Examining the Skills, Attitudes, and Perceptions of Developmental Writing Students at a Midwestern Private College

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Examining the Skills, Attitudes, and Perceptions of Developmental Writing Students at a Midwestern Private College

Abstract
Postsecondary degree-granting institutions recognize that students lack necessary academic skills, but the characteristics of this at-risk population have not been as clearly identified. As well, the value of remedial programs that serve this at-risk population need to be investigated.

The survey instruments for this study were developed by the researcher. The purpose of the study was to examine the skills, attitudes, and perceptions of basic writers of a remedial writing course Academic Skills Center (ASK 060) at a private Midwestern college. Specifically, this study identified the value of the remedial writing program related to perceived level of competence and academic performance. The freshmen survey items included perceived levels of competence compared to GPA, before and after completing the course. The senior survey was comprised of two open-ended questions evaluating the course, both positively and negatively, as students reflected on its value to their academic career. As well, GPAs and writing samples for both groups of seniors were compared to assess value of the program. A total of 291 students from ASK (n = 25), former ASK (n = 15), and non-ASK seniors (n = 251) participated.

The study produced four primary findings. First, higher perceived levels of competence were significantly correlated to higher GPAs for freshmen before and after completing the remedial course. Second, GPA comparisons between former ASK and non-ASK seniors were significantly correlated with non-ASK seniors possessing higher GPAs. Third, the majority of former ASK students indicated that grammar usage and proofreading were the two most valuable skills retained and used throughout their academic career while the majority indicated that learning writing styles was not beneficial. Finally, when scored writing samples of former ASK and non-ASK seniors were examined, no significant differences in scores were indicated by the data.

Keywords
remedial teaching, literacy programs, educational evaluation, college students, academic skills

Disciplines
Higher Education | Rhetoric and Composition

Comments
- A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty of the University of South Dakota in partial fulfillment for the degree of DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
- Dr. Lisa Hazlett, Committee Chairperson
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EXAMINING THE SKILLS, ATTITUDES, AND PERCEPTIONS
OF DEVELOPMENTAL WRITING STUDENTS
AT A MIDWESTERN PRIVATE COLLEGE

by
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B.A., Dordt College, 1983
M.A., The University of South Dakota, 1994

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Division of Curriculum and Instruction
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in the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

William P. Elgersma, Ed.D. Curriculum and Instruction
The University of South Dakota, 2005

Examining the Skills, Attitudes, and Perceptions of Developmental Writing Students at a Midwestern Private College

Dissertation directed by Dr. Lisa Hazlett

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This abstract of approximately 350 words is approved as to form and content. I recommend its publication.

Signed

Professor in Charge
DOCTORAL COMMITTEE

The members of the committee appointed to examine the dissertation of William P. Elgersma find it satisfactory and recommend that it be approved.

Dr. Lisa A. Hazlett, Chair
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

By the turn of the 20th century traditional, public secondary schools in America graduated 22,000 students, 3.5% of the 17 year old population. In 1940, they graduated 1.143 million students, 50.8% of the 17 year-old population, and in 2002, 2.609 million students graduated from public secondary day schools, 72.5% of the 17 year-old population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). Historically, education was an elitist activity that few in America could afford. Those graduating from institutions became leaders in communities and politics, not only because of their ability to articulate their vision through public speaking, but also because of their ability to reinforce this vision through clear and concise writing.

However, even though writing is considered an essential skill for those entering colleges and universities today, a National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) study (2002) revealed that 72%, 69%, and 77% of students in grades 4, 8, and 12 respectively were at or below basic level in writing, 26%, 29%, and 22% were proficient, while 2% of students in each of grades assessed had advanced writing skills.

The National Commission on Writing in America’s Schools and Colleges (NCW, 2003), suggested that grammar, rhetoric, and logic were the basis on which education in America was founded, and these needed to be emphasized once again. With 75% of American high school graduates enrolled in postsecondary institutions immediately after completion of the senior year (NCW, 2003), recognition of necessity of further educational skills to assist job opportunities had become evident. The NCW panel,
established by the College Board, presented a report titled *The Neglected “R”* (2003), which found that less than three hours per week in school was the typical amount of time spent on writing for fourth-grade students, 49% of 12th-grade English students were required to write one-two papers per month of three pages, and 39% were reported to “never” or “hardly ever” receive a writing assignment. Additionally, national implementation of *No Child Left Behind* (2002) as well as state and local accountability assessments had placed an increased emphasis on the demonstration and improvement of skills including writing, which challenged teachers to develop proficient writers (Saddler & Andrade, 2004).

With a majority of colleges and universities in America today recognizing the writing difficulties and inadequacies that many incoming freshmen demonstrate, a remedial approach has been adopted to facilitate their academic success (Maloney, 2003). Depending on the institution, a variety of standards have been utilized to identify the students requiring assistance including a minimum ACT/SAT score, a GPA within a certain range, and essays to prove writing abilities at a minimum acceptable level. The major difficulties and inadequacies of incoming students’ writing include a lack of understanding as to the use of grammatical correctness, syntax, standard usage rules, clarity, employment of voice, and cohesiveness.

Remedial programs vary; some are an eclectic collection of writing workshops, individual tutoring sessions, and walk-in assistance centers. Others maintain a more traditional approach that is instructor led with direct instruction the preferred method of delivery. Many postsecondary institutions, especially larger ones, offer a variety of these
remedial supports to accommodate a range of students (Allen, 1980; Hansen, 2003; Pollington, Wilcox & Morrison, 2001; Reynolds & Bruch, 2002; Shaughnessy, 1977), but the discussion as to what strategies are most effective is ongoing.

Remedial, postsecondary public education in America formally established itself in 1969, when the City University of New York offered local high school graduates free education at all 18 campuses (Maloney, 2003) regardless of their level of academic performance. Because deficiencies were most evident in reading, writing, and mathematics, courses were established to remediate students in those areas.

Recently, former New York city mayor Rudolph Giuliani along with the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York required that all remedial courses be moved to the community colleges by 2001 (Healy, 1998). As well, South Carolina, Missouri, Colorado, and Florida do not permit remedial courses at degree-granting institutions in their states. Georgia, Maryland, Minnesota, Massachusetts, Nevada, Ohio, and Virginia are also considering the same move (Roueche & Roueche, 1999).

As a result of the implementation of these writing programs, a discussion has developed regarding the academic level of students currently enrolling in colleges and universities in America. While admissions standards are set for students in good standing, the term *provisional admittance* has now entered catalogs referring to students who do not meet the minimum standards relative to ACT and SAT scores and cumulative GPA, but do fall into a range where postsecondary institutions believe these students can be successful with additional assistance (Linn, 2001; Maloney, 2003).
Because of writing deficiencies of college freshmen, postsecondary public institutions in America annually spend up to a billion dollars remediating students. The costs include additional basic writing courses, employment of additional instructors and tutors, establishment of writing centers, and extended financial aid because students are unable to graduate on time, according to National Commission Chair C. P. McGrath (NCW, 2003). With budgets being leveraged against student enrollment numbers, college and university administrations are recognizing the potential for increased enrollment as a result of servicing an at-risk population. Therefore, students are admitted on this provisional basis with restrictions and requirements regarding which classes they must attend and pass with a minimum level of competence in order to continue their college or university careers (Boylan, Bonham & White, 1999; Clayton, 1998). Administrations must analyze their potential student population and determine cost ratios to maintain efficiency.

While data appear to endorse the remedial writing courses (Allen, 1980; Maloney, 2003; Rochford, 2003; Shaughnessy, 1977), students eligible for and successful in such courses are less defined. Adelman (as cited by Breneman & Haarlow, 1999), suggested that students who took a greater number of remedial courses had lower graduation rates, and students who required remedial courses in reading had a lower success rate in graduating than those who required courses in mathematics or writing. While data appeared to determine which of the deficiencies was least likely to produce graduates, the perceptions of students relative to their success at college or university, the efficacy of students, and the instructors’ perception of these students’ potential after graduating from
remedial writing courses was less defined. Although developmental instructors agree that attitudes and perceptions of at-risk students are critical to their successful graduation, little research has been done in this area.

Statement of the Problem

Although most institutions set a minimum academic standard based on standardized test scores and cumulative GPA, the focus of this study moved beyond the students’ academic scores and directly examined the students' skills, attitudes and perceptions. The study examined students’ perception of writing ability as opposed to reality of skills demonstrated through course work and survey instruments, self-efficacy relative to writing, and writing levels compared to peers.

The study was conducted at Dordt College, a private, religious college in the Midwest. The students involved in the study were provisionally admitted to the college with one of the stipulations for continued enrollment being a passing grade in a remedial writing course (ASK 060) with no credit received for successful completion of the course. Two surveys designed by the researcher and data collected by Dordt College’s assessment team was used to add to the existing research.

Although the research was limited relative to these perceptions, Pajares (2003) suggested that developing insight into this area would further enhance students’ ability to be successful as well as offering direction to educators for their students.

Research Questions

The research questions to be answered included the following:
1. What level of competence regarding writing do freshmen believe they possess prior to their required enrollment in *ASK 060*?

2. How well does these perceptions correlate to level of competence reflected by course grades received?

3. What level of competence regarding writing do freshmen state they possess after completion of *ASK 060* course?

4. How well does these perceptions correlate to level of competence reflected by course grades received?

5. How do writing skills of senior *ASK 060* students compare to the non-*ASK 060* seniors in the writing portion of the *Dordt College Survey*?

6. Which skills from *ASK 060* were identified as most valuable through their college career by upperclassmen who were enrolled in this class during their freshman year?

7. How do the GPAs of senior *ASK 060* students compare with other graduates?

*Significance of Problem*

The findings of this study are relevant for several different groups in the field of education. These include college or university administrations, admission personnel employed at colleges or universities, instructors of remedial writing courses, and secondary school teachers. Because remedial education has only been formally offered at postsecondary institutions since 1969, typically by way of courses in mathematics, reading, and writing, much of the data available centers on student performance in these

While the research is extensive relative to performance, there is limited information related to students’ perceptions of their abilities and performance when compared to reality collected through valid and reliable research. This study sought to collect data for educators, assist basic writing students, and facilitate secondary school writing teachers. The study also assisted administrations regarding their decisions over remedial monetary allocations, due to its success rate.

Students enrolling in a remedial writing class are typically apprehensive about their writing based on past experience (Daly, 1978). They recognize that postsecondary education may be stringent, but they often fail to make the connection between a remedial writing class and the rest of their college or university career. As a result, begrudging resentment based on contractual stipulations for these at-risk students may make educating them in remedial classes difficult. Stipulations include mandatory attendance, completion of all assignments, weekly meetings with support personnel, a passing grade of C or above to be granted continued attendance, and/or no credit for the class. While these stipulations appear stringent, at-risk students do not always recognize the need for additional help (Hodges, 2001).

Finally, the findings of this study serve as a catalyst to influence secondary schools in their pursuit of writing excellence. In a study that juxtaposed self-concept to self-efficacy, Bong & Skaalvik (2003) recognized that many academic difficulties came from self-concept issues that originated much earlier in a student’s life, and these
difficulties manifested themselves in the area of writing. In an era of standardized testing and the No Child Left Behind (2002) initiative, assisting teachers of writing in recognizing what roles perception and reality have in the lives of their students relative to writing enable them to facilitate their students toward improved performance.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions were utilized to ensure clarity and consistency throughout the study. All definitions that do not include a citation were developed by the researcher for this study.

Basic Writing for College Students [ASK 060]: This course is required for students who scored below an 18 on the ACT or possess a cumulative high school GPA below 2.0. It includes grammatical instruction as well as syntax, usage and styles and types of papers and writing. No credit is given for successful completion of the course. Three sections are offered in the first semester and two in the second, depending on the number of students enrolled. All sections are taught by one instructor possessing at least a master’s degree in English.

Dordt College: A privately funded, four-year, degree-granting, accredited institution that is controlled by a board of trustees that oversees the administration of the college granting primarily undergraduate degrees with a Masters of Education offered at the graduate level. As a private college it may be selective about its hiring practices as well as the recruitment of students. Not every student who meets the standardized testing and GPA requirements may be admitted.
**Freshman:** Any student possessing 0-23 postsecondary course credits earned.

**Instructor:** Any person involved in the educating of students for credit at the postsecondary level. A minimum of a master’s degree is required. In the history of ASK 060 course offerings, no individuals possessing doctoral degrees have taught ASK 060 at Dordt College.

**Junior:** Any student possessing 54-83 postsecondary course credits earned

**Provisionally Admitted:** Admitted to an institution with restrictions as to which courses a student is permitted to take and which courses are required due to low GPA or standardized test scores. Provisional students gain full status when they earn a cumulative GPA of 2.0.

**Public University:** Any publicly funded, degree-granting institution controlled by a board of regents who monitor all of the state’s postsecondary institutions collectively. Depending on the selectivity of the institution, all or the majority of the state residents will be granted admission to the institution if they meet the admission requirements.

**Remediation:** Course work designed to assist the student in learning or refreshing material that was previously taught but not retained or understood by the student.

**Self-efficacy:** the level of confidence that individuals have in their ability to perform specific tasks at an acceptable level.

**Senior:** Any student possessing 84 and above postsecondary course credits earned. (To graduate, 124 credits earned with a cumulative GPA of 2.0 is required.)

**Sophomore:** Any student possessing 24-53 postsecondary course credits earned.
Delimitations

1. This study was designed to examine a specific group of freshmen in an institution that selects its students to attend based, not only on the students’ academic abilities but also their religious principles. Because there was no random selection, all students of ASK 060 were part of the study; therefore, the findings were not generalized to students in similar programs across the United States.

2. The number of students enrolled in remedial courses at Dordt College, 1998-2003, ranges between 33-50 per year. Forty-two percent of these students graduated with a two or four-year degree with less than 20% graduating with a 2 year degree (P.S. DeJong, personal communication, July 11, 2004). Less than 50% of students enrolled in ASK 060 graduated from college.

3. Dordt College is a private, religious college with an affiliation to the Christian Reformed Church. Approximately 55% of the student body has membership in the Christian Reformed Church across North America. Although admission to the college was considered mildly competitive from an academic viewpoint, religious affiliation affects students’ admission. Therefore, the results of this study were limited to this college because of the religious affiliation of the students and the college’s approach to recruiting its students.

4. The fourth instrument was a comparison of grade point averages between graduating ASK 060 students and students who were not enrolled in the course. Recognition that grades were not definitively reliable as an indicator of a person’s ability due to additional assistance, course of study, motivation, etc., meant that this study used
the comparing of GPAs as additional research information to be combined with the other three instruments.

5. Any international or non-native speaking students in remedial classes were excluded from the study. Too many variables that were beyond the scope of the study influenced these students' perceptions; therefore, omitting them added to the reliability of the study.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 included an introduction to the problem, a statement of the problem, the research questions, significance of the study, definition of terms of the study, and delimitations. Chapter 2 is a review of related literature and research related to the perceptions and realities of the abilities of remedial writing students. Chapter 3 includes the methodology and procedures utilized to gather data for the study. Chapter 4 contains the results of the study, and Chapter 5 contains a summary of research, conclusions as a result of the research, and recommendations for further study.
CHAPTER 2
Review of Related Literature and Research

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature and research currently available related to the perceptions and realities of the abilities of remedial writing students divided into the following sections: History of Remedial Courses in America, Criticism of Remedial Programs, Self-Efficacy and Writing, and Summary.

History of Remedial Courses in America

Remediation in America's educational system is not new. According to Breneman and Haarlow (1999), throughout the 19th century questions about whether a course was academically suitable for a postsecondary institution had many college students enrolled in what would later be deemed secondary level courses. The GI Bill passed after World War II, along with the open admissions policies of the 1960s, increased college and university enrollment numbers dramatically. However, the decline of literacy rates first was evidenced in the mid 1960s with a significant number of college students lacking basic skills necessary for academic work. Duckett (as cited in McCusker, 1999) referred to a Post-Secondary International Network study that claimed between 50 and 70% of university and college students in the United States needed remedial and developmental courses.

In 1969, the City University of New York (CUNY) opened its doors to admit, tuition free, any resident of the city of New York possessing a high school diploma. Shaugnessy (1977) acknowledged the 1960s as a time of change culturally, but also
With the advent of the Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968), colleges and universities no longer were able to recruit only the academically elite.

As a result, students who were not adequately prepared for postsecondary education were now granted admission. Although institutions varied with regard to admission policies, requirements, and confidence in the ability of these students to complete the work, by 1975 the City University of New York enrolled 266,000 students, an increase of 92,000 from 1969, when the program was implemented. With this came the decision to remediate students who were not academically able to enter an introductory freshman class in reading, writing, and mathematics (Shaughnessy, 1977).

Previous to this time, little research had been done on at-risk students because few went to universities, and universities were reluctant to admit them. However, by 1995, 78% of U.S. public universities offered remedial or developmental courses including mathematics, reading, and writing (NCES, 2003). A comparative study evaluating changes in remedial education between the years 1995 and 2000 showed a 2% increase to 80% of all public four-year institutions offering remedial education (NCES, 2003).

Almost one-third of all students entering colleges and universities every year were under-prepared, and approximately 90% of this under-prepared group could not expect to graduate without some type of assistance according to Boylan (1999). As well, almost 30% of this group enrolled in one or more developmental course (Kozeracki, 2002). Ill-prepared college students exhibited lower self-esteem, lower self-efficacy, and did not take responsibility for control of tasks, instead directing their focus elsewhere (Visor, as cited in Perin, 2002). As well, when compared to other freshmen, students demonstrated
less motivation in utilizing and applying strategies to facilitate their study skills and exhibited lower levels of intellectual interest (Morrison, 1999). Data from the study indicated remedial education required more than requisite skills in writing.

Addressing students' perceptions, coping mechanisms, and reinforced lack of success were necessary issues for consideration of any future improvement. Future success was jeopardized by the fact that many ill-prepared students did not recognize their inadequacies and failed to use the support systems. For example, a study involving attending supplemental instruction for extra credit found that less than 10% of the at-risk students in a psychology class used the assistance that was offered for extra credit (Reittinger & Palmer, 1996).

A study was conducted by Colby and Opp (1997) to determine who was responsible for the remediation of the students with poor basic skills. The findings resulted in three views. Inadequate high school education including low standards, in addition to little parental concern and support, was the first view. Reaction to this view included making the high schools solely responsible for the remediation of the students. The second view suggested that developmental education belonged outside of high school, in the private sector, at colleges and universities, and in on-the-job training programs.

The third perspective identified community colleges, i.e., two-year institutions, as the place for remediation. With 98% of community colleges offering remedial courses (NCES, 2000), a primary role of community colleges is to educate under-prepared students, thereby alleviating degree-granting institutions the necessity of remediating
students through developmental courses. Because community colleges do not close enrollment, this appeared to be a natural option for developmental education.

While statistics indicated that community colleges addressed the need for developmental education through a variety of course offerings, degree-granting institutions had also acknowledged the need for developmental education. In 2000, 1,880 degree-granting institutions enrolled freshmen. Of this number 500 were public, and 1330 were private. Of the public institutions, 80% offered remedial courses in reading, writing, and mathematics while 59% of the private institutions offered all three. (NCES, 2000).

Criticism of Remedial Programs

Although both two and four-year postsecondary institutions realized that developmental education was a necessity, the fact that courses were offered did not mean that developmental students were successful. Brittenham et al. (2003) in a study of the value of associations between professors, peers, cognitive processing, and developmental students, suggested that the retention rate of students not enrolled in developmental education was less than 5% higher than students enrolled in a developmental education program that included more than instruction in writing. The study addressed the necessity of supporting the students' needs beyond academic courses, including developing social skills, forming relationships with professors and peers, and an understanding of cognitive processing. For critics of developmental education at the postsecondary level, typically those who believed that remediation of students diminished...
the status of an institution, this study reinforced the argument that developmental education was an intangible curriculum that defied assessment.

Maxwell (as cited in McCusker, 1999), argued that developmental courses were not effective if they were “stand alone” courses because they were not cost effective, negatively affected students’ attitudes and expectations, extended graduation dates, lowered students’ self-concepts, and identified students as being at-risk.

Instead, the suggestion was made that these courses be incorporated into the curriculum as program-related with credit to alleviate both the stigma of at-risk and the dilemma of extended graduation date, which negatively influenced student attitude and expectation. Interestingly, when juxtaposed against the previous criticism of developmental education, Maxwell’s analysis indicated that developmental education was still emerging, and the extraneous variables that made up the success of the developmental student had not been completely evaluated. While predictors of success were still being assessed and evaluated because of the relative youth of the developmental movement, the more fundamental issue of physical location of developmental programs continued to be revisited.

The ongoing discussion about where developmental courses would be offered compounded the problem of student perception and attitude. Research showed that being rejected by a degree-granting institution and instead enrolling at a community college where the student was grouped with like individuals who required the same remediation without any connection to a course of study increased the likelihood of a student not transferring to a degree-granting institution (Breneman & Haarlow, 1999). However,
based on the assumption that community college was the correct institution to offer remedial courses, a discussion about whether or not community colleges can fail students who are under-prepared for college classes has recently arisen. Concern centered on students’ psychological well-being. Many students attend community college to access degree-granting institutions through this course of action (Maxwell, 2000). Although students are under-prepared, failing while enrolled in community college restricts their future options academically and vocationally.

While students did not want to enroll in developmental courses because of their perceived loss of self-esteem from being misconstrued as less intelligent, they were unable to perform successfully in a degree-granting institution and were either academically dismissed or withdrew, with perhaps a greater loss of self-esteem. Research showed that mandatory placement provided an avenue where students could remediate and transfer to degree-granting institutions. Therefore, in order to protect their psychological well-being and facilitate their success both in education and vocation, Hadden (2000) suggested that enrollment in developmental courses at the community college level be mandatory.

However, remedial education had recently faced a variety of critics due to length of time enrolled in courses, delay of graduation by enrollment in non-credit courses, and expense (Boylan, 1999). The attitude of educational administrations and political factions forced the CUNY system to change its policy as of 2000 to restrict enrollment of students who had not met the minimum proficiency requirements in reading, mathematics, and writing (Maloney, 2003). Prior to this action in 1998, Massachusetts proposed a
statewide minimum competency test for incoming students, capping the enrollment of freshmen needing remedial courses to 10% of the class and then reducing that number to 5% the following year. The intent of this move was an attempt to improve the credibility of public institutions as well as place the onus for academic preparation for postsecondary education on high schools (Clayton, 1998).

In a study that addressed required remediation of skill-deficient college students, Weissman, Silk, and Bulakowski (1997) concluded that students involved in developmental courses demonstrated improved persistence and grade point average. Another study that focused on developmental students found that over half of the students enrolled in developmental courses completed those courses and had a higher persistence rate than the general student population from the fall semester to the spring. As well, most full-time remedial students enrolled in developmental classes also enrolled and completed college level courses in the next semester (Haeuser, 1993).

**Self-Efficacy and Writing**

Self-efficacy, a relatively recent theory, was defined by Bandura (1977) as individuals’ beliefs that they were capable of organizing and completing a course of action. This belief determines the plans that are made, the effort expended, the level of perseverance exhibited regardless of success or failure, the resilience when undergoing taxing situations, and the level of accomplishment demonstrated.

Self-efficacy focuses on peoples’ beliefs about their skills and abilities. More important than what skills and abilities people actually possess, the belief that a task can be completed because of their skills is the impetus to this theory. In an article
juxtaposing self-efficacy to self-concept as indicators for student success, Bong and Skaalvik (2003) found that strong self-efficacy and positive self-concept allowed students to set higher standards for themselves academically, reduced their anxiety levels, persisted in their academic endeavors for longer periods of time even when they were not successful, and felt better about themselves as both a student and a person.

While this outcome is desirable to any student, the interconnectedness of self-efficacy and self-concept must be established in order to comprehend the value of self-efficacy to the writing process. Students’ education for a large part is shaped on their past. How students perceive themselves as members of the class, where they see themselves as placed in the class, in what classes they think they possess talent, what skills they believe they possess, and how they think they contribute to the well being of others are all issues of perception. Whatever picture was formed was based on a perception of self that was shaped by experience and performance. According to Bandura (1997), regardless of the accuracy of these perceptions, once established, they determined much of the individual’s future development.

Self-concept is people's perception of themselves. The totality of these perceptions influences the actions or lack of action on the part of an individual, and these, in turn, result in shaping personal perception. Self-concept is formed through experiences in an environment and is particularly shaped by environmental reinforcements and significant others. Shavelson’s hierarchical self-concept model (1976) established several areas that were heavily influential in establishing self-concept. Frames of reference or standards was an area where individuals judge their abilities and
achievements against established standards. In this area was also included social comparison, a construct that was a critical source to the development of self-concept.

Next, causal attribution was a theory where people attributed specific factors to their successes or failures. Causal attribution was related to self-concept in that previous successes or failures were related to past self-concept. When these factors arose again, present performance was influenced by past self-concept, thereby influencing future self-concept. Finally, reflected appraisals from significant others suggested that people view themselves as they believed others perceived them. Again, as Bandura (1977) suggested, once the perceptions were established, they determined a great deal of the future, which made reflected appraisals an ambiguous but potentially dangerous area relative to perception (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976).

Unlike self-efficacy, self-concept concerned itself with what skills and abilities people have rather than what they believe they could do with their skills. Self-efficacy focused on individuals' expectations and beliefs about their performance and accomplishments in a specific environment while self-concept perception was influenced by the actual performance of the skills and abilities within that environment (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003).

A number of areas that particularly develop self-efficacy beliefs were suggested by Bandura (1986). While sharing some of the basic tenets of Shavelson’s hierarchical self-concept theory, these had a pragmatic bent to them. Bandura’s self-efficacy research included studies where he found that mastery experience included experiences from the past both successes and failures that strengthened or weakened self-efficacy depending
on the outcome. If an individual was successful in the past and had recently been unsuccessful, the efficacy based on past experiences persisted. If the individual was continually unsuccessful, self-efficacy would wane over time. As well, he discovered that vicarious experience was an area where self-efficacy was gained by individuals through observation of others much like themselves performing a task. If the individuals identified with the model, their development of self-efficacy was much more likely to occur. Finally, Bandura (1986) showed that verbal persuasion, which included persuasion from credible peers or instructors and objective assessment from respected others, and also enhanced self-efficacy. However, if the individual was not successful even though the assessment and persuasion was supportive, the individual was less likely to exhibit positive self-efficacy.

While the similarities between these two concepts appear fairly evident, Bong and Skaavlik (2003) suggested that when focused on self-concept, students compared their academic capabilities in one area to other areas, thus diminishing their self-concept in one area when they excelled in another. However, those students who were focused on self-efficacy did not compare their abilities to others or to other areas.

As indicators, self-concept better predicted anxiety, satisfaction, and self-esteem since it operated from a past schema, while self-efficacy better predicted cognitive processing and actual performance because it was focused on future success (Bong & Skaavlik, 2003).

The issue of self-efficacy and self-concept is inextricably linked when one attempts to rank them hierarchically. Strong self-efficacy and strong self-concept
allowed students to persist longer in difficult tasks, develop higher standards and more challenging goals, and feel better about themselves as students (Paris & Paris, 2001). Although Bong and Skaavlik (2003) suggested that self-efficacy was the positive or negative link to a student’s ability to learn because of enactive mastery experience or vicarious experience, self-concept determined whether a student continued to pursue the course of study. If the student determined that he lacked the requisite skills to complete the task, self-efficacy would not overcome self-concept. While improving self-efficacy was found to be reasonably easy, self-concept was a much more stable perception built over past successes and failures. Changing an individual’s self-concept took much more time.

Like the attitude of persistence, extensive data had been collected on student self-efficacy relative to academic performance. Self-efficacy was a positive link between course work and performance as cited in (Bottomley, Henk, & Melnick, 1997; Faigley, Daly & Witte, 1981; Graham, Wchwrtz, & MacArthur, 2001; Klassen, 2002; Lane, Lane, & Kyprianou, 2004; Lavelle, Smith, & O’Ryan, 2002; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Pajares, 2003; Schunk, 2003).

Graham and Weiner (as cited in Pajares, 2003), extrapolating from Bandura’s (1986) *Social Cognitive Theory*, suggested that academic motivation on the part of students was contingent upon the perceptions that students construed about themselves. Students needed to be motivated to exert effort, to move toward difficult but attainable goals, and to feel self-efficacy about their achievements (Como, 1993; Paris & Paris, 2001). These perceptions determined the academic failure or success of the students.
depending on the type of perception chosen. Students with low self-efficacy, when exposed to difficult tasks, exhibited feelings of helplessness and lowered motivation to paraphrase or synthesize information in their own words (Perin, 2002). Another study that examined students’ beliefs about themselves as writers determined that low self-efficacy relative to writing identified those students who feared writing, doubted their ability, and regarded writing as painful (Lavelle & Zuercher 1999).

Environments that cultivated self-determination, personal satisfaction, and intrinsic motivation typically promoted self-regulated learning, a strategy that emphasized social interaction, motivation, metacognition, cognitive strategies, and task engagement (Paris & Paris, 2001). They suggested that students who engaged in self-regulated learning entered a state of “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Flow was a state of challenge for student’s learning, but not to the level of frustration. This state allowed for intense concentration, optimal learning, and personal satisfaction from the accomplishment. Students with a poor academic history who experienced poor learning outcomes and failed tests and papers demonstrated negative attitudes and behavior with low motivation (Paris & Paris, 2001). The study suggested that if students learned the strategy of self-assessment, they were able to interpret their own accomplishments. With this acknowledgement came an increase in efficacy and perception of ability.

An instrument to test the self-perception of students when they wrote was developed by Bottomley, Henk, and Melnick (1998). Their instrument, *The Writer Self-Perception Scale*, was designed to assist teachers, parents, and administrators in obtaining additional information about students as well as serving to classify students as high,
average, or low self-perception as to their writing. This permitted supporting individuals to identify issues of self-efficacy and make adjustments to improve students’ performance.

In a review of literature related to self-efficacy beliefs, motivation, and achievement in writing, Pajares (2003) suggested three ways of measuring writing self-efficacy. The first assessed students’ confidence in grammatical usage by having them work through specific items and then evaluating their response. The second measurement assessed students’ confidence in completing writing tasks such as term papers and essays, and the third was a change in the scale used to assess confidence in completing the tasks correctly. Instead of a standard five-point scale similar to the Likert, Pajares suggested a 0-100 point scale, which permitted a more concise evaluation of the students’ confidence level. Once these confidence levels were established and students had a better understanding of their own perceptions, then their performance levels could be clarified. As well, when students developed a positive identity through the process of being made aware, they were more willing to acquire new skills to facilitate improved writing (Lavelle & Zuercher, 1999).

The related literature and research revealed the history of remedial education in America, most significantly the recent introduction of remedial courses to degree-granting institutions. The criticisms indicated that disparity between groups regarding who should be responsible for remedial programs, community colleges or degree granting institutions. As well, politicians and academic administrations questioned its value to students and institutions. Conversely, Bandura’s (1977) self-efficacy theory supported
the remedial programs by focusing on student writing performance relative to self-perception, as did Bong and Skaavlik’s (2003) research on self-concept.

Summary

Chapter 2 included a review of the related literature including the history of remedial education, criticism of remedial courses, and review of self-efficacy in writing. Chapter 3 includes the research questions, instruments used for data collection, methodology, and data analysis. Chapter 4 is the findings of the data collection, and Chapter 5 contains a summary of the purpose of the study along with a literature review and a review of the methodology in data collection. Chapter 5 also offers conclusions based on data collected and includes discussion relative to the study as well as recommendations for future study.
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology and procedures that were used to collect data for this study. It includes the methodology for the review of related literature, identification and description of the population, an explanation of the instruments used to collect data, the process of data collection, and data analysis.

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of students as writers compared to the reality of their writing skills, performance on essays and papers, writing habits they have developed, and ability to write relative to peers.

Although the research was limited to these perceptions, Pajares (2003) suggested that developing insight into this area would further enhance students’ ability to be successful as well as offering direction to educators for their students.

The research questions used to guide this study included are as follows:

1. What level of competence regarding writing do freshmen believe they possess before their required enrollment in ASK 060?

2. How well does this perception correlate to level of competence reflected by course grade?

3. What level of writing competence do freshmen state they possess after completion of ASK 060 course?

4. How well does this perception correlate to level of competence reflected by course grade?
5. How do writing skills of senior ASK 060 compare to the rest of the seniors in the writing portion of the Dordt College Survey?

6. Which skills from ASK 060 were identified as most valuable and least valuable by upperclassmen enrolled in this class during their freshman year?

7. How do senior ASK GPAs compare to other graduates?

Before any research proposal could be presented, The University of South Dakota required the researcher to complete a CITI (Collaborative IRB Training Initiative) course for the protection of human research subjects. This course, Social/Behavioral Researcher, was available online through The University of South Dakota. The course was completed on July 17, 2004, and a certificate of completion (Appendix H) was awarded through the University of Miami.

Review of Related Literature and Research

The primary sources used in this research were obtained from the John and Louise Hulst Library, located on the campus of Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa, and the I.D. Weeks Library located on the campus of The University of South Dakota, Vermillion. The related research included journal articles, dissertations, books, and chapters in textbooks. Databases used to identify these resources included the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Dordt College WebCAT, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Dissertation Abstracts International (DIA), Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE), and Internet databases.

The Vice President of Academic Affairs of Dordt College was contacted on August 28, 2004, requesting permission to study skills, attitudes and perceptions of basic
writers enrolled at Dordt College and analyze data collected by the institution relative
to writing proficiencies of graduating students. After receiving consent on September 21,
2004, the IRB (Institutional Review Board) of Dordt College required a brief proposal
(Appendix E) to determine what course of permission to grant. After the committee
approved the study on September 24, 2004, permission from students was included as
part of the survey completion process. Completing the survey indicated their permission.
Data were also collected from the assessment team who annually administers the *Dordt
College Survey* (Appendix D) to all students who have either freshman or senior status.
Data collected is a rubric that assesses writing skills. The registrar at Dordt College was
contacted by email on January 5, 2005, to obtain GPA scores of former *ASK* and non-
*ASK* seniors. A return email granting permission was received on January 7, 2005.

*Population*

Dordt College is a private, religious, liberal arts institution located in Sioux
Center, Iowa with an enrollment of 1,300 undergraduate students. Approximately 89%
of students are American, 10% are Canadian, and 1% are international. Approximately
10% of the American population are from the West Coast (Arizona, California, New
Mexico, Oregon, and Washington), 5% are from the East Coast (Massachusetts,
Maryland, New York, Vermont, and Virginia), and approximately 64% are from the
Midwest (Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota,
and Wisconsin).

Admission requirements for first time freshmen to be accepted in good standing
include a GPA of 2.25 and an ACT score of 18. Students whose high school records
indicate failure to meet admission standards or potential inability to complete academic coursework may be accepted provisionally. Provisional acceptance is granted by the director of admissions based on assessment of transcripts provided. Students entering college with transcripts that indicate low performance in core academic subjects have two semesters to improve their cumulative GPA to 2.0. When the cumulative GPA is above 2.0, students are granted regular admission status. Failure to meet this requirement results in academic dismissal from the college. For students who have been denied admission, no opportunity for appeal is provided.

ASK 060 is a remedial writing course taught in the fall semester to first semester freshmen who have been granted provisional enrollment. Enrollment in ASK 060 is mandatory for these students. One instructor whose educational experience is primarily in grammar and writing instruction teaches both sections with a capped enrollment of 15 students per class. As well, students are supported by T/As who are identified by the English Department of the college as competent writers, with a ratio of 1-3 T/A to students. Students are required to meet with the T/As once a week to remediate writing difficulties that appear in essays they have written.

The population for this study included 29 freshmen automatically enrolled in ASK 060, because ACT or GPA scores were below a minimum level established by the college (18 and 2.25, respectively), and data were collected from 266 seniors. International or non-native speakers, approximately two per year, were omitted as listed in the limitations.

Instrumentation
This study used three surveys and a comparison of cumulative GPAs from former ASK 060 students to non-ASK 060 students who graduated in 2004.

The Freshman Survey (Appendix A) was a new instrument designed by the researcher consisting of 11 questions randomly organized to measure perceptions of ability, writing skills, and self-efficacy as a writer. A Likert scale of agreement ranging from 1-5, where 1 was *strongly disagree* and 5 was *strongly agree*, was used to indicate their response to questions. The freshmen survey was designed to address research questions 1-4, and this instrument was pilot tested on August 16, 2004 with a similar population. No changes were made to the instrument after the pilot test.

The Senior Survey (Appendix B) was a new instrument designed by the researcher consisting of two questions designed to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the ASK course as college seniors perceived it after their college experience. The Senior Survey was pilot tested on August 16, 2004 with a similar population. No changes were made to the instrument after the pilot test.

The Dordt College Survey (Appendix C) was an instrument designed by the assessment team at Dordt College. This team was comprised of three individuals including two with doctoral degrees and one doctoral candidate. This team has collected data since 1994, and have presented their findings at conferences throughout the United States. The instrument was designed to assess academic progress of students as well as providing information about students' spiritual and cultural growth. It utilizes an essay question format where students are required to respond in a 50-minute time block. Expert readers read and scored the essays based on rubrics provided with the instrument.
A phone call was made on August 24, 2004 to the Director of Institutional Assessment asking for permission to use data. Permission was granted on August 24, 2004 during the phone conversation.

The academic progress of students was assessed through a rubric (*Rating Rubric for Student Writing*), and the spiritual and cultural growth was measured by another rubric (*Recognition/Application of Perspective*). This survey was administered to all first semester freshmen and all seniors. While the intent of the survey was to assess growth of students over four years relative to cognitive issues, data from *Rating Rubric for Student Writing* were the information that this comparison was used. Data collected from the *Rating Rubric for Student Writing* of the *Dordt College Survey* were utilized to compare the writing scores of former *ASK 060* seniors to non-*ASK 060* seniors to assess if there was statistically significant difference.

A comparison of GPAs of former *ASK 060* senior students to other seniors was made by requesting GPAs from the Registrar. These two groups were compared to see if there were significant differences in scores. The registrar at Dordt College was contacted by email on January 5, 2005, requesting permission to use the cumulative GPAs of all seniors for the study. Permission was granted through email on January 7, 2005.

_data collection_

The *Freshman Survey* was administered on August 27, 2004, and on December 6, 2004, to students enrolled in *ASK 060* similar to a pre and posttest assessment of freshmen perceptions relative to *ASK 060*. An aide administered the survey after being trained by the researcher to read the instructions as scripted consistently to all groups.
Removing the researcher from the students permitted students to answer freely, thereby increasing the likelihood of honesty of responses. As well, the aide monitored the room and collected the surveys when they were completed. December 10, 2004, was the alternate date for those who were unable to complete the survey on December 6, 2004. On December 10, 2004, one student completed the survey. The researcher contacted two students who were unable to complete the survey on either date and arranged an alternate time. On December 13, 2004, two students completed the survey.

The Senior Survey was pilot-tested on August 16, 2004, and administered to all former ASK 060 students on December 6, 2004. It was distributed by a teaching aide, who had been trained by the researcher to read the directions consistently from a provided script to establish validity and reliability in data collection. The aide read instructions, monitored the room, and collected surveys when completed. Paper was provided for the answers. December 10, 2004, was the alternate date for those unable complete it on the specified date. On that date two students completed the survey. The researcher contacted seven students who were unable to complete the survey on either date and made alternate arrangements. An alternate date of December 13, 2004, was offered, and seven students completed the survey at that time.

The Dordt College Assessment director was contacted through email on September 28, 2004, asking for permission to use data collected through the Dordt College Survey. Permission was granted on September 30, 2004, by telephone. During this phone conversation a request for the writing scores of seniors who had written the Dordt College Survey was made. Scores were sent on March 3, 2005.
Data Analysis

The data from *Freshman Survey* were analyzed by computing means and standard deviation for relevant items. Results of research question number one which examined initial perceptions of freshmen relative to their writing skills before taking *ASK 060* were obtained by calculating the means and standard deviation of items 1-2 and 8-10 of the Freshman Survey.

Results for research question number two, which examined the relationship between initial perception and the grade for the course, were determined by establishing a mean for items 1-2, 8-10 of the *Freshman Survey* and comparing the composite perception mean to course grade using a Pearson product-moment correlation.

Results for research question number three, which examined the perceptions of students' level of competence after completing *ASK 060*, were determined by calculating the means and standard deviation of items 4-5 and 11 of the *Freshman Survey*.

Results for research question number four, which examined the perceptions of students after completing the course to final semester grades, were determined by establishing a mean from items 5-7 of the *Freshman Survey* and comparing the composite perception mean to course grade using a Pearson product-moment correlation.

Results for research question number five, which compared the writing skills of the seniors who were required to enroll in *ASK 060* to the rest of the senior students, were determined by an independent *t* test analysis to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in the mean rubric scores of *ASK* versus non-*ASK* seniors. The data from the *Dordt College Survey* were analyzed with an independent *t* test.
The data from Senior Survey were analyzed by establishing a list of open-ended responses and compiling similar responses. Results from research question number six, which identified skills that students considered most and least valuable from ASK 060, were obtained by listing open-ended responses, compiling like responses, and comparing frequencies and like responses from items 1-2 of the Senior Survey.

Results from research question seven, which compared the GPAs of former ASK 060 students to other senior students, were determined by an independent $t$ test to calculate if there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups.

Summary

Chapter 3 included methodology and procedures for data collection, research questions, literature review, description of Dordt College and the study population, instrumentation, and procedures by which the data were analyzed. Chapter 4 includes results of data analysis and findings of data collection. Chapter 5 contains a summary of the purpose of the study along with literature review and review of methodology in data collection. Chapter 5 also offers conclusions based on data collected and will includes discussion relative to the study as well as recommendations for future study.
CHAPTER 4

Findings

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis. The chapter includes the following sections: Response Rate, Demographic Data, and Research Findings.

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of students as writers compared to the reality of their writing skills, performance on essays and papers, writing habits they have developed, and ability to write relative to peers. The skills, attitudes, and perceptions of *ASK 060* students at Dordt College.

The following questions guided this study:

1. What level of competence regarding writing do freshmen believe they possess before their required enrollment in *ASK 060*?

2. How well does this perception correlate to level of competence reflected by course grade received?

3. What level of competence regarding writing do freshmen state they possess after completion of *ASK 060* course?

4. How well does this perception correlate to level of competence reflected by course grade received?

5. How do writing skills of senior *ASK 060* students compare to the non-*ASK 060* seniors in the writing portion of the *Dordt College Survey*?

6. Which skills from *ASK 060* were identified as most and least valuable through their college career by upperclassmen who were enrolled in this class during their freshman year?
7. How do the GPAs of senior ASK 060 students compare with other graduates?

Response Rate

There were 31 participants for the initial Freshman Survey; however, 25 surveys, 7% of the freshman population, were used. Of the initial group, six participants withdrew from the institution before the second survey was administered. The Senior Survey included 15 participants, 6% of the senior class, for a total of 40 current and former ASK 060 students, approximately 3% of the college’s student population. As well, the GPAs for senior students were requested from the registrar. Data relative to students’ writing skills, previously collected by the Dordt College assessment team, were also used for 266 senior students. Of the survey participants, 87% completed all surveys.

Demographic Data

The study surveys were distributed to present and former ASK 060 students at Dordt College, a Midwest private college of 1300 students. This section provides descriptive information relative to the population that completed the surveys. The group (n = 25) was not randomly selected because all students who completed the surveys were granted provisional admission, meaning that either the students’ GPA or ACT scores were below a 2.0 or an 18, respectively. Provisional status is established before students enroll in the freshman year, and this status is removed after students successfully complete ASK courses. If students fail to complete these courses within the first year, they are academically dismissed from the institution. The former ASK students who completed the survey (n = 15) were enrolled in the course as freshmen and are now in
good academic standing based on cumulative GPA scores of 2.0 and above. The remaining senior population \((n = 251)\) are students who were not required to enroll in ASK because of acceptable ACT and GPA scores.

**Research Findings**

The following section reports the findings of the data collected.

*Perceived Competency Level Prior to ASK060*

Data regarding initial perceptions of *ASK 060* freshmen relative to writing competence are summarized in Table 1. Mean values greater than 3.00 were considered a positive level of perceived competence, while mean values lower than 3.00 were considered negative. Items on the survey pertaining to research question one were designed to evaluate ASK freshmen writing competence by assessing composite means for each survey item and then finding a mean composite score relative to initial perceptions. Respondents indicated a negatively-perceived level of competence as to their academic writing competence (2.84), comfort with peer reading (2.92), willingness to proofread (2.08), and essay test preference (2.04). The composite mean perception \((M = 2.58)\) compiled all of the item mean scores to find an average mean score of central tendency relative to initial perceived level of writing competence. The standard deviation \((SD = .54)\), showed all scores to be within two standard deviations of the mean. Respondents demonstrated negatively-perceived level of competence prior to enrolling in the course \((M = 2.58, SD = .54)\).

Table 1
What level of competence regarding writing do freshmen believe they possess before their required enrollment in ASK 060?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grammar Rules</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>.645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Writing Confidence</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>.800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort with Peer Reading</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to Proofread</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>.909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay Test Preference</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite Mean Perception</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>.539</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Relationship of Initial Perceptions Compared to Course Grade

Data regarding the relationship between initial perceptions and course GPA at the end of the semester compared the composite initial perception mean ($M = 2.58$), (see Table 1) to the course GPA. A Pearson product-moment correlation was performed to examine the relationship. The final GPAs for the course were significantly related to initial perceptions of the students, $r (25) = .46, p = .020$, such that lower initial perception scores were related to lower course GPAs.
How well does this perception correlate to level of competence reflected by course grade received?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial Composite Mean Compared to GPA</td>
<td>.462</td>
<td>.020*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. *p < .05.

Perceived Competency Level after Completion of ASK060

Data regarding perceptions of ASK 060 freshmen relative to writing competence after course completion are summarized in Table 3. Mean values greater than 3.00 were considered a positive level of perceived competence, while mean values lower than 3.00 were considered negative.

Respondents indicated a positively-perceived level of competence as to multiple drafts of essays (3.24), score of B or above on essays (3.24), and work ethic relative to peers (3.52). The composite mean perception (M = 3.33) compiled all of the item mean scores to find an average score of perceived level of writing competence after course completion. The standard deviation (SD = .96) showed all scores to be within two standard deviations of the mean. Respondents demonstrated a positively-perceived level of competence after course completion (M = 3.33, SD = .96), such that students indicated a higher perceived level of writing competence on these items at the end of the semester.
Table 3

What level of competence regarding writing do freshmen state they possess after completion of ASK 060 course?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Drafts of Essays</td>
<td>3.24 1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score of B or above on Essays</td>
<td>3.24 .970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Ethic Relative to Peers</td>
<td>3.52 1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite Perceived Competence</td>
<td>3.33 .960</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Relationship of Perceived Level of Competency after Course Completion and GPA

Data regarding the relationship between perceptions of writing competency after course completion and GPA at the end of the semester compared the composite perception mean ($M = 3.33$), (see Table 3) to the course GPA. A Pearson product-moment correlation was performed to examine the relationship. The final GPAs for the course were significantly related to initial perceptions of the students, $r (25) = .75$, $p = .000$), such that lower perception scores were related to lower course GPAs.

Table 4

How well does this perception correlate to level of competence reflected by course grade received?
Writing Skills Comparison for ASK and non-ASK seniors

Data collected for research question five compared the ASK and non-ASK senior students’ writing skills as reported from the writing portion of the Dordt College Survey by means of an independent t test. Data between ASK and non-ASK students, \( t(266) = 1.52 \), \( p = .13 \), in ideas (.309); organization (.479); voice (.649); word (.208); and sentence (.084), where differences are significant at the 0.05 level indicated one significant difference. Conventions (.037) was significant. The composite writing score comparison indicated that ASK and non-ASK senior students wrote at the same academic level for the Dordt College Survey.

Table 5

How do writing skills of senior ASK 060 students compare to the non-ASK 060 seniors in the writing portion of the Dordt College Survey?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean Responses</th>
<th>( t )</th>
<th>( p )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideas</td>
<td>3.00, 3.30</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>.309</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Identification of Most and Least Valuable Skills

The results of research question six, “Which skills from ASK 060 were identified as most and least valuable by upperclassmen enrolled in this class during their freshman year?” were reported by students \((n = 15)\) in an open-ended format. Respondents’ complete narrative comments for survey question one: “List the writing components from ASK 060 that helped you most.” are presented in Appendix 1. Respondents’ complete narrative comments for survey question two: “List the writing components from ASK 060 that helped you least.” are presented in Appendix 1.

Most Valuable Skills Related to ASK 060

The response most repeated as to the most valuable skills of ASK 060 was the acknowledgement of the value of proof reading skills and grammar usage. Most of the students, \((66.6\%)\) specifically mentioned proof reading and/or grammar usage as being valuable to their writing ability, and writing better papers \((26.6\%)\) was also considered to be important to their writing ability.
The following are examples of responses to the survey question one: “List the writing components from ASK 060 that helped you most.”

“I learned how to write a fundamentally sound paper, I learned about comma placement, transitions, internal documentation. I also learned the value of proof reading. I understood the grammar concepts. I feel I learned so much that through this class, I wouldn’t be getting the grades I am getting.”

“ASK 060 helped me in proof reading other students [sic] papers and also on grammar usage. I now know the do’s and don’ts of writing.”

“Proof reading helped me the most.”

Least Valuable Skills Related to ASK 060

The response most repeated as to the least valuable skill of ASK 060 was the instruction and utilization of essays types. More than half of the students (53.3%) felt that learning specific essay writing styles had little value to their writing ability.

The following are examples of responses to survey question two: “List the writing components from ASK 060 that helped you least.”

“The correct formats to use for each type of paper helped me the least because I only use one type ever.”

“Usage helped me the least.”

“Comma usage (comma splicing) consistency of tenses throughout a paper.”

“I have not been stretched by other professors to use different types of essay. However, in English 101, I wrote the same types of papers as in ASK 060.”
Comparison of ASK and non-ASK senior GPAs

Data regarding the comparison of former ASK to non-ASK seniors student GPAs are summarized in Table 6 by means of an independent t test using the mean GPA scores of both groups. A significant difference between the GPAs of former ASK and non-ASK seniors was indicated t (266) = 3.53, p < .01, such that non-ASK senior GPAs were higher than former ASK senior GPAs.

Table 6

How do the GPA's of senior ASK 060 students compare with other graduates?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean Responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ASK</td>
<td>non-ASK</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>p</td>
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<tr>
<td>GPA Comparisons</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *p < .01.

Summary

Chapter 4 has included the response rate, the demographic data, and the findings of the study. Chapter 5 contains a summary of the purpose of the study along with literature review and review of methodology in data collection. Chapter 5 also offers conclusions based on data collected and includes theoretical discussion relative to the study as well as recommendations for future study.
CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions, Discussion, and Recommendations

Chapter 5 presents a summary of the study and conclusions based on data analysis and research findings. Discussion resulting from research question responses, recommendations for current practice at Dordt College, and recommendations for future study are also presented.

Summary

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of students as writers compared to the reality of their writing skills, performance on essays and papers, writing habits they have developed, and ability to write relative to peers. the skills, attitudes, and perceptions of ASK 060 students at Dordt College. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What level of competence regarding writing do freshmen believe they possess before their required enrollment in ASK 060?

2. How well does this perception correlate to level of competence reflected by course grade received?

3. What level of competence regarding writing do freshmen state they possess after completion of the ASK 060 course?

4. How well does this perception correlate to level of competence reflected by course grade received?

5. How do writing skills of senior ASK 060 students compare to the non-ASK 060
seniors in the writing portion of the *Dordt College Survey*?

6. Which skills from *ASK 060* were identified as most and least valuable through their college career by upperclassmen who were enrolled in this class during their freshman year?

7. How do the GPA's of senior *ASK 060* students compare with other graduates?

**Review of Literature and Research**

In the year 2001, more than three-quarters of postsecondary institutions offered at least one remedial reading, writing, or mathematics course (NCES, 2002). While postsecondary involvement in remediation and support indicated an acknowledgement to the need, research supporting the effectiveness of many academic support programs was limited (Simpson, Hynd, Nist, & Burrell, 1997).

Although institutions continued to debate the effectiveness of remedial programs and cutbacks occurred (Hebel, 2001), recognition of value of academic support was evidenced by the addition of courses such as remedial writing and supplemental instruction. Grunder and Hellmich (1996) suggested that persistence influenced students required to enroll in remedial courses.

Beyond persistence, self-efficacy was a positive link between course work and performance. Students' perceptions of ability to perform tasks successfully directly influenced much of their academic success (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Bottomley, Henk & Melnick, 1997; Faigley, Daly & Witte, 1981; Graham, Wechwrtz & MacArthur, 2001; Klassen, 2002; Lane, Lane & Kyprianou, 2004; Lavelle, Smith & O’Ryan, 2002; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Pajares, 2003; Schunk, 2003).
However, self-efficacy is correlated to self-concept according to Bandura (1986). Those achievements successfully completed in the past led to positive self-concept which, in turn, enhanced higher self-efficacy. Higher self-efficacy combined with positive self-concept caused students to set higher but realistic academic goals, persist longer when involved in challenging tasks, reduce anxiety when accomplishing tasks, and feel better about themselves as people and students (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003).

Methodology

Present and former ASK 060 students of Dordt College were surveyed to determine the effectiveness of the course when compared to non-ASK students. The instruments included the Freshman Survey, the Senior Survey, and the Dordt College Survey, and they allowed the researcher to obtain information on skills, attitudes, and perceptions of current and former ASK students, as well as the writing ability of former ASK seniors when compared to non-ASK peers.

Findings

The following findings are the results from data analysis of the research:

1. What level of competence regarding writing do freshmen believe they possess before their required enrollment in ASK 060?

Initial perception \( (M = 2.58) \) indicated a negative level of confidence on the part of the students prior to completing the course. The negative level of confidence was expected. At-risk students are aware of their deficiencies, and these students were notified before attending Dordt College that they were required to enroll in ASK 060. Being required to attend a class specifically designed to address writing deficiencies with
an unfamiliar group of students who demonstrate the same deficiency reinforces their perception that they are not typical college students.

Some might expect a developmental course to be a learning environment of like-minded individuals, but this is not typically the case. Regardless of students' unwillingness to face the reality of writing deficiencies, being required to remediate at the postsecondary level indicates that the problem still exists. Expectations of superior academic performance by these students based on a change of learning environment evaporate when the letter arrives during the summer months reminding them that they are enrolled in a remedial writing class.

While most students recognized that they possessed writing difficulties, every year a few students are required to enroll in *ASK 060* even though their GPA is acceptable. These students fail to recognize that they are substandard writers, and much of the semester they present an attitude of begrudging resentment for being required to take a developmental course for no graduation credit. Typically their perception of their writing ability is high although they possess definite deficiencies as their ACT scores indicate. These students' attitudes are such that *ASK 060* has little value, and they exhibit little interest in utilizing what they have learned in their writing.

1. How well does this perception correlate to the level of competence reflected by course grade received?

There was a significant correlation between initial perceived level of confidence and GPA scores, $r (25) = .46, p = .020$. Students who lacked confidence in their ability to write well typically possessed lower GPAs than students who indicated a higher level of
competence in their writing and vise versa. Although most students indicated a negative level of perceived competence when the semester began, the expectation was that all students would improve through writing experience. Improvement would also be reflected in GPAs. However, the data show that initial low perceived level of competence is an indicator of GPA performance. For students not demonstrating improvement in GPA scores, Bandura's research (1986) on self-concept as linked to self-efficacy may well explain the results. These students struggled in grade and high school, and upon enrolling in college, their concept from the past influences their writing performance in the present. One course in a college setting is not going to eradicate a negative educational experience that has been reinforced continually. They lack confidence, voice, critical thinking skills, and self-confidence. Before they submit anything, they discredit it because they have come to expect criticism for their work.

3. What level of competence regarding writing do freshmen state they possess after completion of ASK 060 course?

After course completion data indicated positive perceived levels of competence ($M = 3.33$). Through the course of the semester, practice in writing as well as meeting with a teaching assistant to review writing deficiencies and rewrite essays allowed students to feel more confident in their ability to write competently. Although they may have had difficulties with writing instruction prior to postsecondary enrollment, with the number of papers required, they no longer dismiss it as being insignificant.
The college environment may also have influenced their self-perception. Being immersed in an environment that was dedicated to learning may have caused them to focus and actually develop their potential. Moving away from traditionally small high schools where students understood who was capable of performing and who could not compete, students had the opportunity for a fresh start. Incorporating that attitude in all courses students found they were capable of performing at a higher level than they believed. That perception also acknowledged that peers accepted them for who they were rather than what they had done in the past. Therefore, through the course of the semester they developed study habits and used what they were learning in their classes to improve their performance as students.

As a result of practice in proof-reading in ASK 060, many developmental students proofread for others in their dorms. This experience gave them a sense of worth and confidence in their skill level relative to others. Although they perceived themselves as inferior at the start of the semester, by the end they believed they had exceeded their peers in writing skills.

4. How well does this perception correlate to level of competence reflected by course grade received?

The results of the Pearson product-moment correlation indicated the relationship between perceived level of confidence and GPA was statistically significant, $r (25) = .75$, $p < .000$. While data indicated a positive level of competence, students who scored highest in perceived levels of confidence at the end of the semester possessed higher GPAs than those who demonstrated lower levels of perceived confidence, and this was to
be expected. Most students whose GPAs correlated positively with their perceived
certainty already had writing instruction in their backgrounds but had not used what
they had learned to represent themselves accurately on the ACT. Being required to enroll
in ASK 060 was somewhat disappointing to them, but they came to understand that their
prior knowledge applied to what they were learning in the course to improve their
writing.

Perhaps maturation had an influence as well. Students who did not struggle
significantly to write correctly came to understand the power of writing and incorporated
some of what they had learned in the class to essays for other courses as well. Initially
the focus was on writing the essay, but in time students knew they would finish the task,
the impetus behind the writing was how to express themselves effectively.

5. How do writing skills of senior ASK 060 students compare to the non-ASK 060
seniors in the writing portion of the Dordt College Survey?

Regardless of which students wrote the Social Challenges Essay for the Dordt
College Survey, the results of the independent t test showed no significant difference
when comparing the composite writing rubric scores for former ASK 060 students (n =
15) and non-ASK seniors (n = 251) on the Dordt College Survey, t (266) = 1.52, p = .13.
Scored student writing samples from the Dordt College Survey indicated former ASK and
non-ASK students were comparable relative to technical writing skills.

While the data suggest that ASK and non-ASK students possess comparable
technical writing skills, perhaps the methodology whereby the data were collected needs
to be reviewed. The data were collected without students' knowledge that their writing
was being scored for more than reflective thinking. Having them write this essay in a 50 minute time slot without being presented with the topic question to think about in advance may have caused stress for them. For students who are simply concerned with addressing the issue, the technical writing merit of the essay may have been insignificant.

Rather than assuming that former ASK students improved, perhaps the rest of the graduates regressed due to time constraints or fatigue from a day of assessments. This essay was written at the end of a series of tests taken through the course of the day. Students may have put less than their best effort into the last test especially since it was the only written one for the day.

Finally, the number of ASK students \((n = 15)\) compared to non-ASK \((n = 251)\) does influence the results. Had the number of ASK students been greater, the data would show different results.

6. Which skills from ASK 060 were identified as most and least valuable through their college career by upperclassmen who were enrolled in this class during their freshman year?

In an open-ended question asking students to list the most valuable skills learned from ASK 060 that assisted them through their college career, the majority (66.6%) believed that grammar, usage, and proof reading were most useful to them. Grammar, usage, and proof reading were valuable skills that students continued to use throughout their college career, and they identified these skills as important to effective essay writing. The second most frequently mentioned response (26.6%) was the course made
them better writers by allowing them to feel competent and confident in their written work.

In an open-ended question asking students to list least valuable skills learned from *ASK 060* that assisted them through their college career, learning the different styles of essays was considered by a majority (53.3%) to be of little value to college writing since professors did not require the use of more than one style.

7. How do the GPAs of senior *ASK 060* students compare with other graduates?

There was a significant difference between the GPA's of former *ASK* and non-*ASK* students, *t* (266) = 3.53, *p* < .01, with the non-*ASK* students possessing higher mean GPAs (*M* = 3.36, *SD* = .03) while the former *ASK* students possessed lower mean GPA's (*M* = 2.94, *SD* = .34). Graduating *ASK* students were typically less academically-motivated, as is evidenced by lower GPA scores, than graduating non-*ASK* students. The goals and aspirations of *ASK* students included graduating from college. Certainly they had vocations in mind and pursued degrees to attain those vocations, but for many, being product oriented, completion was of primary importance. As long as they were not placed on probation, which would have jeopardized their financial aid, the majority were content to pass. Undoubtedly they studied hoping to get good grades, but they were more concerned with getting passing grades in all of their classes than worrying about superior performances. Part of this also reflects a lack of planning beyond college. Society has said that a college degree is important, and so they went and got one. However, what level of performance a student should demonstrate was not indicated by society, so this has not received consideration. To that end few made plans to go on to graduate school,
and few intended to use their major as a means of gaining employment. They simply focused on completion.

The non-ASK seniors, however, had spent time planning their future beyond college. For many of them, graduate school was the next phase of their lives, and good grades were essential for entrance into competitive schools. Therefore, GPAs were an important part of their academic life, and they spent time planning their course work to optimize the potential for a high GPA.

Many non-ASK seniors were also interested in entering the work force with a substantial salary. They equated high GPAs with higher salary regardless of whether this was true or not and consequently worked at their studies in an effort to secure the most lucrative job that their major allowed.

Discussion

Perceived Levels of Writing Competence and GPA

The results of this study indicated that level of perception is an important predictor of student success as related to GPA. Prior to enrolling in the course, student perceptions were somewhat negative regarding their level of ability ($M = 2.58$). Earlier educational experiences reinforced the perception that they were poor writers. Many of these students have struggled to write clearly or cohesively starting early in grade school. Years of grammar, whether through rote memorization of grammatical terms or through the writing process have created a level of anxiety for them. Flash cards for memorizing grammar terms, essays receiving poor grades, and essays requiring rewrites had been part of their learning experience throughout grade and high school. Most students had spent
time in resource rooms, working with a tutor or aide to correct what had been written although students did not know what they had done wrong.

Moving from grade school to high school the writing process became more intensified with less educational instruction. Typically a grammar review is taught in the freshman year, but students are expected to know and understand the material. The writing process becomes specific with introduction types of essays for specific courses as well as an expectation of essay format and rubrics for correcting writing. Initially students may struggle to express themselves correctly within formats such as the 6+1 Trait Writing Model (Kozlow & Bellamy, 2004), but with time and experience the majority are capable of meeting the expectations of the teacher. Most remedial students do not. The segments of the rubric appear independent of each other, and students lack the cognitive ability to join them cohesively. Rather than enhancing the writing process, strategies such as these serve to frustrate students and further reinforce the attitude of defeat relative to writing.

Recognizing that college is a natural educational progression, many remedial students apply, simply hoping that writing difficulties will disappear upon entering college regardless of GPA or ACT scores. However, being admitted provisionally and consequently being required to take a remedial writing class supports the negative perception they have fostered in the past. Once again students are faced with an identified area of weakness relative to their academic success even though the academic environment has changed. Several of these students acknowledged that very little writing was required in high school. Literature, poetry, theatre, and speech made up the English
curriculum, and because of the format of the classes, students received good grades without having to write a great deal. Grades were comprised of projects, presentations, and tests over novels and short stories. Only when their ACT or SAT scores returned with lower than satisfactory scores in writing and grammar did these students realize that they were deficient in writing.

However, self-efficacy may have also influenced perceived levels of writing competence. An initial negative perception of competence \( (M = 2.57) \) changed to a positive perception of competence after course completion \( (M = 3.33) \) where scores below 3.00 were considered negative and scores above 3.00 were considered positive. Students’ GPAs improved as well. The stigma of required enrollment in a noncredit class as a result of test scores may have accounted for the earlier negative perceptions (Dembo & Seli, 2004). Remedial students had been required to attend resource classes for which they received no credit but believed they worked harder than other students to comprehend the same material. Although they may have graduated, the ASK class appeared to be much like their former educational experiences.

However, as students began to experience success based on issues of persistence, they demonstrated competence and consequently improved and believed they possessed the ability to continue to improve. As well, learning to use the teaching assistants as resources to identify their writing difficulties and developing editing skills enabled them to evaluate their writing more objectively. Metacognitively, through the course of the semester, they became more comfortable writing their thoughts on paper and developing an academic vocabulary. Also, the process of becoming independent individuals in an
academic environment responsible for their success or failure may also have contributed to their improvement.

*Most and Least Valuable Writing Skills*

The majority of former *ASK* students indicated that grammar, usage, and proofreading were skills most valuable to their college writing success, and essay types the least beneficial. The response from the surveys indicated what they learned best in *ASK 060* was to correct their grammatical errors. According to *Senior Survey* results, in courses where students wrote essays, content appeared to be less important to instructors than technical writing, and grammatical errors affected their grade. From a pragmatic perspective these students used what they had learned in *ASK 060* to be academically successful. Knowing their writing weaknesses, *ASK* students were most concerned with writing grammatically correct essays.

A concern here is the issue of critical thinking. The assumption that students know how to write before entering a postsecondary institution is incorrect when related to this population. The concern for correct writing as a central element of their essays should be secondary to critical thinking and reflective responses to the issue being explored. The writing difficulties with which they have struggled has delayed their ability to think in an academically-introspective manner, and consequently, content of the essays is more surface than deep thinking.

Negative evaluations of learning essay types indicated students recognized the writing requirement; however, the important issue was finishing the assignment and receiving a passing grade. Deciding how to present the content most effectively was not
a skill considered valuable. This may reflect their attitudes for success. The most important issue is completion of assignments successfully *persistence* while to what level of competence those assignments were completed is less important.

Relating to the paragraph above, these students are metacognitively immature. They are product driven; therefore, they write the essay. A paper is due, something is required that will be graded, this is a reinforced pattern from the past. In at-risk students' grade and high school years, typically as long as the essay was written, points were awarded. However, what type of essay best fits the assignment is not considered because remedial writing students fail to make a connection between what the content of the essay is and how it might be most effectively presented. A lab report should be written in a particular formula using a passive voice. However, at-risk students' format for a lab report may be no different than a personal narrative. The inability to look beyond the assignment as a written essay and examine its value within the course is not a consideration because concern for its completion is more important than its content.

*Writing Sample Score and GPA Comparisons*

The data show scores from the *Dordt College Survey* indicate no significant difference between former *ASK* and non-*ASK* seniors, while the GPA comparisons indicate a significant difference between the same populations. The majority of students (*n* = 251) are non-*ASK* seniors, meaning they were not admitted provisionally, while the former *ASK* students was a limited sample (*n* = 15). Because of the size of the former *ASK* sample, confidence in the *Dordt College Survey* data is low.
However, significance in GPA comparisons is expected. As was previously discussed relative to persistence, provisionally-accepted students are interested in completion, not necessarily mastery. Therefore, considering the difference in seniors desiring to enroll in graduate schools with minimum GPA requirements as well as students who must maintain a certain GPA to retain academic or athletic scholarships, and former ASK students who are only interested in graduating, the attitude and motivation of former ASK students is such that they will typically possess lower GPAs than non-ASK seniors.

At-risk students watch the majority of their cohort group leave or be dismissed before graduating. Part of their mindset when entering college includes "trying" it to see if they can be successful while maintaining an attitude that seems ready to accept failure if it happens. The pattern of grade and high school has been such that they have endured failure in the past, and perhaps they should not be in college. They are non-committal in some respects. In the event that should they fail, they did not commit too much. Typically they struggle for the first semester attempting to adapt to college, living away from home, managing studies and time, figuring out sleeping patterns, and adapting to academic rigor.

First semester GPAs typically reflect this adjustment with minimally acceptable scores to grant admission for the second semester. For many at-risk students, commitment to college does not come until after the sophomore year. At this point the GPA is still quite low, although minimally acceptable. Getting to a midway point, they decide to graduate and begin to study seriously but attempting to improve GPA scores
becomes increasingly difficult. Consequently, many of those who graduate work hard enough to attain a degree but feel incapable of competing with students who enrolled in college knowing what their goals were and what amount of work and study was necessary to achieve those goals. As well, a certain level of resignation on their part is a pervasive attitude that they have carried through their academic career, and they are willing to accept it. Obtaining a degree is a major accomplishment in their lives, but many at-risk students believed that they worked much harder than other students to attain the same goal.

_Dordt College Course ASK 060_

From an economic standpoint, remediation of students is expensive (Haeuser, 1993; NCES, 2004). Additional faculty and resources are necessary to accommodate students requiring assistance. Presently Dordt College spends approximately $45,000 per year to remediate students. Beyond the professional help, tutors in all disciplines are employed by the _ASK_ center to serve the needs of the campus, and text books for each course are purchased to facilitate tutoring.

Working with this population is also time-consuming. In the fall semester of 2004, 126 students, approximately 10% of the student body, used services provided by the _ASK_ center. While some of these contacts were one-time appointments to have a paper proof-read, the majority of students used the services on a weekly basis as a supplement to classroom instruction. Almost 10% of Dordt College’s student population is served by the _ASK_ center. Of this population the graduation rate is presently 12% higher than the national average, which indicates student success at some level.
According to data collected from the Freshman Survey administered at the beginning and end of the course, students indicated less intimidation as to writing although the results revealed that students acknowledge their writing deficiencies. As a remedial program, ASK 060 may not improve students’ ability to write excellent academic essays; however, students’ perception of their writing skills and their attitudes toward writing appear to be more realistic. After completion of the course, rather than panic about writing assignments, they acknowledged that assignments may take them more time than classmates, and they plan accordingly. The writing practice received through the ASK course enabled students to gain a level of confidence that allowed them to plan far enough in advance not only to meet due dates, but also with enough time for editing and submitting drafts to tutors for critique. When essays were submitted that had not been rewritten or revised, they expected to receive a lower grade because they were aware of their writing deficiencies. To this end ASK 060 created an awareness of writing strengths and weaknesses, but it was not a panacea for all writing deficiencies.

Self-efficacy and self-concept, two important theories that encourage persistence, an identified measure for student success (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003), need to account for more of students’ perceptions. Self-concept, a characteristic shaped by a student’s past experience that influences goal achievement, and self-efficacy, belief in ability to complete the task, are both student perceptions. Collecting data for self-concept and self-efficacy specifically when researching ASK 060 students and comparing that data to course grades may have served as a better indicator of academic success.
Student responses in the Senior Survey question one recognizes that students believe they are confident in their writing based on remediation in their freshman year through ASK 060. They also acknowledge that being taught specific skills such as proofreading, grammar, and usage are important for academic success. Providing this type of course complete with its support base of teaching assistants, while expensive and in some ways repetitious of their high school career, affords at-risk students the possibility of success.

Without this course in degree-granting institutions, students must remediate through community colleges, on-line, correspondence courses, or through the use of tutors. While these are helpful, students must be self-motivated. At-risk writing students are aware that they are not competent writers, and they must make an effort to enroll in courses where they have not been successful in the past. The issues of self-efficacy and self-concept continue to be a battle for them.

Recommendations from the Study for Dordt College

Although the national average is 30%, Dordt College’s ASK course reflects, on average, a graduation success rate of 42%. While the success of students may not be directly attributed to the ASK course, a 12% increase over the national average indicates that a variety of factors have contributed to their success. To suggest that ASK 060 is the primary reason these students graduated is unsubstantiated. However, examining the qualitative data, attitudes and perceptions of ASK students improved when enrolled in the course, which is indicative of improved self-efficacy. ASK students who have graduated indicated that the availability of the teaching assistants and the course requirements
pushed them to become serious students with a support base that allowed them to believe they could be successful. This course must continue.

The question to be addressed is: Does there need to be a transitional period for college freshmen where they can adjust to the college environment complete with stringent course requirements and teaching assistants? Conducting a study comparing collected data from *ASK* freshmen to *non-ASK* freshmen on an identical survey may offer insight into the value of the format and structure of the course, particularly when focusing on all freshmen students who do not return for a second semester.

1. Remedial education must be mandatory for students scoring below institutionally-established acceptable GPA and ACT/SAT standards. Students whose scores are below acceptable standards are not interested in remediating in an area where they have been identified as lacking. Requiring them to enroll in a remedial writing course impresses on them the importance of competent, academic writing. Establishing basic minimum standards for acceptable writing performance in this course, and linking this performance to continued enrollment in the institution forces them to meet that standard.

2. Consistent standards for writing conventions are necessary throughout the institution. Skills appear to diminish over time when standards are not consistently established or enforced. The fact that data for both *ASK* and *non-ASK* seniors showed no significant difference in writing scores should be of concern to the institution. Several explanations are possible for this finding. Either the *ASK* students significantly improved as a result of the *ASK* course or the academic environment, or a combination of both over
the course of four years, or the non-ASK seniors’ writing abilities have deteriorated over four years.

Another possibility is that instructors do not maintain consistent writing requirements, consequently students are not held to similar standards and develop poor writing habits. Finally, the structure of the assessment day may explain the similarity of scores. With an entire day established for assessing students, both ASK and non-ASK students may have been fatigued by the battery of tests.

The Dordt College Survey is the only essay required in the assessment, and while students may have been concerned with the content of their response, they may not have considered the technical writing issues as being important to the answer. Regardless, mandating consistent writing standards for all courses would serve as reinforcement for all students to write at a similar level.

3. Institutions intending to incorporate a basic writing program must provide adequately-trained and competent personnel to work individually with ASK students. Data support the value of teaching assistants and peer tutors. Requiring students to enroll in a course with continued college attendance as part of the stipulation for successful completion places a great deal of pressure on them. The qualitative data indicated a level of low self-efficacy before enrolling in the course. At-risk students know they are deficient in the area of writing; therefore, providing competent teaching assistants who read all material they write before it is handed in to be graded allows them feedback as to writing constructs, comprehension, and cohesion. With individual weekly meetings ASK students can bring writing questions from assignments to teaching assistants and receive
informed answers on what corrections are appropriate. This level of personalized education enables them to begin to recognize writing habits and misperceptions that undermine their academic success.

4. Persistence is important to students’ success. As such, Dordt College needs to ensure faculty and staff understand self-efficacy and self-concept relative to augmenting persistence. The primary role of faculty in postsecondary education is to serve as experts. They are to research, write, and teach within specific disciplines. However, teaching appears to be the least important of the requirements for employment. Evidence of this is revealed in the absence of courses in curricular pedagogy and educational psychology for college professors. Apparently institutions do not believe that college students, as students, have similar characteristics to grade and high school students that institutions study to understand how to teach more effectively.

Bandura’s research (1986) on the value of persistence is evident in 15 former ASK students in this study who graduated from Dordt College. By admission standards they had deficiencies, but in spite of deficiencies, through support from tutors and teaching assistants, with help from the ASK center, they progressed enough in courses to develop a self-concept that enabled them to believe they could graduate. If faculties were required to understand the psychology involved with teaching and motivating students, perhaps higher quality learning and higher quality instruction would occur rather than direct instruction to passive learners.

With active involvement, at-risk students would be more likely to engage in subject matter and learning and ultimately remain in school as a result of this persistence
rather than attending for a semester and then quitting because of a disconnect between learning environment, motivated students, and instructors who deliver information rather than engaging them in learning.

5. Classes like ASK 060 provide a transition from the structure of high school to the freedom of college for at-risk students through performance stipulations with support of teaching assistants and personalized attention. In an institution like this one where many of the students come from small, private high schools, personal attention is expected, particularly from the at-risk population. While a 42% graduation rate of former ASK students is above the national average, using the format and structure of this course in other non-disciplinary freshmen courses may improve the academic success of the at-risk population to an even greater extent.

6. The limited sample size of ASK seniors did not indicate significant differences in writing scores when compared to non-ASK peers. A study should be conducted utilizing a software program that reads all first semester freshmen essays written during orientation week to determine writing levels. Correlating this in a longitudinal study to students' writing levels as seniors would serve as an indicator in establishing writing consistency or inconsistency through 4 years of postsecondary academic study.

7. A study seeking a correlation between academic environment and students' performance would permit a clearer understanding of the value of developmental courses. This study would examine types of high schools attended, what course of study was followed, what level of involvement students maintained beyond the classroom in high school, and what level of persistence, attitude, and perception students demonstrated
about their academic level before attending college. As well, this study would examine selection of majors in college, the professors of courses in which these students enrolled, and the type of roommates, classmates, and groups with which these students were involved as freshmen to establish correlations relative to attitudes and perceptions. At present, Dordt College only identifies at-risk academic students on the basis of ACT/SAT scores and high school GPAs. While those may be accurate indicators of a particular set of data, far more information is necessary to efficiently determine students' enrollment and success.

Recommendations for Further Research

While research recognizes a need for developmental education at the postsecondary level, the relatively recent introduction of such programs has limited construction, assessment, and information about these courses. Although data show that remedial courses are offered by the majority of degree-granting institutions (NCES, 2000), data specific to demographics in both public and private institutions are more difficult to attain.

1. Research should be conducted at regionally public and private postsecondary institutions to determine the similarities and differences of remedial programs within identified regions of the country. As well, a study examining the differences between remedial programs of public and private schools within these regions should be conducted to gain a more comprehensive look at the profile of remedial education. Presently, minimal statistical data regarding programs is available for either public or private postsecondary institutions.
2. Further research should be conducted by each state to determine demographic populations requiring remediation. Examining the population within public school requiring remediation and comparing this to those within private school requiring remediation may present an incongruous profile of at-risk students served by each.

While both populations require remediation, the similarities may stop there. The perception of education, the value of the college experience, the intent of parents to protect children, and perceived value or prestige of private versus public college may all be factors that influence selection of schools. Studying these specific populations may reveal more about at-risk student perceptions of themselves and their families than their learning deficiencies and successful remediation.

3. A longitudinal study examining the attitudes and perceptions of college students, which includes studies of self-efficacy and self-concept, is necessary to determine what student characteristics best predict success. If studies are conducted to examine public and private institutions' remedial programs, and a study is conducted to examine attitudes and perceptions of remedial students at both public and private schools, high school counselors will be able to help at-risk students select what type of institution might help them best. As well, admission counselors will be able to recognize which students are going to be academically successful at college and which will not, thereby making recruitment efforts more efficient.

4. A study by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2002) revealed that 24% of students in grade 12 were proficient or better in writing. With 75% of high
school graduates (NCW, 2003) enrolling in postsecondary institutions, research must continue at the high school level to improve writing performance. Conducting a study of English curriculums in both public and private secondary schools throughout the United States requiring students to enroll in college preparatory writing courses, and comparing that data to schools that do not mandate college preparatory writing courses may give insight into the low level of proficient writers at the senior level.

5. A study should be conducted to compare college preparatory writing classes throughout the United States to students' standardized test scores. Syllabi should be examined to compare concepts taught, strategies utilized, and rubrics for assessment used. Using that data and obtaining the students' writing scores on standardized testing would allow for a correlational study to compare curriculum to performance. Ultimately, recurring items correlated to low performance scores or recurring items correlated to high test scores would serve as direction for an effective writing curriculum if the sample population was large enough.

6. Inconsistent scoring by teachers is an area where many secondary schools struggle relative to preparation for college writing. Writing across the curriculum is a buzz-word in education, and many schools incorporate writing into all areas of the curriculum. Standardized testing has been a primary way to evaluate students' writing ability. However, other types of assessment are necessary to evaluate students' writing performance beyond grammar. In recent years portfolios have gained popularity as a type of assessment that allows teachers to evaluate students' writing beyond a semester.
Having students and teachers working together through the portfolio process allows for the process and practice of writing.

While establish standards within English departments allows for consistency within a school, districts must also establish writing standards to improve student writing throughout the district. A study that collected data from the schools throughout the district relative to the writing assessment instruments used, and also collected data on students' writing performance and compared the two would allow a researcher to see what types of assessment instruments are most valuable for improving student writing.
REFERENCES


College Board. (2003, April). Report of the national commission on writing in
America’s schools and colleges. *The neglected “r”: the need for a writing revolution.*


Appendix A

Survey Instrument

(Freshman Survey)
Freshman Survey

Please use a number 2 pencil. Do not print or write name or student ID number.

Using the 1-5 scale listed below, please respond to the following questions by circling the number that corresponds most accurately with your opinion.

1 2 3 4 5

strongly disagree strongly agree

1. I understand the rules of grammar. 1 2 3 4 5

2. I feel confident in my academic writing ability. 1 2 3 4 5

3. I enjoy writing academic papers. 1 2 3 4 5

4. I typically write 2 or more drafts of a paper. 1 2 3 4 5

5. Because of my writing ability, I expect to score a “B” or higher on my papers. 1 2 3 4 5

6. I express myself in writing much better than I do by speaking. 1 2 3 4 5

7. In order to understand my academic thinking, I usually write my thoughts on paper. 1 2 3 4 5

8. I am comfortable having others read what I write. 1 2 3 4 5

9. I willingly proofread for others. 1 2 3 4 5

10. I prefer essay tests to other forms,
i.e. true/false, multiple choice.

11. I work harder than most of my peers to write well.
Appendix B

Survey Instrument

(Senior Survey)
Senior Survey

Do not print or write name or student ID number on survey.

Please respond to the following questions on the paper provided. Be as specific as possible in your answers.

1. List the writing components from *ASK 060* that helped you MOST.

2. List the writing components from *ASK 060* that helped you LEAST.
Appendix C

Instrument Matrix
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Question[s]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 What level of competence regarding writing do freshmen believe they possess before their required enrollment in <em>ASK 060</em>?</td>
<td><em>Freshman Survey</em></td>
<td>1-2, 8-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2 How well does this perception correlate to level of competence reflected by course grade?</td>
<td><em>Freshman Survey</em></td>
<td>1-2, 8-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3 What level of competence regarding writing do freshmen state they possess after completion of <em>ASK 060</em> course?</td>
<td><em>Freshman Survey</em></td>
<td>4-5, 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4 How well does this perception correlate to level of competence reflected by the course grade?</td>
<td><em>Freshman Survey</em></td>
<td>5-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5 How do writing skills of senior <em>ASK 060</em> students compare to the rest of the seniors in the writing portion of the Dordt College Survey?</td>
<td>Dordt College Survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6 Which of the skills from <em>ASK 060</em> were identified as most and least valuable by upperclassmen enrolled in this course during their freshman year?</td>
<td><em>Senior Survey</em></td>
<td>1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7 How do senior <em>ASK</em> GPA’s compare to other graduates.</td>
<td>Transcript comparisons</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D

Dordt College Survey
DATE: May 17, 2004

TO: Faculty and Staff
FROM: Student Learning Assessment Committee
RE: Rating the Social Challenges Essay

Thank you for participating in the reading and rating of the Social Challenges Essay. The information we gain from your work has been valuable in gauging the growth of our students from the freshmen to the senior year.

We have included 5-7 essays for each of you to read and rate. The number of essays to rate increased this year since each freshmen student was asked to write the essay again this spring as one method of evaluating the GEN 100 course. There are also additional rating instructions and an elaboration of the scoring process attached to this memo.

Please see the reverse side of this memo for the general instructions for rating the essays.

Notes and Reminders:

1. Please make sure you carefully copy the student ID number from each essay to the first column of the Student Essay Rating: Summary Sheet. Last summer we were unable to use several sets of ratings due to missing or incorrect numbers.

2. We have set May 31 as the final date for returning your completed packet to Kay De Boom in the Social Science office. If you need more time, please contact Kay De Boom or Mark Christians. We encourage you to rate the essays soon after receiving them at the Faculty Assembly meeting.
INSTRUCTIONS FOR SCORING ESSAYS

1. Read over the criteria for each aspect. The descriptors in between 1 and 7 allow you to make judgments about answers that are moving toward the more thoughtful responses. Please see The Elaboration of Rating Criteria for additional descriptions of the abbreviated concepts used in scoring.

2. Review the stimulus questions (below).

**WRITING INSTRUCTIONS to the students:**

Many important challenges confront the world today. **Identify one challenge** that you believe is particularly significant.

Write an essay describing this challenge, giving specific and concrete examples illustrating why this challenge is important. Discuss the significant historical, social and technological factors that can help us understand how this challenge developed. Include relevant information from your college course work, readings, and life experiences. How do you think Christians should respond to this challenge, both personally and collectively? What are some concrete ways Christians can help our society understand and meet this challenge?

Your essay will be evaluated on the following criteria:

a.) ideas are clearly stated.

b.) position - by evidence and well-chosen examples - is supported.

c.) awareness and understanding of historical, social (political, economic) and technological roots of contemporary issues is demonstrated.

d.) logical and well supported solutions to this challenge - along with a commitment to these solutions is suggested.

e.) Christian perspective is clearly expressed.

f.) appropriate standard writing conventions (style, grammar, and punctuation) are used.

If you finish writing before the end of the 50-minute testing period, please review your essay and make revisions or corrections as needed.

3. Read through the entire essay without any attempt to rate or evaluate the quality of the response. Look for the issues raised, arguments made, evidence offered, and conclusion(s) expressed. Give the essay a global rating (mentally) - low, medium, or high.

4. Next, working with one aspect at a time, go back and reread the essay, looking for specific ideas and arguments that relate most directly to the issue. Rate the essay on that dimension and place the rating DIRECTLY ON THE SUMMARY SHEET. Try to rate each aspect independently of your other ratings, since some unevenness in the student's essay is to be expected. Also, keep in mind that the student may show examples of high ratings for a single dimension and in other parts of the essay may give examples of low ratings for the same dimension. In those cases you may need to "mentally average" the strong and weak scores you could potentially give for the same aspect.

5. Next rate the essay on each dimension listed on the RATING RUBRIC for STUDENT WRITING. Please note that the scale is from 1-5. Place the rating DIRECTLY ON THE SUMMARY SHEET. Some overlap may exist between the "perspectives" ratings and the rating of expression, but this actually helps us to validate the two rating schemes.
Cautions: If you believe a student should be rated high on several aspects but he/she has not addressed a particular aspect to your satisfaction, do not hesitate to give a lower score for that aspect. While you may believe that a particular student could supply a good response for that aspect if interviewed, bear in mind that we are most interested in how often the students as a group think to incorporate some theme, issue or approach. We do not expect most students or even exemplary students to show high scores for every aspect. Rather, we hope to see considerable progress, from the freshmen to senior year, in the quality and frequency of "critical, reflective, and Biblical thinking."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scoring Criteria:</th>
<th>Student Assessment Essay: Recognition / Application of Perspectives</th>
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<td>1 2</td>
<td>3 4 5 6 7</td>
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A. Level of Critical Thinking

| simplistic cause/effect thinking; arguments presented with little support or cohesion | confused cause/effect; recognizes diversity of positions and perspectives, but not sure how they fit together, "it all depends" | explicit, analytical, systematic, critical (perspectival), comprehensive; recognizes complexity |

B. Level of Moral Reasoning and Judgment

| blind acceptance of authorities; arbitrary view of right and wrong as defined by authority figures; doing what you're told | internalized authorities, knows answers, but not sure why; right and wrong depends on (relative) to situation | attempts to understand and articulate norms and principles derived from an internalized understanding of the value implications of one's faith commitment |

C. Worldview: Awareness of faith implications of assumptions, issues and decisions

| unaware of worldview distinctions (not aware of having a world view as an explicit and interrelated system of beliefs, assumptions and commitments) | worldview expressed is primarily a collection of conventional beliefs, assumptions, & morals; little evidence of reflection on the more generalized implications of assumptions, beliefs or commitments | awareness of one's worldview as an explicit system based on a deliberate, conscious affirmation of values, assumptions, beliefs and commitments; able to see and evaluate worldviews while recognizing one's own |

D. Incorporates Understanding of Biblical themes (creation-fall-redemption)

| failure to consider Biblical principles or misconstruing or incorrectly applying Biblical statements | partial recognition and understanding of the interrelated themes of scripture; emphasizing one aspect e.g. Creation or salvation over the others | clearly articulates importance of creational norms, the reality of sin and our call to reclaim; handles Biblical statements with a good understanding of the context |

E. Perception of Responsibility in Response to Challenges

| not my problem; shows little empathy; situation judged in terms of own needs and concerns; simplistic solutions | aware of personal impact & need for involvement; unclear as to the nature and extent of communal responsibility and action; solutions/suggestions are broader | clearly sees self as involved & responsible for dealing with issues within the limits of their political and cultural context; can express potential |
ELABORATION OF RATING CRITERIA

A. Level of Critical Thinking
This aspect focuses on the ability of the student to produce "reasoned" arguments. It does not focus explicitly on the organization of the sentences or of the structure of paragraphs. However, since good writing and good thinking go hand-in-hand, you may have a hard time separating these issues. The "support" that is referred to under the low score criteria does not refer to specific authors, course work or readings. Support here implies that the student can provide explanations that go beyond a simple statement of "fact." Instead, they should supply "reasonable evidence" or supporting arguments for statements made. High scores should go to answers that show thoughtful self-reflection, provide systematic arguments, and show that the student understands that problems are often more complex than typically portrayed - yet they have at least some understanding as to what that complexity is about (as opposed to, "it's just very complex so it's too hard for me to understand").

B. Level of Moral Reasoning and Judgment
Low scores should be given to essays that provide simple, black-and-white moral answers to complex moral issues. Also, low scores go to essays providing little evidence or argument for moral positions taken, or that rely on authority figures (i.e. parents or government officials) to provide answers - without reflecting on why they personally hold to that view. Middle level scores might go to essays, which show that moral issues can be complex, but they don't seem to understand what that complexity is all about. EXAMPLE: "I think so many things here are relative to so many other things that it is so hard to know what is good. [It] so often depends on your situation." Higher scores go to essays that attempt to derive a stance based on broader principles or an internalized commitment to ideals.

C. Worldview: Awareness of faith implications of assumptions, issues and decisions.
Students who do not demonstrate in their essays that they rely on an interrelated system of beliefs should be given lower scores. For example, a student may provide explanations for problems or solutions with no acknowledgment of the assumptions on which those explanations are based. Higher scores should be given when explicit recognition is given to specific philosophical, religious, or social principles. For example, the statement, "All of creation is redeemed, and we need to remember that in all of our dealings with organizations, structures, and each other" can (within the context of the essay) reflect a conscious recognition of larger belief systems that guides the student's response.

D. Incorporates understanding of Biblical themes (creation-fall-redemption)
Essays, which exhibit little moral perception or sense of a Christian viewpoint, should score low. Also, essays, which seem particularly "moralistic" or "pietistic," with no acknowledgement of the call in scripture...
to be a witness in all areas of life, should receive a rating from 2 to 4. Essays which show explicit themes from scripture or which obviously draw from broader Biblical themes should score higher. The example shown for C. above (again in the proper context) could also be an example of a specific reference to a Biblical theme.

E. Perception of Responsibility in Response to Challenges
The continuum of scoring criteria for this section relates both a sense of personal involvement as well as the need for communal action. Specific references to past or future actions on the part of the student are obvious indicators of at least some commitment to action. For example one student was planning on working in urban missions - a fairly obvious commitment to the problem being presented. But high scores should be given to essays that recognize the communal responsibility of Christians in society. One student suggested, "Personally and communally writing letters of protest can be an effective means." The same student elaborated with, "The poor are definitely a concern in our society. We need to target financial corruption and destroy it and then redistribute the wealth." While you may agree or disagree with the statement, it clearly represents a call to communal or societal action in order to solve a problem.

F. Historical/Structural Basis
If the students statements only reflect personal responsibility - both in others and in self - they may score relatively high for section E. but they should then score lower for this section. Also, lower scores are given to students who show an overly strong "just world" belief (i.e. people basically get what they deserve) and therefore see problems as mostly being the result of personal weakness or immediate situational factors. Higher scores reflect a sense by the student that problems are often more complex than is often believed to be the case. Also, the student should show an understanding of the unfolding of history and how the resulting cultural values and structures contribute to personal actions and societal problems. For example a student might point out the technological change should be seen the context of God's desire for human discovery and is therefore part of our "cultural mandate." They may also point out that technology may in turn shape social and cultural values in directions that are not God glorifying. (A simple example: "We are excessively worried about cleanliness because now we have vacuum cleaners.")

Rating Rubric for Student Writing

These variables are arranged in **descending** order of importance. That is particularly to be noted when scoring unedited writing.

**Ideas**
- Fails to significantly engage prompting question
- Thesis unclear, conflicting or disjoint
- Fuzzy and disjointed ideas
- General, sketchy, vague development
- Simplistic thinking or topic
- Responds clearly to prompting question
- Clear thesis statement
- Clear and focused ideas
- Effective, forceful development
- Strong topic: displays complex thinking

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

**Organization**
- No real lead-in
- Confusing order: problem and solution mix-up
- Ideas not connected
- Just stops writing
- Compelling introduction
- Logical problem solution organization
- Clear transitions
- Powerful conclusion
### Word Choice
- Redundant words and clichés
- Modifiers are overused
- Meaning lost in unclear phrasing

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### Voice
- Sounds bored by topic
- Feels distant, disconnected
- Many tangential ideas

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### Sentence Structure
- Hard to read aloud
- Too short, or run-on

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### Conventions
- Numerous distracting errors
- Requires re-reading to decode

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Precise, vivid, natural language
Well-chosen modifiers
Meaning very clear
Confident or enthusiastic
Writer present on the page
Holds reader’s attention
Easy to read aloud
Smooth, fluent
No grammar/spelling /punctuation errors
Text is easy to process
**STUDENT ESSAY RATING: SUMMARY SHEET**

Place ratings for each aspect for a single essay in a single box

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Essay Number</strong></th>
<th>Ideas</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Voice</th>
<th>Word Choice</th>
<th>Sentence Structure</th>
<th>Conventions</th>
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**NOTE: PLEASE BE CAREFUL TO RECORD THE ESSAY NUMBER LOCATED IN THE UPPER RIGHT HAND CORNER OF EACH ESSAY PAGE - INCORRECT OR ABSENT NUMBERING MAKES THE RATINGS USELESS.**

COMMENTS: Patterns you observed or reactions to the student essays.

COMMENTS: About the process or method of assessing students.
Appendix E

Human Subjects Approval Proposal
Human Subjects Approval Letter

COVER SHEET APPLICATION FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS RESEARCH REVIEW

DATE RECEIVED ___________________________ NUMBER ASSIGNED:

DECISION OF THE IRB:  Approved  Conditional  Disapproved

******************************************************************************

TITLE OF PROJECT: Examining the skills, attitudes and perceptions of remedial writing students at Dordt College

INVESTIGATOR(S) Bill Elgersma  Instructor, Dordt College; Doctoral Candidate, The University of South Dakota in Curriculum and Instruction (Secondary Education)

HOME ADDRESS  307 2nd Ave NE

PHONE  712-722-3969

CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE  Sioux Center IA  51250

FACULTY SPONSOR(S) Dr. Lisa A. Hazlett  605-677-6293
Department  Curriculum and Instruction (SEED) The University of South Dakota

PROPOSED DURATION OF PROJECT:  [ X] One time only  [ ] Multiple times

FROM  September 2003
TO  June 2004

PROPOSED LOCATION  Dordt College classroom #173

TYPE OF RESEARCH:

[ ] Individual

[ X] Class Project

[ ] Other (identify)

PARTICIPANTS:

Number of Participants  46

Ages of Participants  18-23

Compensation  No

THIS PROJECT IS:  [ X] New  [ ] Modification  [ ] Renewal only (no modification)

DESIGN OF PROJECT:  [X] Qualitative  [ X] Quantitative
Control Group Involved [ ] yes [ X ] no

Signature of Investigator(s)

Signature of Faculty Sponsor(s)
Examining the Skills Attitudes, and Perceptions of Remedial Writing Students at Dordt College

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to gather information from remedial writing students at Dordt College to assess how their perception of their skills and abilities aligns with actual scores. Through data collection specific perceptions will serve as identifiers for students’ academic success at Dordt College. Being aware of these perceptions will enable instructors in remedial programs to better facilitate these students. As well, the research will help secondary schools assist students with strategies to ameliorate the perceptions before they become detrimental to postsecondary educational planning. Identified perceptions will also assist admission personnel in identifying potential at-risk students who may be successful at Dordt College, and provide the institutional administration data to assess the cost of the course juxtaposed to its value to the institution through enrollment.

Procedure

A perception survey designed by the investigator will be given to first semester freshmen ASK 060 students at the beginning and end of the semester, and the information on the surveys will be compared to their grade for the class at the end of the semester. A second perception survey designed by the investigator will be administered to former ASK 060 student who are now seniors. This survey asks the students to assess their performance over four years. A third data assessment instrument is the Dordt College Survey administered to all seniors. The data collected from the Rating Rubric for Student Writing for former ASK 060 seniors will be compared to non ASK 060 students. Finally, the final GPA’s of graduates will be compared.

Participants

The students selected for this study will include all present and former ASK 060 students. For reasons of reliability and validity, all English Language Learners will be excluded from the study although they may be enrolled in ASK 060.
Appendix F

Student Consent Form
STATEMENT OF CONSENT

Title:

Examining the skills attitudes and perceptions of remedial writing students at Dordt College

Investigators:

Bill Elgersma, Instructor, Dordt College; Doctoral Candidate, The University of South Dakota, Curriculum and Instruction (Secondary Education)

712-722-3969 (home) 712-722-6263 (Office)

307 2nd Ave NE, Sioux Center IA 51250

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to examine ASK 060 student perceptions of writing at the beginning and end of the first semester of freshman year. Former ASK 060 students who are seniors will also be surveyed to see if perceptions are similar after 4 years of study. Collecting information will allow the identification of perceptions related to writing for college students early in their college career and then near graduation. This survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Your Rights:

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop participation at any time with no penalty to you.

If you have any questions, call me, at 712-722-6263. For additional questions or concerns regarding this study, contact Dr. Lisa A Hazlett, supervisor, at 605-677-6293. If you have any questions in general about your participation as a research participant in studies at Dordt College, contact Dr. Daniel F. Hitchcock, Chair of the Dordt College Institutional Review Board at 712-722-6357.

Conclusion:

YOU ARE MAKING A DECISION WHETHER TO PARTICIPATE OR NOT. RETURNING THIS SURVEY INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE, HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE.
Appendix G

Letter of Approval from Dordt College

for use of Institutional Statistics
DORDT COLLEGE

September 21, 2004

To the dissertation committee for Bill Elgersma:

As Vice President for Academic Affairs at Dordt College I have been contacted by Bill Elgersma regarding his dissertation topic and the college’s support of his research. My understanding is that Elgersma is required to secure a letter from Dordt stating that he has permission to use data collected from ASK 060 (Basic Writing for College Students) in his dissertation.

Bill Elgersma has permission to use data collected from the ASK 060 students relative to their evaluation of their abilities as freshmen and their judgment as to the value of the course when they are seniors. He also is permitted to use the Registrar’s office to access GPAs to make comparative studies between ASK and non-ASK students. The ASK 060 course is in its sixth year. As a relatively new course, assessment of its value to students and the college is important. As Dordt continues informal and formal assessment of courses and programs the data obtained from Elgersma’s study will assist in evaluating this developmental course.

Sincerely,

Rockne M. McCarthy

Vice President for Academic Affairs

Cc: Bill Elgersma Jim Bos, Registrar
Appendix H

CITI Course Completion Certificate
CITI Course in The Protection of Human Research Subjects

Saturday, July 17, 2004

CITI Course Completion Record
for Bill Elgersma

To whom it may concern:

On 7/17/2004, Bill Elgersma (username=belgersma; Employee Number=) completed all CITI Program requirements for the Basic CITI Course in The Protection of Human Research Subjects.

Learner Institution: University of South Dakota
Learner Group: Group 2.
Learner Group Description: Social Behavioral Research Investigators and Key Personnel
Contact Information:
- Department: Curriculum and Instruction
- Role in human subjects research: Student Researcher
- Mailing Address:
  307
  2nd Ave NE
  Sioux Center
  Iowa
  51250
  USA
- Email: welgersm@dordt.edu
- Office Phone: 712-722-6263
- Home Phone: 712-722-3969

The Required Modules for Group 2 are:

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For this Completion Report to be valid, the learner listed above must be affiliated with a CITI participating institution. Falsified information and unauthorized use of the CITI course site is unethical, and may be considered scientific misconduct by your institution.

Paul Braunschweiger Ph.D.
Professor, University of Miami
Director Office of Research Education
CITI Course Coordinator
Appendix I

Most Valuable Skills Learned in ASK 060
Most Valuable Skills Learned in *ASK 060*

1. Essay types, transitions and variation of using descriptive words.

2. I learned how to write a fundamentally sound paper, I learned about comma placement, transitions, internal documentation. I also learned the value of proof reading. I understood the grammar concepts, I feel I learned so much that through this class, I wouldn’t be getting the grades I am getting.

3. *ASK 060* helped me in proof reading other students’ papers and also on grammar usage. I now know the do’s and don’ts of writing.

4. It improved my proof reading ability most.

5. Thought it was a waste of time because I’m a bad test taker and did poorly on the ACT.

6. Proof reading other papers, grammar and usage.

7. Proof reading helped me the most.

8. I employ all the skills I learned in *ASK 060*. With the help of this course I am ble to write a paper with confidence.

9. I felt grammar and proof reading helped me the most.

10. Proof reading and grammar helped the most for me.

11. Proof reading, grammar usage (comma use), writing journals every class period helped me learn how to write better, having a T/A also helped me learn how to look over my work more and take the time to read. The class challenged me to write better overall.

12. Learning to write good papers. Less errors in paper and papers flow good.
13. The writing components which helped the most in the class were proof reading and usage. The class was helpful to see how the “rules” were used in actual usage instead of just being rules stated, but no examples given on how to use them. I feel that I have lost some of the skills learned from the class.

14. Proof reading and checking the grammar and making sure the tenses are the same.

15. Essay writing and transitions.
Appendix J

Least Valuable Writing Skills from *ASK 060*
Least Valuable Skills from *ASK 060*

1. Grammar.

2. I have not been stretched by other professors to use different types of essay. However, in English 101, I wrote the same types of papers as in *ASK 060*.

3. In *ASK 060* I was never taught how to write different types of essays because I was only writing for one professor. Every professor is different in asking what they want written.

4. I really don’t know. This class involved a lot of writing which was really nice and it was an easy class to ask questions in, like I felt comfortable asking him. But I think we should have gotten credit for it.

5. Probably essay types.

6. Comma usage (comma splicing) consistency of tenses throughout a paper.

7. Learning how to write different forms of writing.

8. Usage helped me the least.

9. I felt that the entire course helped me with my writing, and I have no negative feeling towards what I learned.

10. Essay types helped me least because of unfamiliar knowledge prior to entering *ASK 060*.

11. The correct formats to use for each type of paper helped me the least because I only use one type ever.


13. I didn’t like the amount of home work from the class. Made other classes harder and took a lot of time.
14. I cannot remember the least helpful component, at the time I thought it was the number of papers which we had to write. I felt the number of papers was too much. I wish that more examples of spelling rules were taught because I was never really taught them. I was taught to memorize the words not the rules.

15. Too much time.
Appendix K

Summary of Scores from *Dordt College Survey*
### Group Statistics

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Appendix L

Summary of Graduate *ASK/non-ASK* GPA Comparisons
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Appendix M

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* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
Appendix N

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**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level