college student. Even as a currently enrolled student of WU she was still not yet able to demonstrate literacy in the WU Discourse – she was walking the walk but not able to talk the talk; Olivia, Paris, and Violet were, however, able to demonstrate literacy in the WU Discourse, calling things by their given WU names (e.g. Major Maps, MyWU, prerequisites), as well as doing things that WU students were supposed to be doing (e.g., getting involved in student groups and organizations). Rose was still an outsider to the ways of being a WU college student, whereas Paris, Olivia, and Violet had become insiders.

It is not enough that an individual carries out the actions of a particular identity to show literacy in the Discourse. One must also be able to speak the language and use the tools to be literate. Rose was the only one in the group of student participants who did not identity someone other than a family member to provide her with some insight into what it was like to be a college student. Rose
recognized the limits of her family’s ability to provide an insider perspective. They had only been able to share information and insight from their perspective as outsiders. The only other resource she had identified to gather information was the WU website, yet her experience with this tool proved to be overwhelming. Rose’s attempt to show that she belonged to the group of WU students was not successful.

**Western University Websites and Discourses**

The students’ use of the WU website and the Discourses found within the messages on the WU website were the second element of my study. There were four major themes that arose from the data: the Discourse WU website is designed for insiders; students’ use the WU website as a resource in constructing their situated identities; students experienced challenges in using technology and using the website as a tool or resource as students as they constructed their situated identities; staff identities have a significant role in website design.

**Western University website: Ways of being.** The WU website is a large website with many different links and resources located on the homepage; however, the Discourse of the WU website is designed for insiders. The WU website begins the level of Discourse in a way that situates the reader as having some familiarity with the WU Discourse, the way the university is organized, the way WU operates, and the WU lexicon. Olivia, Paris, Rose, and Violet had some information about what it was to be a college student but they understood very little about the organization of WU. They had used the website in very limited ways because of their lack of information. They had become familiar with certain
offices and departments (e.g., financial aid, UH), but knew little else about the universities organization. Much information about the structure of the university was located in various places on the WU website, yet because of their lack of familiarity with the Discourse, Olivia, Paris, Rose, and Violet were not even aware that there were other units within the university that they might find helpful or of interest. In essence, they did not know that they did not know that they should know what they did not know. Conversely, all of that information was available on the website but because of the way the website was constructed it remained closed to outsiders who did not understand the WU Discourse. Even as Olivia, Paris, Rose, and Violet sought information they were unable to find it without creating their own way into the Discourse. The students were surprised to find out that WU had a law school, that the UC provided diverse types of support, and that the colleges had their own websites within the University’s website. Discovering the depth of their ignorance about the University’s website was disconcerting to the all four young women.

What was also identified in the data was that this was not just a phenomenon of first-generation students but of many other individuals. Maggie had shared that she too had not known that there were colleges within her university and she grew up on a college campus. She also spoke from her experience as a website developer who had the challenge of designing the CLAS core website when she knew that students did not identify or even understand what being in a college meant – she was resolved to accept that “Nobody comes to CLAS”. The students developed a sense of belonging to WU but not to their
colleges, yet it was through their colleges that they were earning their degrees. The WU website privileged those who had some context and pre-disposition to the Discourse. The website was also designed for those individuals who had an identity that already incorporated elements of the WU Discourse. The website did not easily accommodate those whose identities were uncertain or ambiguous. This proved to be problematic for the first-generation students. The exception was the UC which had incorporated “I don’t know” into their website as a keyword identifier.

Students used the WU website as a tool in constructing their situated identities. Most students used it in combination with other tools and resources; however, for some, it was their only resource that could provide information from an insider’s perspective. In their efforts to understand what the college experience was going to be like they used the website for a variety of information. Paris had used the website to look up faculty members whose courses she was going to in so that she could get information about them and how she should prepare in advance to be a student in their courses.

Interviewer: And so/ when you go to/ if you were to look for something/ what do you use the [WU] website for/ Do you type in keyword search/ you use a keyword/ so you just type in what you're looking for/

Paris: Yeah//
Interviewer: So/ tell me some of the things you've looked for//

Paris: Well/ I remember before school started I looked up my teachers/ So/ like I went to the directory and then I put down their names and then like/

Interviewer: Did you/

Paris: Yeah/ and then I like looked at their pictures and saw how they look like and read what they had/

Interviewer: Okay/ And why did you do that/

Paris: Because I wanted to know a little bit about them BEFORE school started/ cause what if they're like really STRICT/ I was like/ well/ then/ I'm going to bring this STUFF to scho[ol] to class/

Interviewer: Okay/ and how would you gauge if they were strict/

Paris: I don't know/ their faces maybe/

Interviewer: Okay/ But if if if they look strict/ you'd say you bring what to class/

Paris: I would bring my notebook and my laptop/ my planner and my pencils/ so be prepared//
Interviewer: Okay/ Just in case/

Paris: Yeah/

Interviewer: And then what else did you do/

Paris: That's pretty much it/

Paris was not simply looking for information. Paris was looking for clues and information about her faculty members, their demeanor, and their expectation of students who would be taking their classes. She wanted to know as much as possible about what to expect before she arrived to their classes so that she would know how to act, what to bring, and how to be as a student in their class. She was using the website to construct her college student identity – more than a tool to gather *knowledge for action* and *knowledge to inform*. Olivia and Rose also expressed that they had also used the website as a tool in understanding the ways of being a WU student.

All of the students – first-generation and the continuing-generation students – used this WU-developed web portal, *MyWU*. Although this web portal was a website they would have to use throughout the course of their matriculation at WU, all of the participants found this website to be one they would choose to visit daily. The participants visited this webpage to stay abreast of the *knowledge for action* that was provided in this Internet based environment. The language and approach to this web portal was very straightforward, using a predominant number of Germanic terms or student-friendly specialized words and phrases. For instance next to several of the links are small representative icons, almost like clipart, that depict the link they are next to whereas there are few other icons used...
on the website. Also the word “My” is featured on 13 different links within the landing page personalizing each of the categories to the students. Additionally the phrases “MyStuff” and “MyApps” are used which. Both phrases are fairly common in the English language, but among students “MyApps” is particularly current language given the current technological pension for specialized applications, or “Apps” for Smartphones and iPhones. There are only a few Latin terms and those are reserved for areas that are auto-populated with university announcements. This web portal was specifically designed with the students’ needs in mind; it was because of the nature, type, and presentation of the information that the students visited this web portal as often as they did.

The fact that the students preferred this website also speaks to their desire to engage with webpages specifically designed for them. The students were able to interact with a web portal that greeted them by name, contained personal information about their particular enrollment status, updated them on any outstanding tasks to which they needed to attend, provided specific information directly from their college (e.g., their academic advisor’s name and contact information, academic status, progress to graduation, grades earned), and information on resources they might need, personally. Most of the information on this web portal was knowledge for action with some knowledge to inform, but the majority of the information was customized and specific to the individual student.

Due to the fact that the students found the Discourse of the University’s main website to be challenging, they worked around their challenges by using website features that allowed them to explore on their terms. This practice
supports the findings by Hamid and Lejeune (2009) that when an individual was
challenged by the use of technology, he or she would respond in one of four ways
(i.e., acting on the situation, adjust oneself, catharsis, distancing). Indeed, the
participants used all four of these strategies. The use of the keyword-term search
was one such way participants utilized to overcome obstacles. By acting on the
situation Olivia, Paris, Rose, and Violet had all resorted to using the keyword
search to find the information for which they searched, as it allowed them to use
the website on their terms. In the group, the cathartic moments of sharing their
individual challenges in using the website helped them to discover that they had
all experienced the same challenges, to greater or lesser degrees. Their catharsis
fostered an environment in which the group to further bonded and began to
advocate for change on behalf of other students who might benefit from their
challenged experiences. These types of strategies helped the students to work
around or through their challenges in constructing their situated identity as they
used both technology and the WU website as tools and resources.

Students also used other Internet sources that allowed them to create
connections to other students, foster a sense of belonging to the WU community,
and gain insider information. Participants used other user-facilitated websites that
used more Germanic and everyday language (e.g., Facebook Class of 2015
Group) to help them construct their college student identities while interacting
with other students. The students were looking for tools and resources that
allowed them to interact with other individuals on their terms, using their phrases,
while still gaining their desired insight. In so doing, they were engaging in new
literacy practices – using the Internet in ways that blended the functional use of
the web with the social networking capabilities of user-created websites with the
traditional *knowledge for action* and *knowledge to inform* found on the
institutional websites. They were then able to use the knowledge and insider
information gained through these interactions to facilitate their literacy in the WU
Discourse.

**The architects.** Ultimately, one of the most significant findings in the data
was the degree of influence the website designers’ set of multiple identities had in
the construction and development of the WU websites and webpages. Like the
brick-and-mortor architects referenced earlier in this chapter, the work of the
website designers has a lasting effect on those who experience their websites and
webpages (and ultimately, the University itself); problems arise, however, when,
as in the case of one of the CLAS departments, this important responsibility is
treated as a part of the catch-all phrase found in many employee contracts: “other
duties as assigned.” As Amy and Maggie both shared, there is a blend of skills,
experience, and training that every web designer should have as a part of their
identity. I would add that this description would also include demonstrating an
understanding of or a familiarity with multiple literacies.

The staff interviews proved to be invaluable as they added another
dimension to this research study – one that had not been considered prior to the
data analysis. As each of the staff members shared their experiences in designing
and developing their respective websites and webpages, they designed them with
multiple audiences in mind. Although the website designers worked with teams to
design their college or departmental website and webpages, it was the website designers’ identities that were found throughout the website design and content. Amy – who had been a first-generation college student, who was the daughter of a disabled mother and a technologically challenged father, who identified herself as an artist and a designer, and who had a multimedia background – incorporated her set of multiple identities into the existing UH website. As Amy anticipated redesigning the UH website, she planned to incorporate other new elements, many of which were reflective of her other multiple identities. It was the combination of Amy’s set of multiple identities, her ability to make decisions and influence the ultimate design, and the clarity of her departmental identity that allowed for the design and development of a website and webpages that drove Amy to incorporate photographs that were visually “pretty”, text that provided a high degree of detail while incorporating the business enterprise and legal parameters, and messaging designed to allow the students to envision themselves as members of the WU community.

Maggie, on the other hand, was working under a different set of circumstances, and as such, the CLAS website reflected more of her circumstance and less of her identity. Working within a website design not of her making, her role was more functional than creative, she was situated within a unit of the college that was considered as a pass-through unit, and she was situated within a college that had an ambiguous identity. The CLAS website reflected Maggie’s situated identity and the identity of the CLAS. As such the core CLAS website
was not designed to tell the students what it was to be a CLAS kind of student or any other kind of student – it was simply a pass through to other websites.

**Implications and Recommendations**

The findings of this study are reflective of the Discourses within WU, and as such, are reflective of the students and staff who are members of the WU community; there are, however, elements of this study that can provide a framework for others who find themselves within the Discourse of higher education. I believe David Bartholomae (1985) best established the context for my recommendations:

> Every time a student sits down to write for us, he has to invent the university for the occasion – invent the university, that is, or a branch of it, like history or anthropology or economics or English. The student has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community. Or perhaps I should say the various discourses of our community, since it is in the nature of liberal arts education that a student, after the first year or two, must learn to try on a variety of voices and interpretive schemes – to write, for example, as a history critic one day and as an experimental psychologist the next; to work within fields where the rules governing the presentation of examples or the development of an argument are both distinct and, even to a professional mysterious…There is, to be sure, an
important distinction to be made between learning history, say, and learning to write as a historian. A student can learn to command and reproduce a set of names, dates, places, and canonical interpretations (to ‘tell’ somebody else’s knowledge); but this is not the same thing as learning to thing (by learning to write) as a historian. The former requires efforts of memory; the latter requires a student to compose a text out of the texts that represent the primary materials of history and in accordance with the texts that define history as an act of report and interpretation. (pp. 135,145)

Bartholomae’s words capture the expectation established by all Discourses. Those who would be members of the Discourses should be able to do more than simply repeat facts, figures, and a catch phrase. There are, within colleges and universities, multiple Discourses and new students entering into those new Discourses at least every semester.

**Start here.** This study described in detail the experiences of first-year and first-generation college students who were beginning their freshman year at WU, how they made meaning of the messages on the WU website and webpages, and how the messages effected their construction of the situated identity of a college student. A problem students experienced in making meaning of certain message was that they were unable to access the messages. The students did not know where to find the messages to make meaning of the messages. Olivia, Paris, Rose, and Violet all found ways to discover the information they were seeking, but they
used round-about ways to do so. First-generation students may be relying on the best-guess-estimate information of family members and others, who, despite good intentions, cannot provide more than what they have viewed or experienced as an outsider to the Discourse.

College and university administrators should consider designing a separate website for incoming freshman that introduces them to the Discourse. If the website were to be constructed from the premise that students enter the university with little familiarity in the Discourse, all students would be situated equally. First-generation college students who would enter the undergraduate college experience without having guidance from a parent would have access to information they might otherwise miss if they had to find it on the full website. All students might benefit from such a website, as it might fill in gaps of information other students might have.

The data showed the phenomenon of being unfamiliar with the organization of the institution was the experience of both first-generation and continuing-generation students. Even Maggie, whose father was a college employee and who spoke at her own college graduation, did not know that there were colleges within the University or from what college she graduated. Creating a mechanism that fostered a connection between the students and their college would increase the students’ familiarity with their academic home, as well as help the better understand their identity as a college student in that particular college at that particular institution. This website for freshmen could provide that opportunity.
You are here. These data demonstrated that students use the websites and webpages with which they had either become familiar through their own use or because they were led to the website or webpages through another link in an email or a letter they had received from their school or college. As Bartholomae (1985) stated, sometimes Discourses are “mysterious” (p. 135) even to the professionals, and they work within the Discourse.

I recommend that, as has been done with virtual campus tours of the brick-and-mortar spaces and locations, colleges and universities create virtual organizational tours. Creating a virtual organizational tour would allow particularly first-year and first-generation college students to understand the way the university is structured and the relations between the units, colleges, and schools. By incorporating other media elements – students’ stories, photographs of staff members, videos of University members interacting – institutions could educate students, or others, on the types of people who are members of the various units. The students would then have a better idea of the various Discourses found within the institution. This virtual tour would also allow students to have a starting point for understanding the institution, its organization, and its Discourses.

Lexicon. There are particular words, terms, and phrases that are particular to the Discourse of the college or university. As Rose shared her experiences with the website she struggled as she tried to remember the specific lexical word used at WU rather than use the term as she had known in another Discourse. Websites and webpages have multiple audiences and multiple uses – multiple Discourses –
and as such, individuals may find it challenging to understand the specific meaning attributed to certain specialized or institution specific words. There should be greater attention paid to the way in which students and others are introduced to the lexicon of the Discourse.

With the rise in Internet use by students and colleges and universities, there is a greater capacity to begin introduction students to the institutional *ways of being* before students the have set foot on campus to begin taking courses. The development of a lexical list of terms and phrases that are commonly used within the institution and within the colleges and various departments might prove a helpful resource. Another option would be to do as the UC staff had done and incorporate the meaning of the terms and phrases in the text. A *vocabulary list* would be easiest to find, knowing that students and others may use the index or the keyword search option to find the information. This could also be located within the freshman website.

The WU website favored the use of highly specialized language and Latinate words, which had the effect of closing access to only those readers who understood the Discourses that were being employed. Although the use of specialized language projected the kinds of individuals who were a part of the institutional Discourse and the kinds of things that are happening within the institutional Discourse, it also has the effect of closing the institutional website from those who are outsiders, which can include the students the institution has worked so hard to recruit.
Additionally, more colleges and universities are developing and recruiting more students to enroll in their strictly online degree programs. As such, more students are using the Internet and institutional websites as their only form of contact with the institution. As online students their only interactions with the institution would be through the institutional website. These students in these programs would have certain perceptions of the institution based solely on what they experience through the college or university’s website. Given the fact that many decisions about college enrollment can be made from the comfort of the student’s home, I recommend that college and universities be aware of the possible alienation that could occur due to the design, photographic images, and text – all multimodal elements that convey messages to the viewer.

“Just for me”. The advent of the Internet and the increased use of social networking media have changed the way that colleges and universities interact. This study further elucidated the ways in which the students used the Internet, the WU website, and other social media websites as they constructed and enacted their college student identity. Olivia, Paris, Violet, and Rose were all drawn to the students’ stories found on the UC website. They wanted to stay on the website to read the stories, and with some coaxing, agreed to proceed with the meeting.

Colleges and universities are increasingly using institutional websites and webpages to connect students to one another and to the institution. With that in mind, colleges and universities might consider providing students with opportunities to interact with one another in social-networking-like environments, which allow students to have interactions in low-stakes environments. Rose was
hesitant to contact individuals because she did not know all of the correct terms and phrases. In a social environment and in a discussion with other students, Rose and other students might feel more comfortable asking WU-related questions.

WU created a web portal that had been used by all of the students in this study. The students reported that they really liked using the MyWU website because once a student logged on the majority of the information displayed was specific to that student. The schools and colleges also recognized the value and access this webpage allowed. Given the fact that this is a highly trafficked web application, it might be beneficial to the student to add an area that incorporated links to various resources for first-year and first-generation students. It might also be helpful to provide information on some of the challenges students have faced as they transitioned into college so that they did not feel alone in their experiences. In the process of reviewing the webpages the only resources for challenges on the websites involved those experienced when a student was in academic trouble. In the midst of saying that the college experience is about the development of the whole student, the personal side of their experience – inclusive of the challenges experienced by first-year and first-generation students - is often non-existent, at least on the WU website and webpages.

**Staff diversity.** At WU, there are disparate levels of support provided for the various websites and webpages. There are units that have entire website-design teams committed to the upkeep and maintenance of their websites and other units in which the administrative assistant or another is given the duty of maintaining the website in addition to the other duties they fulfill. Although there
are software programs that allow individuals to simply place text in an already designed template, he or she is still creating the message. It would behoove colleges and universities, as well as the various schools and departments, to ensure that the staff members have some type of training that educates them to look beyond their own Discourse. Current findings showed that the webpage designers are the architects, builders, and conveyers of the institutional Discourse, and as such, they are the invisible gatekeepers and greeters. In as much as the technology has revolutionized communications practices, Discourses still remain a gate-keeping mechanism. There should be more consideration given to those who hold the keys to the gates and who will be the first to greet the students.

The written register, much like the formal public-address register, is thus the utmost mode of communication in the *mass society of strangers*. It is a product of need; it is there for a purpose. Conversely, since language evolved as an oral tool, initially in immediately obvious contexts, dealing with immediately obvious topics and tasks, involving face-to-face communication among small groups of intimates who shared much of the pragmatic presuppositions about their universe and its social and motivational structure, an inescapable conclusion is that in the evolution of language, the pragmatic mode was the *earlier type* of human communication, while the syntactic mode is a later outgrowth from it. (Givón, 1979, p. 231)
Historically text had been the communication method used by strangers and oral language had been the communication method for those who were intimately familiar with one another – a small community of individuals who share values, belief, and practices. Technology has changed the way that communication takes place, and the boundaries that were once in place have changed. Today, strangers communicate orally and face-to-face through video-conferencing, and intimates communicate through text-messaging. People are connecting in ways once unheard of and creating communities of Discourse although they may never have met in person. Separately or in combination websites, the website architects and Discourses have the capacity to restrict access to the newest and most illiterate members of the Discourses. Colleges and universities have changed the way students become members of their campus communities. Through the use of the same technology, institutions have the capacity to introduce the first-generation college students to the Discourse so as to make them feel they are at home, as though they belong, and as though they are insiders – not outsiders – to the Discourse.

When I had a chance to show Olivia the college of business website, we visited the webpage for incoming college of business freshmen. As her eyes set upon the text that was emblazoned across the top of the page she exclaimed with great joy.

Interviewer: What is this new admit there? Do you know/ have you ever looked at it before/

Olivia: No// I have not/ Oh/ look that's ME//
Interviewer: That's you/

Olivia: Oh/ my goodness/

What she saw was a message that simply said “Welcome Class of 2014”. Olivia knew they were speaking directly to her: She belonged and the message was received.
References


Table 6.3. Among 2003-04 beginning postsecondary students who started 
at 4-year institutions, percentage who attained a degree by June 2006 
and, for students who did not attain, last year enrolled, by student and 
institutional characteristics. Retrieved November 12, 2010, from Table 
Files Descriptive Summary of 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary 
Students: Three Years Later: 

Journal of Marriage and Family, 52, 1015-1024.


Attributions: “can help us to understand what causes people to behave the way they do” (Munton et al., 1999, p. 8). As Heider (1968) stated, “In everyday life we form ideas about other people and about social situations” (p. 5). Individuals interpret others’ actions and predict what they will do under certain circumstances. When understanding an attribution, there are three elements that should be defined: “the cause (C),” “the outcome (O)” and “the link between C and O” (Munton, Silvester, Stratton, & Hanks, 1999, p. 9).

Breadcrumbs: a list webpages listed in order from the landing page or the first page from which the currently displayed page originates. The webpage names are listed in sequential order and the individual can click on any of the pages names to return to that page. Breadcrumbs are most often across the top of a webpage under the toolbar.

Core Identity: who an individual is as an everyday non-specialized individual (Gee, 2008, p. 156)

Multiple Identities: an organized sets of social relations and the behavior expectations associated with those positions; and it calls these internalized representations ‘identities’”(Stryker 1994p. 16).

Primary Discourse: is what gives us our initial and often enduring sense of self and sets the foundations of our culturally specific vernacular language (our “everyday language”), the language in which we speak and act as “everyday” (non-specialized) people, and our culturally specific vernacular identity. (Gee, 2008, p. 156)

Secondary Discourse: is acquired or learned in communication with and “in association with and by having access to and practice with” others, “non-intimates”, or “secondary institutions (such as schools, workplaces, stores, government offices, businesses, or churches)” (Gee, 1989b, p. 22) or “interest-driven groups” (Gee, 2011a, p. 202). Secondary Discourses are public Discourses that help create public identities.

Symbolic Interaction: the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings. The peculiarity consists of the fact that human beings interpret or “define” each other’s actions instead of merely reacting to each other’s actions. Their “response” is not made directly to the actions of one another but instead is based on the meanings which they attach to such actions. Thus, human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation or by ascertaining the meaning of one another’s actions. (Blumer, 1969, p. 79)

Webpage: an electronic document located on a website that contains various types of information.

Website: The “home” of many webpages created and placed on the Internet by an individual or organization. Located on the World Wide Web, websites allow for many types of interactions between an individual who visits the webpage and the owner of the website – an individual or organization.
Dear Research Volunteer:

My name is Carol A. Sumner. I am a doctoral student under the direction of Dr. Kris Ewing in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. I am conducting a study to understand first year college student development and how college freshmen make meaning of university website messages. This research will study students enrolled in Summer [Transition] Program and explore how students define what it is to be a college student, how students have used the [WU] website to gather information about [WU] after they made the choice to attend [WU] and how they make meaning or relate to the messages on [WU] web pages. The first phase of the research will involve responding to a questionnaire. The second phase of the research will involve a smaller group, specifically first generation students, participating in focus group meetings where we will discuss the responses gathered from the questionnaire and discuss the participant’s web site use.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve your completion of a questionnaire. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. It is okay for you to say no. Even if you say yes now, you are free to say no later, and withdraw from the study at any time. Nonparticipation or withdrawal from the study will not affect your grade in any of your classes or your participation in the Summer [Transition] Program. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. You must be over the age of 18 years to participate.

Although there is no direct benefit to you, possible benefits of your participation may shape how college and university administrators, faculty members and others understand freshmen college student development and how colleges use and design general web pages as well as those targeted at college freshmen. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation in this research project.

We will not use any method to identify you during the course of your participation. Your responses will be anonymous. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name or any other identifying information will not be known or used. All tapes and transcripts of data will be kept in a locked cabinet and will be erased five years from the end of the study.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the researcher: Carol A. Sumner, (XXX) [XXX-XXXX]. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

Please indicate if you wish to be part of the study.

___________________________                     _________________________
Signature                     Date
APPENDIX C

RESEARCH STUDY FOCUS GROUP LETTER
Dear Research Volunteer:

My name is Carol A. Sumner. I am a doctoral student under the direction of Dr. Kris Ewing in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. I am conducting a study to understand first year college student development and how college freshmen make meaning of university website messages. This research will study students enrolled in Summer [Transition] Program and explore how students define what it is to be a college student, how students have used the [Western University (WU)] website to gather information about [WU] after they made the choice to attend [WU] and how they make meaning or relate to the messages on [WU] web pages. The first phase of the research will involve responding to a questionnaire. The second phase of the research will involve a smaller group, specifically first generation students, participating in focus group meetings where we will discuss the responses gathered from the questionnaire and discuss the participant’s web site use and. The researcher will also be conducting non-interactive observations of the focus group participants.

If you are a first generation college student I would like to further ask your participation in a focus group meeting where we will discuss the results of the questionnaire and study participants’ web site use and understanding of web site messages. I would also like to observe you during the Summer [Transition] program – during one of your classes and during a Friday activity.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. It is okay for you to say no. Even if you say yes now, you are free to say no later, and withdraw from the study at any time. Nonparticipation or withdrawal from the study will not affect your grade in any of your classes or your participation in the Summer [Transition] Program. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. You must be over the age of 18 years to participate.

Although there is no direct benefit to you, possible benefits of your participation may shape how college and university administrators, faculty members and others understand freshmen college student development and how colleges use and design general web pages as well as those targeted at college freshmen. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation in this research project. Please note that I cannot guarantee the confidentiality of anything that is shared in a focus group setting. The focus group will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do not want the focus group to be taped; you also can change your mind after the focus group starts, just let me know. The audiotape and field notes will not be used in any way to evaluate your performance in the program.

We will not use any method to identify you during the course of your participation. Your responses will be anonymous. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name or any other identifying information will not be known or used. All tapes and transcripts of data will be kept in a locked cabinet and will be erased five years from the end of the study.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the researcher: Carol A. Sumner, (480) [XXX-XXXX]. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the Arizona
State University Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

Please indicate if you wish to be part of the study.

By signing below you are agreeing to participate in the focus group. You agree that your responses and feedback given while participating in the focus group can be used for research and you give permission for us to use the materials as data in our study.

___________________________                     _________________________
Signature                                                            Date

By signing below, you are agreeing to be taped.

___________________________                     _________________________
Signature                                                            Date

555
APPENDIX D

RESEARCH STUDY INFORMATION LETTER: STAFF
Dear Research Volunteer:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Kris Ewing in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. As part of my coursework in the doctoral program I am conducting a research study to understand first year college student development and how college freshmen make meaning of university website messages. I will be interviewing new incoming freshmen to understand how they have used the [WU] website to gather information about [WU] after they made the choice to attend [WU] and how they make meaning or relate to the messages on [WU] web pages.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve participation in an interview. The interview will take between one and three hours to complete and will be audio recorded. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. It is okay for you to say no. Even if you say yes now, you are free to say no later, and withdraw from the study at any time. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. You must be over the age of 18 years to participate.

The possible benefits of your participation in the research are that you - and other university administrators, faculty members, and staff - will gain a better understanding of new incoming college freshmen identity development and how they make meaning of web site messaging which may also help as you develop future web page information for your institution/department. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation in this research project.

The interview will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do not want the interview to be taped; you also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know. All tapes and transcripts of data will be kept in a locked cabinet and will be erased five years from the end of the study.

I will not use any method to identify you during the course of your participation. Your responses will be anonymous. Once work is collected, all names will be replaced with non-identifying markers (case numbers or pseudonyms). The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name or any other identifying information will not be known or used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the researcher: Carol A. Sumner, (480) 246-9991. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

Please indicate if you wish to be part of the study.

Sincerely, Carol A. Sumner and Dr. Kris Ewing
The Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University
APPENDIX E

CAMPUS A PILOT STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE
Please respond to each of the following questions.

1. From the list of adjectives/descriptors below select the top five adjectives/ descriptors (from the list provided) you believe best represent the each of the following: a high school student, a college student, a college professor. (You can only use each word once.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a high school student</th>
<th>a college student</th>
<th>a college professor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>2.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>5.</td>
<td>5.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The list of adjectives/descriptors:

- Aggressive
- Hardworking
- Passionate
- Ambitious
- Highly qualified
- Pressured
- Apathetic
- Imaginative
- Realistic
- Committed
- Independent
- Researcher
- Competitive
- Individualistic
- Responsible
- Concerned
- Inquisitive
- Scholarly
- Creative
- Inspiring
- Sensitive
- Critical
- Intellectual
- Social
- Dedicated
- Involved
- Stellar
- Dependent
- Leader
- Studious
- Driven
- Mature
- Talented
- Engaged
- Motivated
- Top ranked
- Exceptional
- Openminded
- Use to being successful
- Experienced
- Optimistic
- World renowned
- Friendly
- Outstanding

2. List of adjectives/descriptors you used for the previous question, which are adjectives or descriptors that would best describe a successful college student and that of an average college student (select all that apply but you may only use each word once).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Successful college student</th>
<th>average college student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Of the adjectives/descriptors you selected in the previous question, which are adjectives or descriptors that would best describe you now (select all that apply).
4. Of the adjectives/descriptors listed above – which are adjectives or descriptors you would like to represent you in the future (select all that apply).

5. Of the adjectives/descriptors listed above, what are five characteristics or you attributes that you believe colleges are looking for in potential college students.

6. Do different types of colleges or universities look for different types of students? How do you know this?

7. How did you come to know what colleges are looking for – through what media or people?

Demographic Information:

Your date of birth: _/__/_____ (example 09/12/1980)

Have either of your parents (mother or father) earned a bachelor’s degree?

__Yes__No
Please respond to each of the following questions.

1. From the list of adjectives/descriptors below select the top five adjectives/descriptors (from the list provided) you believe best represent the each of the following: a high school student, a college student, a college professor. (You can only use each word once and you may add words that you may not see on the list but you feel are appropriate – positive or negative.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a high school student</th>
<th>a college student</th>
<th>a college professor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>5.</td>
<td>5.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The list of adjectives/descriptors:

Aggressive
Ambitious
Apathetic
Committed
Competitive
Concerned
Creative
Critical
Dedicated
Dependent
Driven
Engaged
Exceptional
Experienced
Friendly
Hardworking
Highly qualified
Imaginative
Independent
Inquisitive
Inspiring
Intellectual
Involved
Leader
Mature
Motivated
Openminded
Optimistic
Passionate
Pressured
Realistic
Researcher
Responsible
Scholarly
Sensitive
Social
Stellar
Studious
Talented
Top ranked
Use to being successful
World renowned
Outstanding

2. List of adjectives/descriptors you used for the previous question, which are adjectives or descriptors that would best describe a successful college student and that of an average college student (select all that apply but you may only use each word once and you may add words that you may not see on the list but you feel are appropriate – positive or negative).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>successful college student</th>
<th>average college student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Of the adjectives/descriptors you selected in the previous question, which are adjectives or descriptors that would best describe you now (select all that apply and you may add words that you may not see on the list but you feel are appropriate – positive or negative).

4. Of the adjectives/descriptors listed above – which are adjectives or descriptors you would like to represent you in the future (select all that apply and you may add words that you may not see on the list but you feel are appropriate – positive or negative).

5. Of the adjectives/descriptors listed above, what are five characteristics or attributes that you believe colleges are looking for in potential college students. You may add words that you may not see on the list but you feel are appropriate – positive or negative.

6. Do different types of colleges or universities look for different types of students? How do you know this?

7. How did you come to know what [WU] was looking for in potential students (brochures, [WU] staff, website, etc.)

8. Since you have been admitted to [WU] what [WU] web pages do you visit? How often do you visit them?

Demographic Information:

Your date of birth: ___/___/_____ (example 09/12/1980)

Have either of your parents (mother or father) earned a bachelor’s degree? ___Yes ___No
APPENDIX G

RESEARCH STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE
Please respond to each of the following questions.

1. From the list of adjectives/descriptors provided below select the top five adjectives/descriptors you believe best represent each of the following: a high school student, a college student, a college professor. (You may only use each word once. You may add adjectives/descriptors that you may not see on the list that you think are appropriate – positive or negative.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a high school student</th>
<th>a college student</th>
<th>a college professor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>5.</td>
<td>5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your added adjectives/descriptors</td>
<td>Your added adjectives/descriptors</td>
<td>Your added adjectives/descriptors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The list of adjectives/descriptors: (Refer to this list for questions 1-6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academically aggressive</th>
<th>Exceptional</th>
<th>Involved</th>
<th>Reliable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accepts criticism</td>
<td>Experienced</td>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>Financially secure</td>
<td>Mature</td>
<td>Respected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambitious</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Money conscious</td>
<td>Responsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apathetic</td>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>Motivated</td>
<td>Scholarly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committed</td>
<td>Frustrated</td>
<td>Nonchalant</td>
<td>Sensitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>Hardworking</td>
<td>Open-minded</td>
<td>Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerned</td>
<td>Highly qualified</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>Stellar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>Imaginative</td>
<td>Outspoken</td>
<td>Studious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Takes initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>Individualistic</td>
<td>Passionate</td>
<td>Talented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinker</td>
<td>Innovative</td>
<td>Prepared</td>
<td>Thoughtful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated</td>
<td>Inquisitive</td>
<td>Pressured</td>
<td>Top ranked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent</td>
<td>Inspiring</td>
<td>Procrastinator</td>
<td>Use to being successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driven</td>
<td>Intellectual</td>
<td>Ready</td>
<td>Well rounded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td>Intellectual</td>
<td>Realistic</td>
<td>World renowned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Of the list of adjectives/descriptors, which are adjectives or descriptors that would best describe a successful college student and an average college student? Select all that apply but you may only use each word once. You may add words that you may not see on the list but you feel are appropriate – positive or negative.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>successful college student</th>
<th>average college student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
3. Of the list of adjectives/descriptors, which adjectives or descriptors would best describe you now? Select all that apply and you may add words that you may not see on the list but you feel are appropriate – positive or negative.

4. Of the list of adjectives/descriptors – which adjectives or descriptors would best describe how you would like to be represented 3 years from now and 10 years from now? Select all that apply and you may add words that you may not see on the list but you feel are appropriate – positive or negative.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3 years from now</th>
<th>10 years from now</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Of the list of adjectives/descriptors, what are five characteristics or attributes that you believe colleges are looking for in potential college students. You may add words that you may not see on the list but you feel are appropriate – positive or negative.

8. Of the list of adjectives/descriptors, what characteristics or attributes do you believe [WU] is looking for in potential college students? Select all that apply and you may add words that you may not see on the list but you feel are appropriate – positive or negative.

9. Do different types of colleges or universities look for different characteristics in students? If so, why?

10. How do you know what [WU] was looking for in potential students? (brochures, [WU] staff, website, etc.)

11. Please share what sources you have used to gather information about [WU] (i.e. campus visits, brochures, specific [WU] web pages, parents, friends, counselors, etc.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before you were admitted</th>
<th>Since you have been admitted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. Since you have been admitted to [WU] what [WU] web pages do you visit or use? How often do you visit or use them?

13. What has been your most used and most preferred source for getting information about [WU]? Why?

14. Do you visit any other websites or web pages related to the college experience (i.e. other college or university websites, financial planning for college, etc.)? If so what sites and how often?

Demographic Information:

566
Your date of birth: _/_/____ (example 09/12/1980)

Have either of your parents (mother or father) earned a bachelor’s degree?
___Yes ___No
APPENDIX H

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL
Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. As you know, I am Carol A. Sumner from Arizona State University and am conducting a study to understand first year college student development and how college freshmen make meaning of university website messages.

As a reminder, your responses will remain anonymous and you will not be identified in this study. Once the data are collected, all names will be replaced with non-identifying markers (case numbers or pseudonyms).

I would like to use a recorder today to help in my note-taking, but if at any time you would like for me to turn off the recorder please let me know. I am going to turn the tape recorder on now, ok?

Part I
Potential Prompts:
1. See themselves as:__________________________
2. Believe high school is different from college in what ways:________________
3. First impressions of college will come from:________________________
4. Might believe college is:________________________________
5. Believe faculty members will be:_______________________________
6. Think a college student is:____________________________________
7. Believe classes will be:________________________________________
8. Thinks a successful college student is/does:________________________
9. If I did _________ as a high school student people would think/say.
10. As a college students if I did ______ people would think/say.
11. Believe people believe that as college students people expect they should act like_____

Part III
What websites do you visit? Why do/did you visit these particular webpages?

Part III
Lead student thought the process of going from the ASU homepage to the three selected websites – University Housing, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and University College. The students will be asked to share their thoughts out loud – using the talk-out-loud protocol – as they experience each web page. Participants will be asked to share:
- What do you see?
- What do you think it means?
- How do the messages resonate with you or how do they make you feel?
- Who are they addressing? Who are they speaking to?

Part IV
Discussion of data gathered from study participants.
APPENDIX I

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW: STUDENTS
1. I want to ask you some questions about you and your family
   a. Birthplace – parents, you, siblings
   b. Educational level of parents
   c. Parent occupation
   d. Primary language at home
      i. Do you speak the language outside the home?
      ii. Do you read anything in your home language?
      iii. Have you ever visited the [WU] website in Spanish?
2. How far does your family live from your campus
3. How did you share information about university experience with your parents?
4. Who is the most influential person in your life? Why?
5. How do your parents expect you to act now that you are in college?
6. What do you think your faculty members expect of you as a college student?
7. What do you think they think about you being a college student?
8. If you were developing a webpage for incoming college freshmen what would you include?
   a. Information about college life expectations
   b. Things to know
   c. How should they act
   d. What would they need
   e. What should they do
   f. Who should they meet
9. Did you feel like you belonged when you were planning to come to [WU]?
10. Is there a difference between being a student on the Tempe campus of [WU] and being a student at West campus?
11. Do you have any concerns about being a college student?
12. Still using markers same as in H.S.? (Olivia)
13. Do faculty teach differently than H.S. teachers – visual aides, PowerPoint?
14. Have they used technology in class?
15. What is the difference between H.S. classes and college courses?
16. Do the faculty treat you differently that your H.S. teachers?
17. Do you act differently here than you do in H.S.?
18. How do people respond to you asking questions in class?
19. How do you feel about your major?
20. What does it mean to be a business major/education major?
21. How do people respond when you tell them you are a business/education major at [WU]?
22. What groups were you a member of in H.S.?
23. What groups are you a member of now?
24. Since you have been here at [WU] have you had someone to give you a funny look or say something to you based on something you were doing?
25. What behaviors are good behaviors for a college student?
26. What behaviors are bad behaviors for a college student?
27. What key words do you use when you search for something on the [WU] webpage?
28. If you were to need to get help with a paper for your English class what words would you use to describe this need in a web search?
29. What terms do you use to type into the keyword search is you were looking for some information
APPENDIX J

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW: STAFF
Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. As you know, I am Carol A. Sumner from Arizona State University and am conducting a study on I am conducting a study to understand first year college student development and of university website development/messaging.

As a reminder, your responses will remain anonymous and you will not be identified in this study. Once the data are collected, all names will be replaced with non-identifying markers (case numbers or pseudonyms).

I would like to use a recorder today to help in my note-taking, but if at any time you would like for me to turn off the recorder please let me know. I am going to turn the tape recorder on now, ok?

I have several questions I would like to ask regarding the website you

1. Would you please share how you have been involved with the web page development for your college/unit?
2. What is the purpose of having the website available
   a. do you have any specific goals or outcomes/ do you want them to do something
   b. how do you determine if your goals have been met
3. Who develops each element of the page
   a. text – the language and the messages
   b. photos
   c. layout and design
   d. links to other pages
4. What planning goes into developing the website/freshmen web page?
5. How often is the website updated – time from design to implementation
6. Who has final editorial say
7. Is there a predisposed format that must be followed
8. Is there particular institutional policies you must follow regarding
   a. messaging or words you must use/should use
   b. layout and design
      i. Is there a reason as to how the links are listed on the page – an order
         1. Links on left
         2. Text in middle
         3. Links in the middle
   c. audience
9. Is there a particular rationale behind the way the information is presented
   a. the particular order of the pages
   b. the content and the design elements that are presented together
   c. the order in which the information is presented
10. Who are your targeted audience members?
11. Why have differentiated pages for freshmen and other students? Do you know how that came to be – separate pages for freshmen and others?
12. When you envision your freshmen audience what do you picture?
13. What are characteristics come to mind when you envision of a college freshman?
14. Do these characteristics differ when considering students who would be in UC versus another college/school? If so what are the differences?
15. What knowledge do you believe incoming freshmen have of the university experience? What misconceptions?
16. Do you believe incoming freshmen have misconceptions about what it is to be a college freshman? Do you address these misconceptions on your web page?
17. Do you see differences between freshmen and other populations in their actions and thoughts?
18. Do you make different considerations for each group when designing your web pages?
19. Have you ever been surprised by a question that a student may have had that you have later added to your web page?
20. What has been the most surprising thing you have experienced as it relates to your website?
21. Have you had to work differently when addressing your web audience versus when you work with students in person?
22. Do you track the number of visits
23. What data do you collect about users and their use of your websites?
24. If you had a student, an incoming freshmen, that went to your page what would you want them to walk away from feeling or thinking?
25. If you did a keyword search or if students were to type in keywords what words do you think would trigger bringing up your [college/department]?
Observer: 

______________________ Location/Scene

Date: _____________ Time: __________ Activity:

Participants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visual Map of Setting</th>
<th>Observational lens:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Situated Identity formation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Field Notes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Things I saw</th>
<th>Things I thought</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX L

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

APPROVAL
To: Kris Ewing  
ED

From: Mark Roosa, Chair  
Soc Beh IRB

Date: 07/07/2010

Committee Action: Exemption Granted

IRB Action Date: 07/07/2010

IRB Protocol #: 1007005295

Study Title: The Power of the Virtual Pen and the Development of College Freshmen: Exploring the Impact of University Website Messaging on the Situated Identities of First Year College Students

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(1)(2).

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects’ financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.
have a vision. engage the world. let university college help you

Kevina’s story

By making a decision to attend University College, you are no longer undecided – you have made a clear and important choice to explore your options in a thoughtful and productive way. Choosing a major is an important decision that involves many factors, including self-understanding, research, reality testing, and the desire to excel. As a University College student, you will have classes, tools, resources and people there to help you as you chart your path towards graduation, your future career, and your dreams. Begin your journey.

University College homepage.

University College second-level page.
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences homepage.

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences second-level webpage.
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences third-level webpage.

University housing homepage.
University Housing

Living on campus gives you access to a variety of services and resources within each campus community. These services and resources allow you to further your academic success while empowering you with independence and responsibility in a supportive environment. Studies show that students who live on campus transition with more ease to university life, graduate faster, and are more involved with the university than students who live off campus.

To gain the most from your first year, freshmen are expected to live on campus. Housing for upper-division students, graduate students, and families; the majority of the residence halls are designated for freshmen. We encourage you to live on the campus of your major to receive the most from your academic experience.

A new world—a new home. Get the full college experience!

2009-2010 Academic Year Housing Process

Apply for the 2010 Spring Semester

University Housing

2010-2011 Academic Year Housing Process

• Incoming Freshmen
• Transfer or Upper-Division Students
• Current Resident Renewal
University housing third-level webpage.