

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: 'Reclaiming Voice: Enacting Social Discourse Communities in Belizean First-Year College Composition'

Abstract approved:

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This thesis explores the evolving purposes for the teaching of first-year English composition in Belize. Starting from an analysis of the underlying cultural assumptions of U.S. composition pedagogies, this thesis argues that American composition pedagogies need to be rethought when applied in a Belizean context to fulfill the country's unique demands from its writing literate community. In chapter 2, I analyze expressivist, cognitive theory, and academic discourse community approaches to the teaching of writing in the United States, addressing assumptions these pedagogies make about the national culture in which they are implemented. I then analyze the complications of implementing those pedagogies in Belize's particular national culture, concluding the chapter with a discussion of the issues that arise due to the use of Creole-English vernacular in Belize and the requirement of Standardized English in the classroom. In chapter 3, I conduct a case study of first-year composition syllabi from St. John's College Junior College (SJCJC), the oldest tertiary institution in Belize. My analysis shows that over a seven-year period, English composition at SJCJC has moved away from current-traditional pedagogy to a socially oriented curriculum that centers the public sphere as the main venue for writing. In chapter 4, I conduct close readings of three American composition textbooks used at SJCJC during the previous chapter's seven-year study period, as well as composition syllabi from University of Southern Florida University and St. Louis University in order to determine how their pedagogies

influence SJCJC's evolving composition curriculum. Ultimately, I propose that using the idea of social discourse communities as a starting point, Belize can create college composition guidelines that position the course as a space where students can articulate ideas about their personal and national identities to develop thriving public dialogue.

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‘Reclaiming Voice: Enacting Social Discourse Communities in Belizean First-Year
College Composition’

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

André Antonio Habet, Author

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Introduction

Belize exists in the minds of foreign nationals as a place of sandy white beaches, luscious rainforest, and rum and cokes. Growing up there, I was more accustomed to broken streets, pirated American television, and fifty-cent meat pies. To think that internationally Belize had started to become recognized as a tropical vacation destination would have been laughable prior to returning to Belize in 2009 after leaving to attend a four-year university in the United States. On my return, I rediscovered my home country through tourists' eyes. I first acquired awareness that people outside of Belize knew anything about my home country as a kid watching Robert Rodriguez's *Spy Kids*. In the movie's climax, protagonist Carmen Cortez confesses to her mom that she has been running off to Belize on weekends. Once word got around my school about this name drop, several conversations with friends revolved around the fact that our tiny country had gained recognition in American popular culture, albeit in a ho-hum kid's action movie.

Even prior to that movie, I had taken it on as a hobby to collect instances where the world recognized Belize somewhere other than on the nature channel. Belize has been represented in American media on numerous occasions, those representations often composing what Belizeans recognize as its national identity. Among the most notable occasions over the years have been seeing Marion Jones carry a small Belize flag alongside a giant US one when she won three gold medals at the 2000 summer Olympics, reading about a future Belize existing as a resort country in Nicola Griffith's dystopic *Slow River*, and viewing an episode of Andrew Zimmern's *Bizarre Foods* where he travels around Belize misnaming things. Most recently, a song by the group Wayward called 'Belize' seems to have made its way onto every Belizean under thirty's mixtape, including my own.

This interest in finding Belize in foreign artifacts carried over to my graduate work in composition studies where I began looking into more subtle linkages as I became curious about tying my graduate work to the work I foresaw myself eventually doing in Belize. This search centered around finding ways US composition scholarship addressed issues prevalent in the teaching of writing in Belize, lazily looking for a pedagogy I could merely tweak and propose as a revelatory solution to what I condescendingly saw as a lack of critical thinking among the majority of the Belizean populace I had encountered. After much initial frustration with what I considered the limited applicability of US scholarship to Belize's circumstances, I started the work of *creating* those connections, and determining whether US models of the teaching of writing could be transferred to a context that had inherited aspects of US culture alongside British, Latin American and Caribbean influences that impact its language, economy and literacy- some of which has been addressed by scholars for their effects on the teaching of writing. This thesis therefore hopes to initiate a conversation about the assumptions made about the teaching of writing in Belize to explore those factors that should determine the purpose and goals for first-year composition classes, and generate a possible direction for thinking about the teaching of writing to suit Belize's own national objectives.

While less than forty years as a sovereign country since its independence in 1981, Belize's short history of education involves a variety of countries and religiously affiliated interest groups (Barry and Dylan xviii). This association with many different groups helps to explain why Belize's education history is tangled, and also why at times it is difficult to follow a clear sequence of causation regarding the origins of contemporary curricula. Despite this entangled history, Belize, both as a British colony and later as a sovereign nation, has not been around for very long with the

first European settlers not arriving here until the 18th century and an official colony not forming until 1871.

Following is an overview of some of the country's cultural and socio-economic characteristics as well as its history's most sedimentary moments, contextualizing how current ideas about education and literacy came to be in the country. It is necessary to understand the historical context in which Belize's education system developed because my thesis argues that national composition guidelines should respond to the history and present conditions of a country in order to determine how people can use writing to engage with their socio-economic and cultural reality. In Belize's case, that move involves investigating Belize's cultural identity to gain a better sense of the populations in a composition course. It also involves examining how foreign religious organizations, primarily from England and the United States have widely determined Belize's education system, designing curricula to meet purposes that do not consider Belizean students' interests. By outlining the history of education in Belize, we can address the problems caused by the wholesale adaptation of pedagogies from imperial countries.

Belize is culturally and ethnically diverse in a manner unlike many Central American or Caribbean countries. The country's former position as a British colony ties it to other Caribbean colonies such as Jamaica, Guyana and Barbados. This tie to both England and its Caribbean colonies caused Belize to adopt English as its national language and Kriol, a form of Creole English¹ as its vernacular. Like the other Anglophone Caribbean colonies, Belize, known as British Honduras prior to its independence, also participated in the horrors of the transatlantic African slave trade. This participation drastically altered the population of Belize, resulting in Belize currently having a large population of people of African descent. Partially due to the shared

¹ A dialect of English that draws from West African languages and European English

population and culture between Belize and the Anglophone Caribbean countries, many consider Belize culturally Caribbean in addition to Central American (Barry and Dylan xviii). Unlike most other British colonies, slaves in Belize were brought over to the colony to work in the mahogany and logwood industries rather than to work in sugar or tobacco plantations, making trips into the colony's swampy wilderness to cut wood for exportation to Britain where the profits were often retained by absentee landowners in Britain rather than reinvested in the colony. The relationship between the British colonizers and the former slaves impacted Belizean education with the establishment of schools that maintained colonizers' political control over the newly freed blacks following abolition in 1833.

While some of Belize's mestizo communities descended from Mayan groups that have lived in parts of Belize for centuries, many of them moved to Belize from parts of Mexico as a result of Spain's invasion of Yucatan. Formerly a minority group in Belize, the mestizo community, a group of mixed indigenous American and Spanish ancestry, has taken on a dominant position in Belize's socio-economic hierarchy, heavily participating in electoral politics in the past thirty years (Barry and Vernon 76). Once the mahogany and logwood supplies had been depleted, Belize needed to find a new source of revenue to compensate for the industry's absence. Therefore sugar and citrus growth and exportation became the most prominent industries in the country for some time once growers recognized their potential salability. The agriculture industry created many jobs for Belizeans, working on the plantations and in the factories that processed and distributed the raw goods. These jobs attracted workers from neighboring Central American countries, who were willing to receive the shrinking wages offered by the agricultural companies causing mass immigration from places like Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador (Barry and Vernon 69). As a result, Belize is considered "a West Indian nation in a Hispanic region" (Lewis 3), fusing aspects of

both cultural identities, manifesting in its food, music, and language. Spanish and English are both widely used in the country, yet English continues as the main language of instruction, a consequence of the inheritance of Britain's educational system.

In addition to descendants of Africans, and the mestizo, there are numerous cultural communities throughout Belize. Among the smaller cultural communities are the Garifuna, descendants of African slaves and indigenous Caribbean who mostly reside in the country's Southern districts; the Mennonites, a religious community from Canada that has been one of the main driving forces behind the country's small dairy and meat industry; and Chinese and Indian communities that have recently increased in size due the ease of attaining citizenship in Belize relative to other countries (Barry and Vernon 69). There are also pockets of United States expatriates that retire in areas of Belize like Ambergris Caye due to the relative low cost of living and the ease of adapting to the country due to the prevalent use of the English language.

Several economic and social conditions further distinguish Belize from the United States, such as its relatively low population-to-land mass ratio and heavy economic reliance on the tourism industry. Belize has the lowest population of the Central America countries, its numbers not even reaching into the seven digits (Lewis, 3). This relatively low population in a consumer capitalist economy results from a variety of factors, including a sub-par consensus system that often fails to account for those living in the country's more rural areas as well as undocumented immigrants from neighboring Central American countries such as Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua (Barry and Vernon 22). Additionally, the country has had an ongoing situation with emigrant Belizeans who often leave for the United States or European countries in the hopes of acquiring greater financial opportunities, further limiting Belizean's ability to engage in commerce due to a lack of potential resident consumers. As a result of this low population, Belize's economy is often under stimulated

with relatively little commercial or industrial activity occurring within the country at any given time (Villanueva 60).

Since the 1980's, eco-tourism has steadily risen to be among the country's largest industries due to the country's coral reefs, Maya ruins, and tropical rainforests. This resulted in the creation of several conservation initiatives meant to protect the country's revenue-generating natural attractions for future generations as well as an ongoing explosion of hotels and resorts to meet the growing tourist population, reaching one million tourists for the first time in a single year in 2014 (The San Pedro Sun). Additionally, the prevalence of English-language usage by Belizeans makes it an easier country for foreign citizens from the US, and Western Europe to navigate as opposed to neighboring countries. The economic success of Belize's tourism industry has deferred the country's need to seek alternative industries, and positions the country to continue prioritizing foreign interests now in the form of tourists and the investors that exploit the country's natural resources. The federal government devotes much of its attention and funding to expanding the industry despite its potential impact on the nation's ecology, and the lack of ability to sustain the growing number of tourists, continuing pre-independence trends of catering to foreign desires rather than to Belize's citizens.

Much of the scholarship involving education in Belize revolves around the ongoing impact that colonialism has made on the country. Historian and sociologist Karl Lewis sees the current educational system in Belize to be a vestigial remnant of colonial education intended to oppress the majority of former slaves, Creoles, and the lower economic groups of the country. Education available pre-independence "prepared a majority of children for the values acceptable to Europeans and North Americans" with only "The students with privileged backgrounds (i.e. whites, mulattos, middle class, and upper-class) educated for secondary and higher education" (Lewis 11). Following

its independence from Britain in 1981, Belize maintained the use of Britain's education system. This includes the structure of the school system that has students go through primary school (standard 1-6), high school (first through fourth form), and then a two year junior college, otherwise known as a 6th form. Additionally, students worked towards completing the Cambridge examinations on the occasion that they were able to pursue studies beyond secondary school. Due to this structure, educational materials continued to focus on American and British culture rather than on Belize's (Lewis 17), impeding students from greater consideration of their national identity. This systemic disenfranchisement takes further shape in a pedagogy that does not encourage critical thinking, but instead rote memorization of information in fields of study that may not even have professional applicability to the average Belizean. Additionally, this colonial education creates a curriculum with a legacy of "passivity, conformity and regurgitation, not only for students but also for the teacher" (Lavia 290).

Heavy church involvement, particularly from the Roman Catholic and Protestant sects, has also had substantial influence on the current education system in place. However, the presence of both Catholic and Protestant churches in the country may have had neutralizing effects on either's ability to dominate national policy. This resulted from weaknesses in the structure of both groups, "Irish American Jesuits (wealthy but lacking political power) and the British Protestants (politically powerful but lacking funds)" (Hitchen 195). Because these two groups neutralized each other, Belize was able to avoid a rift along ethnic or religious lines, an issue prevalent in other former British colonies such as British Guyana. The church-state relationship regarding education was institutionalized in 1892 (US Embassy 211). Until the late 1980's, "religious affiliation largely determined which schools children attended" (US Embassy 205). Quality of education has since taken over as the main determining factor for the schools parents select for their children. The

colonial government allowed the church to take on such a large role in its education system partially because it enabled the government to “abdicate any financial responsibility” (Hitchen 197). More importantly, “the powerful forestocracy feared schooling would undermine its hold on the labour (sic) force” (Hitchen 197)

The Roman Catholic Church’s involvement extended into the early 20th century wherein in 1931 the majority of education institutes took the form of subsidized denominational church schools with compulsory education enforced in nearly all parts of the Colony (Hitchen 197). During this time, the country still had “no universities although some evening classes were conducted in a few of the secondary schools, one being the St John's College in Belize” (197). The US embassy notes that “From the late 1940’s and early 1950’s, the educational and social activities of the Irish American Jesuits influenced the rise of an anti-British, anti-colonial nationalist movement” (US Embassy 212). This illustrates that the presence of these American Jesuit priests and scholars not only unequivocally defined the models of teaching, especially at the tertiary level, but also had some influence over the rising tide of anti-British thought that was becoming the norm in the country.

While the Jesuit community oversaw the administration of several high schools in the country, it was not until “1966 that St. John's Sixth Form [an extension to the existing St. John’s High School] submitted a proposal, which was accepted by the government of Belize, to offer an associate's degree modeled on the American junior college” (Hoare and Dellows 322). As a result, St. John’s Sixth Form became the first tertiary institution in the country. The American Jesuits’ involvement in curriculum development at St. John’s College Junior College (SJCJC) has had ripple effects across the country as other institutions were founded and mirrored the existing pedagogies and practices of SJCJC. The impact this has on curriculum development is that “63 %

of the eight junior colleges are governed by religious tenets and principles” (UNESCO 2005 6) despite the fact that the state now pays “70% of salaries for faculty and staff, most tertiary institutions. Brenda Harks Hargrove, among others, notes that the “school systems' emphasis on literacy and religion continue to impact the curriculum and practices in the classrooms of Belize” (21). Contrary to this trend, the University of Belize (UB), the country’s first public university founded in 2000, considers itself amongst the 22% of autonomous institutions, governed by its own Charter through the UB Council (UNESCO 2005 21). The United States has also influenced Belize through the dissemination of American popular culture. Cultural objects made their way to Belize via the cinema, magazines, radio, television and migration (US Embassy 208). In turn, these artifacts have impacted the cultural values of Belize, especially in the country’s middle class’s adaptation of “the rhetoric and practices of the ideologies of development and consumerism.” (US Embassy 210)

Over the past three decades, education scholars like Olda Hoare, Donald A. Dellow and Eve Aird, as well as the US Embassy in Belize, have claimed that Belize’s education system still does not align with the needs of the country. The lack of socio-economic conditions similar to the U.S. therefore makes for an ineffective education system as those conditions inform students about a reality absent in their own lives. For instance, the majority of Belize’s population engages in the agriculture, fisheries, or tourism industries (US Embassy 2002 3), yet local educational institutions have only recently started to offer programs allowing people in those industries, especially ecotourism, the opportunity to expand their knowledge base (Hoare and Dellow 333). Meanwhile those who study in the available fields at Belizean tertiary institutions, especially business management, finance and the natural sciences, often find that no jobs exist within the country for their field of expertise (US Embassy 210). Tertiary institutions continue to expand and become

costlier in order to afford their expansions, becoming more exclusionary towards Belizeans of low socio-economic status. This exclusion from formal education prevents a large portion of the population from engaging with the country's social and economic development (Lewis 4).

Generating an atmosphere that makes education inaccessible to those of low socio-economic status, Belize engages in a practice bound to maintain the country's economic and social stagnation that ideally education ameliorates.

Unlike its neighboring countries, Belize appears to have a substantial amount of its population in the school system for at least their primary school education. A study conducted by the government's Ministry of Education found that "6.8% (7,116 students) of students were enrolled in preschools, 66.4% (69,331 students) in primary schools, 18.8% (19,665 students) in secondary schools, 3.5% (3,653 students) in junior colleges, and 4.4% (4,629 students) in universities" (Policy and Planning Unit 9). The small percentage of students at the university level results from factors such as the unavailability of financial assistance for those without the necessary personal funds as well as the sparse number of universities within the country, most only founded in the past fifteen years (Hoare and Dellows 322). Until the nineties, Belize did not possess any tertiary institutions where a person could acquire a bachelor's degree or higher. What this data does not remark on is the substantial amount of Belizeans who pursue their tertiary education in a foreign country. Although limited in availability, as early as the 1960's "students were awarded government scholarships to study at the University of the West Indies and at universities in England" (Lewis 14). These scholarships continued to be limited well into the 80's; however, by this time Belizeans had begun to attend university in Cuba where the cost of an education was substantially more affordable (US Embassy 216). Interestingly, the Ministry of Education does not maintain records of citizens studying abroad or through online programs (Policy and Planning Unit

60). Most elite youth, coming from families with greater finances, attended universities abroad, primarily going to British universities during the colonial period with the 1990's marking a shift towards higher education in the United States or, to a lesser extent, the West Indies" (US Embassy 205-206).

Although tertiary institutions have only existed in Belize for less than two decades, they have become attractive options to Belizeans following their secondary education. Over eleven years, "between 1992 and 2003, five new junior colleges opened their doors to provide accessible and affordable higher education to rising numbers of Belizeans" (UNESCO 2005 5). According to the Ministry of Education's Planning Unit, "During the ten-year period 2002-03 to 2011-12, enrollment at local junior colleges and the University of Belize grew from 4,341 students to 7,841 students"(Planning Unit, Ministry of Education 60). At these junior colleges, several continue to offer the "American-style associate's degrees because there are still many students who wish to attend 4-year institutions in the United States, Latin America and the University of Belize, none of which recognize the CAPE[Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination] exams as entry requirements" (Hoare and Dellows 329). This utility of junior college as a means to further foreign education has caused tertiary education in Belize to be less mindful of students who do not leave the country.

The Belizean government has not done extensive research into its tertiary education curriculum, but anecdotal evidence illustrates some of the problems facing tertiary institutions in Belize. Olda Hoare and Donald A. Dellows, focusing on the junior college system in Belize, write that in an informal survey of a group of Belizean deans, several noted issues such as "the absence of a higher education act and accompanying higher education policy, limited research and professional development opportunities for faculty, lack of a financial aid program for students,

[and] the absence of a quality assurance framework” (322). Such an absence occurs despite the passing of the National Tertiary Accreditation Act in 2004, which intended to ensure that universities met national standards. However, no governing body was ever put into place to create the guidelines, or oversee the accreditation process. Less than half of all institutions surveyed by UNESCO in 2005 stated that they conducted any external evaluation (UNESCO 2005 11), increasing the difficulty of measuring the effectiveness of current curriculum relative to other universities, either in Belize or abroad. However, in the same report, UNESCO states that at the Junior College level 100% of respondents are conducting or have recently completed their program review with 50% of eight Junior Colleges aligning their Associate’s Degree Programs to qualify for the CAPE, CXC Associate’s Degree Program.” (UNESCO 2005 31). This alignment with the CAPE instead of the Cambridge A-level exams shows junior colleges’ shifting interest away from a British model, and towards a fusion of Caribbean and North American models.

Through an analysis of American composition pedagogy’s cultural assumptions, and a case study of St. John’s Junior College, I intend to determine how Belizean composition pedagogy has evolved under its various influences. In chapter 1, I examine some of the major ways that US composition pedagogies have responded to the socio-economic reality of the US. I use this examination to problematize the potential adaptation of those pedagogies in Belizean composition courses, and argue that wholesale pedagogical adaptation enables a lack of urgency for Belize to develop its own reasons for why composition should be required at the post-secondary level. These reasons, I argue, should reflect the country’s own evolving cultural demands. After, I analyze socio-economic assumptions underlying expressivist, cognitive theory and discourse community pedagogical approaches in the teaching of writing in the United States to see whether those assumed conditions exist in Belize. I then determine whether these American pedagogies cater to

socio-economic conditions of Belize, exploring the use of the Kriol language as an example of a cultural circumstance that Belizean pedagogy must consider. The chapter concludes with a brief analysis of some of the more apparent national conditions in Belize that a composition course would most ideally address.

With some ideas about the circumstances composition instructors may want to respond to in designing first-year composition classes, I conduct a close reading of syllabi of first-year composition courses at St. John's College Junior College over a seven-year period (from 2007 to 2014) in chapter 2. Through the close readings, I state ways the course curriculum has evolved and what prevalent pedagogical ideas are most apparent. Of the major shifts recognized, it is clear that first-year composition at St. John's College has taken incremental steps towards being a course less concerned with students engaging in traditional modes of American academic writing, and has positioned itself more towards engaging Belizean students with ideas about their identity, and local spaces.

In the final chapter, I first conduct an analysis of the textbooks used in first-year composition at St. John's College during the same seven year period of the second chapter. An analysis of these textbooks' introduction and prefaces looks at how the books frame writing in a Belizean composition course. I then conduct cross analyses of the SJCJC syllabi with those of two American institutions, St. Louis University and University of Southern Florida, two universities frequently attended by Belizean students, to see the overlap between them and the Belizean schools. By doing so, I argue that SJCJC partially designs its courses for potential transference to institutions in the United States, discussing the problem this poses for students unlikely to attend those institutions due to financial barriers, among other obstacles.

I conclude the thesis with some pages that examine the ways first-year composition might be shaped in Belize over the next few years, and propose the implementation of national outcomes for composition instruction. The utility of composition for generating social discourse on national identity provides the course with the potential to become a space that allows Belizeans to articulate their voices, and move Belize well beyond mimicry of foreign educational systems.

Chapter 2
Remodeling Composition in Belize:
Assumptions About U.S. Composition Pedagogy And Its Potential Applicability in Belize

Writing Without A Cause

A teacher in Belize told me that there are only two books published by Belizean authors worth reading, Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb* and Zoilla Ellis's *On Heroes, Lizards, and Passions*. I read both books while attending St. John's College High School, one of the oldest secondary institutions in Belize founded by British Jesuit priests, not even realizing at the time how the few books published by Belizean authors were only indicative of a greater national trend where literacy and writing were not spoken about beyond skills required for going through a formal education. As a student, I had little conception of what writing could achieve beyond a transcription of jumbled thoughts, and even though I was a voracious reader relative to my schoolmates, I could not articulate what made writing and literacy so important other than the pleasure of having absorbed another story. Thinking back to high school and my two years at the adjoining junior college, I cannot recall ever having a sense of the purpose of the papers we wrote in literature and history classes other than that they were required, and occasionally made me feel good about myself when an instructor responded positively to my ideas.

While part of this I can easily ascribe to the typical ignorance of being young and absorbed in everything but my classes, I believe that at least some of it was owed to a culture of education that had not, and still has not, determined for itself what writing could achieve for its students and its citizenry in an effort to develop the country. Like other Caribbean countries, Belize has been affected over the past two decades by global political and economic changes that have resulted in a growth of the education sector (Tun 36). Maria Isabel Tun, in her article "External Tertiary

Education Providers in Belize” explains “these influences have exerted market demands on human resources and required a broadened diversity of skills at the tertiary education level” (Tun 36). However, as the article continues in an examination of the various external tertiary education providers, it becomes clear that writing and literacy beyond secondary education have little to no role in the development of either the individual or the nation with most of the programs. Tun focused on business management, agriculture or tourism, service industries that most often emphasize manual labor and oral communication. Only since 2006 has the Belizean government began to create higher [tertiary] education policy frameworks in order to meet the standards of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME), which would provide citizens of CARICOM (Caribbean Community) countries, of which Belize is a member, job mobility between those member countries (Tun 38). Even then such opportunities focus primarily on the transference on what are called professional qualifications tied to specific job paths.

Despite the absence of such an explicit statement on writing and literacy from either the government or educational institutions, English composition continues to be taught at most Belizean tertiary institutions. These institutions range from well-established Jesuit-affiliated schools like St. John’s College Junior College (est. 1952), to the first national university, University of Belize (est. 2000), to newer schools such as Wesley Junior College (reestablished in 2006). Most obviously, English composition remains central to college curriculums because it is part of the educational model Belize inherited from a 20th century American education curricula through sects of the Catholic church that established these institutions. As part of these curricula, its existence within the predominant Belizean tertiary curriculum goes unquestioned for the same reason that so much that is inherited from colonial countries goes unquestioned- it’s believed to be innately better to a home grown version of composition due to its connection to a dominant global force. Although

numerous aspects of education go unquestioned by the general public in Belize, composition is significant because its purpose² garners contentious debate even in the United States even outside of academic circles. Determining the purpose for the teaching of writing is vital because “To teach writing is to argue for a version of reality” (Berlin 766). Along those lines then, adaptation of American pedagogy in Belize argues for a version of reality that may not align with the conditions of the country.

That Belizean instructors do not interrogate the purpose of composition attracts even more interest when a person considers the questions that arise about the purposes and goals of first-year composition constantly in American scholarship. This questioning occurs in the United States as formal tertiary education in the US continues its trend to focus more on building careers than a well-rounded liberal arts education, decreasing the overall desire for non-specialized writing and literacy, and configuring to a view of writing as a utilitarian tool (Corbett 444). Documents such as the American Council for Writing Program Administration (WPA) ‘Outcomes Statement for First Year Composition’ show a unity across institutions regarding the potential outcomes for first-year composition in the United States absent in Belize. Additionally, as the Belizean government already has a difficult time trying to fund tertiary education, there is significant incentive in determining why certain courses should be taught, similarly to current demands on liberal arts in the United States (Tun 40). Given the huge discrepancies between American and Belizean socio-economic conditions, the former a longstanding global imperial superpower and the latter a ‘third world’ country that has been around for fewer than forty years, the Belize government and educational institutions should show greater concern for the allocations of their limited funding.

² Throughout the thesis, I use purpose and reason for composition interchangeably, recognizing that they do vary slightly in definition.

Such a wide difference in national socio-economic structure between these two countries begs the question as to how a model that suits one country can be fitted onto the other without a heavily scrutinized and customized overhaul. Additionally, American composition scholarship “has remained largely indifferent to the worldwide teaching of English writing and to the global contact zones created by the worldwide spread of Anglo-American political and cultural forces” (You 176), situating the field in a very American-centric view about the teaching of writing. Belize educational institutions readily accept that having all students able to write according to predominant American ideas is essential. Similar to other aspects of American culture that have permeated Belize, as a result of the United States’ position as “the dominant country in terms of cultural imperialism” (Everitt 17), US composition pedagogy assumes the default position and determines the national standards. This notion is readily believed despite the fact that neither the Belize government (at any level) or educational institutions have articulated how writing aligns itself with the goals of the country’s development, which Robert V. Farrell argued in 1983 should be the intention of any nationwide educational plan (Farrell 16), an argument I will give greater attention to later in this chapter. Thus, Belizean composition instructors and their students engage in a required course without a sense of its potential purpose other than its requirement as part of the institution’s curriculum. James Berlin posits the potential harmful consequences such inarticulation might have, stating the need for “writing teachers [to] become more aware of the full significance of their pedagogical strategies. Not doing so can have disastrous consequences, ranging from momentarily confusing students to sending them away with faulty and even harmful information” (766). While additional work would need to be done to examine how a lack of national composition outcomes, along the lines of the WPA’s, impacts instructor and students’ engagement with first year writing, it is reasonable to assume it impacts the way instructors engage with the teaching of writing.

This chapter therefore explores some of the predominant reasons for the teaching of composition provided by American composition scholarship and groups such as the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA). It also explores the underlying assumptions those reasons make about university education and national socio-economic conditions, finding those conditions uniquely situated in the United States. Xiaoye You, in his book on the history of English composition in China, *Writing In the Devil's Tongue*, states that “reassessing American composition studies’ assumptions in relation to the dynamics of globalization” (176) is a necessary move the field needs to make if compositionists want to further their knowledge about transferable pedagogies. Exploring these assumptions, I determine potential reasons for the teaching of first-year composition that are applicable to a Belizean context as a primer for how composition studies can develop in the country, considering its own social and political position from its independence in 1981 to as recently as 2008. Following is a review of composition scholarship exploring the differences in the teaching of English composition between the Caribbean and the US, focusing on the difficulty posed by Creole English vernacular in Caribbean countries. The chapter concludes by offering various ways composition scholars could conduct research in Belize to determine potential purposes for the teaching of writing that better suit Belize.

The Assumptions Of US Composition Courses

First-year composition in the United States has been a part of the predominant American curriculum since the late nineteenth century “as part of a larger modernizing initiative to replace the classical curriculum of the old-time pietistic college with a secular education in the vernacular” (Horner and Trimbur 595). Since then, composition has undergone many ideological changes due to the work of scholars, teachers, administrators, students, and government bodies. Often, those

changes appear to respond to shifting concerns within American society, such as the rise of Peter Elbow's ideas on expressivist writing coinciding with 1960's notions of individualism, or, for a more contemporaneous example, the wish for a more pluralistic idea of composition in response to calls for greater diversity (Banks 17). One point of interest then is exploring whether those pedagogical ideas, situated in the peculiarities of United States' circumstances, can be applied to a country like Belize where those cultural shifts have not occurred. Further, we can examine what the absence of those cultural shifts in Belize might mean when considering how composition studies sometimes views its evolving ideas as occurring in isolation from societal changes.

Within those pedagogical shifts, only a few ideas on writing have taken firmer root, remaining part of contemporary pedagogical practices even if they continue to receive scrutiny. For instance, for the most part, compositionists agree that a focus on grammar in a composition classroom deters attention from more global writing concerns. Additionally, compositionists would also state that the act of writing develops students' critical thinking abilities, allowing them to access and arrange their thoughts in an easily accessible medium (Emig 127, Corbett 451). Yet, despite American compositionists addressing the teaching of writing as the field evolves, first year composition continues to receive criticism in the United States as a course that does not adequately serve its intended purpose of teaching writing and instead merely serves to drain funds that could be diverted elsewhere. Composition also receives criticism as a course that prevents minority groups from entering the university discourse community (Lowenthal and White 284). Composition scholarship's reasons for the necessity of composition vary widely over the late twentieth century and are worthy of examination to determine what those reasons assume about tertiary education and the society in which that education occurs.

Composition, more than many other fields, receives criticism from several interest groups who each pose different opinions for how composition should be taught. Sharon Crowley views composition's status as the "mutual property of all persons" (231), whether or not they are involved in the discipline, which is largely responsible for the field's need to defend it from extinction. Due to the usage of writing across a wide variety of professional fields as well as daily tasks, the general public assumes a familiarity with the field uncommon with other areas such as chemistry, philosophy, or history. Writing's relatively high accessibility as a composing platform makes it, currently, the most efficient tool for transcribing information for record-keeping or disseminating information. The view of writing as a skill acquired and then used ad nauseam without effort also undermines the work of writers and writing researchers who dedicate considerable time and energy to working with writing. I had formerly thought that people not directly involved in writing and composition scholarship (parents, university administration, local and national government bodies) spoke from a position lacking credibility and therefore should have no say about what was done in composition. However, I now recognize that while people not directly involved in scholarship may lack the training and experience of writing instructors, or the knowledge of the scholarship, those that possess a high degree of rhetorical awareness are just as cognizant of some of the most prevalent issues (the purpose of society, utility of education, language, and art) to which composition responds, and how composition could be reconfigured in order to better address national social issues as conceived by authors such as Xiaoye You and Howard Trimbur.

Composition's status as the 'mutual property of all persons' adds to the field's tendency to change and modify in response to the national socio-economic landscape of the United States. Composition scholars and instructors adjust to the changing climate of the country and to the temperament and needs of their students, in a similar way that an instructor adjusts their pedagogy

according to the students in their class. While other traditional core curriculum classes have a higher threshold of content-knowledge comfortability, most any writing literate person can offer ideas about how composition should be taught as they encounter writing daily, and conceive in their own localized ways what good writing is and how it can be taught. Composition's place within English departments as the default course taught by first-year graduate instructors enforces the idea that it requires little to no specialized training, a position not shared by literature or creative writing courses. Rather than find that information frustrating, I now consider the US's open position towards composition an aspect worth celebrating. Perhaps undervalued is how this celebrated view of the composition course by non-academic persons and groups puts useful pressure on the field to continue articulating its relevance as the demands of writing continue to expand. Such an attitude towards composition, and education more broadly, does not exist with similar vivacity in Belize, impeding the field from developing to suit the country's citizens' desires since those desires are rarely articulated.

Responding to concerns within composition scholarship and an invested public, American compositionists provide various reasons for the necessity of teaching composition. These reasons run the gamut from writing providing a mode of thinking otherwise unavailable (Emig 122), to introducing students to academic discourse communities (Bartholomae 605), and to fostering students' creativity and self-development (Sirc 28). Sharon Crowley, who has written about first-year composition with explicit consideration of the larger scope of English departments and universities, perceives first-year composition as a means of subsidizing the work of English departments, a gate keeper that weeds out incoming writers, as opposed to teaching students how to continue refining their composing processes (Crowley 235). Such "competing claims for the purposes and focus of postsecondary writing courses characterize composition studies' professional

and scholarly conversations,” (Julier 140) although exclusively with regards to composition taught in American English in the United States. The diversity of these writing purposes demonstrates that writing can potentially fulfill multiple roles within an educational framework, supporting the notion that the lack of diverse writing purposes within Belize is not due to the unavailability of potential purposes that could be used to guide pedagogy.

Composition’s response to national changes in the US can be seen, as previously mentioned, in the rise of expressivist pedagogy in the sixties and seventies. Early expressivist pedagogy insisted that composition should be taught in order to assist students in a process of self-discovery that “empowers individuals to act in the world” (Burnham 23). Peter Elbow, one of free writing’s pioneers, championed the exercise as a means of getting students to tap into their own thoughts that lead to better, more honest writing, in reaction to that era’s current-traditional teaching that “emphasized academic writing in standard forms and ‘correct’ grammar” (Burnham 22). Believing that students could better engage in writing if allowed to write about themselves in a low-pressure environment where they maintained greater agency over their writing, Peter Elbow’s classes practiced free writing, journaling and peer review, among other expressivist practices (Burnham 23). Similarly, Geoffrey Sirc maintains that composition courses can provide an outlet for students to explore the kookiness of the world and the self, alongside his cynicism about the course’s loss of appreciation for innovative pedagogy due to what he perceives as composition’s increased professionalization in its attempt to be recognized as a “respectable discipline” (Sirc 7). Rather than trying to make composition appealing for its utility to student’s formal education or career, Sirc embraces “poetry, ecophilia, spiritual intensity, basic human (not disciplined) style” and sees composition as a “a last outpost” without end other than to revel in wonderment (Sirc 28). Between Elbow and Sirc, it becomes apparent how sixties expressivist ideas on writing and the

teaching of writing resisted rising professionalization and sanitization of the liberal arts amid civil rights movements and a growing military industrial complex. While expressivist concepts such as free writing continue to persist until the present, their temporal situatedness in sixties and seventies American culture asks us whether those concepts would have arrived within the scholarship absent of a desire of ideas surrounding individuality, and a greater need for personal openness. These pedagogical concepts, when transferred to Belize or other English-speaking countries that do not prioritize individuality, potentially lose weight when functioning in a vacuum absent of the causes that generated those concepts. Not propelled by a response to its own national socio-political movement, the transference of historically embedded pedagogical concepts enforces the notion that ideas that originate in the United States *should* be effective in other spaces. Such a notion undermines the complexities of the unique conditions of post-colonial countries like Belize, and the pedagogical tact demanded of those conditions.

One of the other major arguments for the necessity of writing in composition is that it provides a means for students to consider their thoughts at a pace and in a form that only writing provides. Janet Emig, employing an argument based in cognitive theory, states writing is most often used in composing because it is the most available means of composing thoughts (Emig 122). Further, she argues that writing provides a way for people to explore “the nature of conceptual relationships, whether they be coordinate, subordinate, superordinate, causal, or something other” (Emig 126), showing that writing proves useful as a means of recognizing connections between elements that may otherwise be inaccessible. This argument for the necessity of writing as a part of a school curriculum arose in the wake of new developments in cognitive theory in the late seventies and eighties as composition continued in its attempt to gain its footing as a well-regarded field of study. Emig’s reason, supported by research in neurology and case studies by authors like Linda

Flowers and John R. Hayes, therefore connects rhetoric and composition to already well-regarded fields in the United States. By doing this, Emig imbues writing studies with the objective credibility traditionally reserved for the sciences. This reason for the utility of writing seems closely tied to notions of formal educational institutional hierarchy, relying on the assumption that people regard scientific research with a greater amount of seriousness than the sort of experimentation more typical within the humanities. Disassociating writing from the composition course seems like an intentional move by Emig meant to display the writing process as a useful learning tool that is adaptable to any situation or college course. This ignores the fact that composition is considered the class in which students are assumed to learn how to view writing as a learning process.

Other composition scholars, most famously David Bartholomae, have argued that composition is most important for introducing students to academic discourse, and instilling a sense of authority over their writing that will be necessary throughout their college career. David Bartholomae, in his widely-read essay “Inventing the University,” analyzes placement tests of several students to propose that incoming college students “appropriate (or [are] appropriated by) a specialized discourse” (Bartholomae 606), and learn the discourse through emulating a genre. Bartholomae distinguishes levels of student writers based on their ability to take on different tiers of authority, remarking that “[students’] initial progress will be marked by their abilities to take on the role of privilege, by their abilities to establish authority” (Bartholomae 627). A course meant to teach students how to take on the discourse of academia, and “the ‘codes’ that constitute [such] discourse,” appears far more tangible as an instructional model than a course meant either to instill a mode of thinking or to develop students’ appreciation for “poetry, ecophilia...” (Sirc 28). Bartholomae provides a pragmatic application for the composition course and decreases the anxiety of composition’s instruction, as the repercussions seem to reverberate only within the campus

domain with little mention of its impact on students' personal development beyond other college writing. Under the framework Bartholomae suggests, there is the assumption that writing will occur with some level of regularity throughout students' formal educations, and potentially in their careers, an assumption my engineering students have often reacted to in disbelief. This assumption also suggests that writing has its greatest utility in students' academic and professional lives, undermining its utility in students' private lives.

Even beyond the assumptions made by these pedagogical perspectives, the teaching of writing in the United States operates under several assumptions privileging specific pedagogical practices. For instance, predominant composition pedagogy assumes that standardized American English is the language that benefits students the most (Horner and Trimbur 595). Despite arguments to create a more pluralized space within composition, the norm continues to be that students, regardless of their ethnic, racial or class background, are required to configure their writing to suit the standards of the educational system, a system that at its foundation excludes minority groups from accessing education. Having looked at some of the major assumptions of the purpose of first-year composition in the United States, I will briefly explore whether the conditions those assumptions make exist in a Belizean context. Such an analysis would provide a starting point for instructors and governing bodies to determine what pedagogies should be avoided.

Crab Kulcha, Science! and Brain Drain

.Expressivist pedagogy relies on the assumption that students have inner selves they can manifest under the right circumstances allowing them to generate authentic writing, and provide sincere support to their peers. In the beginning of this chapter, I stated that Belize lacks a thriving literary community. However, I feel like that does not fully encapsulate the degree to which art of

any medium continues to receive little attention in the country. Currently, it is difficult to say with any surety that Belizeans recognize the potential vitality of their personal perspectives since signifiers of individual and group efforts- art, scientific innovation, and entrepreneurial enterprise -- are in short supply nationwide. Partially, this is due to a socio-political system at both the government and societal level that provides little encouragement for individual efforts, slowing a potential flourishing of works from Belizeans. Socially, the country's own citizens often remark on what is commonly referred to as 'crab kulcha,'³ a Creole term used to describe national culture composed of individuals who oppose the development of persons working towards developing a project or skill rarely seen in the country. Additionally, Belize is also nationally regarded as a Catholic Country, which further regulates the moral and social character of the country through the media, resulting in an intolerable, and physically dangerous space for people of queer identities. So far, Belizean culture has failed to develop identity movements, such as those in recognition of gender, ethnicity, race, etc., recognized for their role in creating more pluralistic perspectives in other countries, downplaying the importance of identity politics in the lives of citizens. While Belizeans are only now recognizing the need for gender equality, women still remain underrepresented in leadership roles both in the public and private sector, additionally impacted by the aforementioned 'crab kulcha' wherein women disparage the efforts of other women that seek leadership roles (Habet 8). Most recently, Belizeans overwhelmingly denied the opportunity for gay rights legislation, and have maintained anti-buggery laws that continue to villainize gay men (Stephens). Such socio-political stagnation breeds a culture frustrated with its current condition, but with little notions as to how their situation could be improved.

³ Belizean Creole for 'Crab Culture'

In spite of its inheritance of Western ideas of capitalism, and democracy, Belizean mainstream culture has not yet gotten to a point where the potential of individual progress is a marker of a successful nation beyond conformity to the job systems already in place. While this is not a phenomenon limited to Belize, it is important because Belize does not have a strong opposing culture consisting of persons that refute the predominant culture. This is due to several reasons, such as a lack of commercial resources or spaces used to support individuals' artistic endeavors, perhaps rendering the notion of individuality less possible and appealing on a broader level. Within a Belizean context then, expressivist pedagogy practices may hold little appeal if the composition classroom appears too dissimilar to the majority of students' lives. Expressivist pedagogical practices such as freewrites, peer review and process theory hold little weight in the face of an overwhelming public attitude that considers the individual an ineffectual organism. With regards to writing, students have little evidence that their voices are valid with few works having been published by Belizeans and instead consuming the histories and cultures of the United States, Western Europe, and the surrounding Latin America and the Caribbean. Arguing that students can manifest their inner selves through their writing appears less appealing in a national culture that places little value on a person's ability to articulate their personal identity.

On the other hand, cognitive theories of writing seem equally inapplicable within a context where a national culture does not value scientific inquiry. Additionally, writing as a means to access new ideas feels unessential when the case studies in support of cognitive writing theories are so far removed from the country's context. Popular case studies, such as those by Linda Flowers and Richard Hayes described earlier, assume that cultural variables of writing students can be transferred across different cultural bodies. These studies also assume that cognitive processes occurring during writing are transferrable onto a drastically different cultural context. Similar to the

assumptions concerning expressivist pedagogy, cognitive theories of writing assume that the culture of a space places value on scientific evidence. Again, Belize's mainstream culture remains in large part skeptical to the findings of scientific research in writing and on a broader scale. More generally, cognitive theories about writing don't carry much weight within a culture lacking contact with scientific discourse communities the credibility of science present in the United States diminishes over geographical and intellectual space.

Lastly, there is sufficient cause to scrutinize Bartholomae's discourse community approach to writing, an approach that assumes that there exists discourse communities where student-writers will engage in classes following completion of first-year composition. However, the circumstances within Belize's higher education structure reveal the absence of such discourse communities in several respects. For instance, unlike the predominant systems of US universities, Belizean college instructors rarely assume the additional role of researcher, writer or contributor to the fields in which they teach. For the most part, these instructors teach content acquired during their training, and rarely study extensively within their own field as a result of the lack of professional or financial incentive for obtaining an advanced degree. Most often during my own time as a student at St. John's College Junior College, it was more common occurrence for an instructor to have only an undergraduate degree in education than for them to possess training within the field they were teaching. A memorable instance my friends and I often recount about SJCJC concerns an anthropology course wherein the instructor learned the content of the class alongside us, offering false information in his speculations on human development, and phrenology. In addition to a lack of instructors with formal advanced education, the education system of schools like St. John's College Junior College often have instructors teaching on average six sections each term with no opportunities for sabbaticals to conduct research or pursue independent projects while maintaining

a livable income. Again, such systems are common at community colleges and other two-year universities in the United States. However, when it is the predominant educational model it proves problematic because it undermines the work of teachers, and the value of dialogue inside and outside the academic community. In the past ten years, affiliations between US universities and the University of Belize have provided some chances to conduct work, but such projects are often tied to dominant industrial sectors such as fisheries, eco-tourism, linguistics and anthropological research, connected to advancing foreign corporate agendas like the expansion and maintenance of tourist sites.

The lack of an academic model that Belizean students can follow therefore hinders a thriving discourse community as described by David Bartholomae. Students are not able to view discussions within their field as ongoing discourses accessible to them. Rather, many students writing in first-year composition at most colleges in Belize are left in a lurch following completion of the course, having started a process of developing their writing only for them to lack spaces-- professional, social or academic-- in which they can envision situating themselves. Entering discourse communities as Bartholomae envisions is only possible for a select few who are able to finance costly education in foreign countries like the United States, and Caribbean countries like Jamaica and Barbados. I am willing to speculate that it is partially the availability of such discourse communities abroad that results in the ‘brain drain’⁴ so frequently found in developing countries like Belize. Discourse communities can hold a generative purpose for Belizean students to engage in the work of first-year composition, but only if the discourses envisioned by Bartholomae are rethought to suit the absence of traditional academic discourse.

⁴ a term used to describe the emigration of formally educated citizens from globally recognized developing countries to developed countries.

Having explored some of the issues in adapting American composition pedagogy to a Belizean context, the next section concludes with an analysis of the national conditions within Belize that composition ought to address as it continues its development.

Situating Assumptions In Cross Cultural Composition Studies

When I researched discussions of English composition and rhetoric outside of a Western context to see how the field was addressed, I was initially baffled by the lack of information available. I had been told by composition scholars that the teaching of writing was not studied as intensively outside of the United States, but I was still surprised by the lack of work not focused on issues of L2 writers⁵. This most likely has to do with the lack of advantage to American composition in studying non-US spaces, but it's also due to a lack of recognition about the teaching of writing outside of the US. Besides the United States and England, the teaching of writing has not been considered with much focus in other English-speaking countries, even in the Caribbean or other former British colonies where English is one of the more popularly spoken languages. In fact, considering that English is viewed worldwide as the language of commerce, it is baffling that the teaching of writing in English is not more heavily studied other than in rare works such as Xiaoye You's extensive work on the teaching of writing in China. Andrea Lunsford and Lahoucine Ouzgane express surprise about the lack of global composition studies in their introduction to *Crossing Borderlands*, stating "It is perhaps surprising that scholars in rhetoric and composition and in postcolonial studies have not been, by and large, in dialogue with one another, nor have insights from one field been used systematically to inform the other" (2). Using Lunsford and Ouzgane's work as a catalyst then, we need to address the regional and national conditions that the

⁵ L2 Writers (Defined)

teaching of writing needs to address if any pedagogical strategies are to be successfully practiced outside the US.

The work done on composition studies in the Caribbean so far has focused on code switching between Standard English and the English Creoles spoken on these islands. Creole, as a spoken language “emerged from a unique language contact situation which was a direct result of European colonial expansion in the Caribbean between 1500 and 1900 (Bickerton, 1981)” (Nero 3). Shondel Nero, Associate Professor and Director of the Program in Multilingual Multicultural Studies in the Department of Teaching and Learning at NYU, presented this information in her paper “ESL or ESD? Teaching English to Caribbean English Speakers” at the “Annual Meeting of the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages” in Chicago, IL, in March 1996. As a result of this contact situation a common language formed that borrowed elements from both Western European and African dialect, specifically “Their syntax, morphology and phonology are more akin to some West African languages, while their lexicons are mainly drawn from the dominant European language.” (Nero 4). Despite commonly observed distinctions, English-based Creoles continue to be considered as a type of ‘broken’ or ‘bad English’ (4). Embedded into this predicament are colonialist attitudes of superiority tied to the “European-derived standard language viewed as the ideal norm in the same socio-economic environment, as is the case with most Creoles outside of isolated rural communities, [where] they come to be viewed as deformed versions of the standard and are negatively evaluated” (Nero 8). While most often Creole is not considered substantially different enough to be recognized as a separate language, greater familiarity with Creole does lead to language issues for students instructed to use standard American or British English in writing courses. Particularly focusing on Jamaica, perhaps due to the presence of the University of West Indies, the study of Creole dialects by Caribbean scholars in writing courses

reveals underlying ethical issues in attempting to teach students using a language other than their spoken vernacular. Although L2 scholarship often touts that ‘academic writing is no one’s first language,’ the cultural position of Creole English dialects carry with them the baggage of class, race and other biases that the teaching of writing in the Caribbean, and Belize more specifically, should work towards addressing.

Studying first-year composition in Belize would benefit both US composition scholars in addition to Belizean composition instructors. The reasons are numerous such as the fact that Belize as a country has existed for only thirty-four years. Therefore it has only ever been a country in a globalized world, not ever gaining much of an opportunity to mold an identity apart from British colonialism and then American imperialism even more so than You’s description of English composition in China, which has experienced periods of isolation from the Western world. As a result, there is difficulty in distinguishing what aspects of Belizean culture and society are formulated to serve the needs of Belizeans, and which are simply taken and adapted from larger, industrialized countries. By examining Belizean composition classes, we could gain insight into whether any aspects of Belizean writing literacy distinguishes itself in a substantial way from American or British ideologies. These differences may perhaps be mere seedlings, but they could also indicate the presence of nascent ideas that may take root if nurtured by instructors and government administrative bodies.

Additionally, and as previously stated, Belize’s history of tertiary education is brief due to the government establishing the first university in the late 1990’s. This inaccessibility to higher education by Belizean students was due to the lack of funds necessary to invest in this level of education, and a lack of personnel who were capable of leading in administrative or instructional roles. As a result of Belize’s inexperience with research support structures typical of US

universities, there exists very little scholarship on Belize by Belizeans outside of the fields of agriculture, tourism, archaeology, and education (Aird 19). While there has been some work done on both tertiary education and literacy in the country that could be squeezed into composition if necessary, the teaching of writing has not been thoroughly considered in a manner resembling the field of composition studies in the United States. The lack of work that examines the teaching of writing serves as the catalyst to my project. Belize presents a space where we can study how the teaching of writing has evolved at the tertiary level over the past thirty years. This evolution has gone uninformed by a culture of scholarship and academia, and instead by the occasional visit from US scholars, particularly Jesuit-affiliated, who assist in aligning Belizean courses with updated pedagogical practices.

The results of such a study of Belizean composition could therefore show American compositionists the impact scholarship has on the actual teaching of writing occurring. An analysis of the teaching of writing in Belize can teach compositionists which writing pedagogies founded in American composition studies are most prevalent. Looking at the teaching of writing in Belize we would learn how thoroughly American pedagogical ideas disseminate across borders, and ponder questions as to whether or not Belizean educators should find such ties disturbing and worthy of amending.

The teaching of writing also deserves examination due to Belize's most prevalent industries not requiring high literacy from its people. Many jobs within these industries, common in Caribbean countries, do not require people to write. In service and manual labor-intensive industries such as agriculture, tourism, and fisheries, it becomes difficult to rely on the professional utilitarian purpose for writing, the notion that students will be writing in their future careers that American composition researchers deploy at least once a term. A worthy project would be

examination of jobs most widely occupied by Belizeans as well as examining the frequency and intensity with which those jobs require people to write. In the few jobs I worked while in Belize I wrote receipts, invoices and television advertising scripts, a variety probably not typical. What happens then when some of the reasons American compositionists state for the necessity of the teaching of writing do not hold applicability in Belize? What reasons for the teaching of writing would come to the fore that may prove beneficial for the Belizean individual and the country?

Some work has been done on the type of general curriculum Caribbean countries might employ in the absence of such a professional utilitarian need. Even since 1983, just two years after Belizean independence, Robert V Farrell, a Caribbean education scholar, has championed the idea of a ‘generative curriculum’ that Caribbean countries might employ instead of importing American ideas of development, which may not develop the country in a manner that acknowledges its present conditions. Arguing “Development has not meant equality and social progress” and that it has instead “most often meant an urban, consumer, industrial reality, often at the expense of local cultures” (Farrell 10), Farrell calls for Caribbean government leaders to consider how a curriculum may be framed to create “a type of literacy that will enable students to become clear thinking, productive citizens needed for Caribbean development” (Farrell 20). Here it becomes clear that aspects of American composition pedagogy should be implemented, particularly those that focus on composition’s development of student’s critical thinking to engage in social discourse. Farrell relates ‘clear thinking’ with ‘productive citizens,’ concluding “such citizens, fully conscious of their reality and potential, will serve as catalysts for authentic development in this part of the world” (Farrell 20). Farrell leaves the idea of what authentic development means to the individual countries. For Belize, this means that productive citizens would partake in their own consumer, industrial reality. In chapter two, I perform a case study of St. John’s College Junior College

composition syllabi in an effort to understand the ways the curriculum there has gradually shifted towards Belize's particular authentic development.

Chapter 3

Inching Towards Ourselves: St. John's College Junior College

Shifting Pedagogy over Seven Years

Why St. John's and Syllabi

To determine where Belize composition might transition, it is first necessary to locate where composition pedagogy has unconsciously arrived within the array of inherited American pedagogies. It is interesting to use St. John's College Junior College for a first-year composition case study because it is indisputably the oldest tertiary level institution in Belize. St. John's Junior College presents itself as the most beneficial institution to study because of its direct connections to US pedagogies, having been provided substantial external support from the American Jesuit community and existing long enough for trial-and-error in their course development. As an alumnus of St. John's, I was allowed unique access to course materials that I analyze in this chapter. St. John's position as the oldest post-secondary institution places it as the guiding standard of other Belizean institutions' curricula. While there are several two-year post-secondary institutions in Belize that could also be examined, such as the University of Belize and Muffles College, St. John's College Junior College (SJCJC) presents itself as the most practical to study due to its ties with US universities. Unfortunately, a lack of archiving course material in previous decades make it difficult to determine how many courses were taught prior to the 00's, including first-year composition. Through recent digital archiving initiatives by the junior college's College of Liberal Arts, course documents from more recent years have been made more easily retrievable in comparison to the non-systematized storage room. To receive a contemporary sense of how the

class has developed, I studied a recent seven-year period (2007-2014) of first-year composition at St. John's College.

In this chapter, I examine course syllabi because such an analysis leads to discovering the intended goals of the course, and perhaps what writing literacy means for the institution. I envision this chapter as a beginning to the type of pedagogical studies educational institutions, and government bodies in Belize could benefit from as they work towards determining a more fully robust pedagogy of their own. There has been some precedent for analysis of syllabus as it relates to first-year composition with Mary B. Eberly et al. stating,

The need to conduct syllabus analysis becomes evident when we recognize the multiple uses of syllabi in higher education and the changing perception of the role of syllabi in educating students. To date, these functional multiplicities of syllabi have not been examined simultaneously in the literature (57).

This analysis assumes that ideas concerning where English composition lies in the eyes of SJCJC's administrators, teachers, and students can be uncovered through a close reading of syllabi. Syllabi provide a sense of the purposes and goals of the course as determined by the administration and faculty. My focus here is on the ideals of the course in contra-distinction to what actually occurs in the classroom as that involves instructors, instructor training, and student's previous education development. These ideals for composition's purpose beyond the course are vital in determining what the course aspires towards, which is important in providing motivation to instructors and students to engage in the course. By examining the ideal purposes of first-year composition at St. John's, this chapter serves as a model for future work at other Belizean tertiary institutions. In future studies this could model can be productively cross-analyzed in an effort of locating patterns across Belize. Due to American Jesuits' role in shaping the Belizean education systems, the close

reading also assumes that the purpose of first year writing at Belize aligns with some prevailing American pedagogy, which is further explored in chapter four.

Methodology

I used the syllabi from St. John's College Junior College for ENG105/ENG110: English Composition I from 2007 to 2014, and traced the course's pedagogical evolution through the course description, assignments, and stated goals. I chose these elements because in syllabi they most often explicitly state what the purposes of the course are. The majority of the syllabi are for classes taught by the same instructor with syllabi from a few others when that instructor did not teach first-year composition. At SJCJC, instructors make minimal changes to their course syllabus, most specifically with the themes and topics of the assignment prompts. Beyond that, instructors stated that syllabi are otherwise consistent across sections. Interesting to note is that SJCJC divides its first year writing curriculum into two courses: ENG105/110: College Composition I and ENG120: College Composition II, but this study limits its scope to the first course students take. This separation of first-year composition courses is also present in the two American universities I examine in chapter three. I did not want to make judgments on the data I found prior to studying the syllabi, therefore I read each syllabus and made notes on different qualities I noticed, whether that was a pedagogical idea presented such as the way a statement was phrased, implicitly emphasizing some aspect of the course or the explicit inclusion of terminology commonly tied to specific composition pedagogy. Since Belize does not have a four-season climate cycle that neatly divides the academic calendar, SJCJC uses a number system to refer to each fifteen-week term. For instance, a semester that starts in August 2007 would be referred to as Semester 1 2007 while a semester that starts in January 2008 would be called Semester 2 2008. Semester 1 begins in late

August and ends in late November, and semester 2 begins in early January and goes until early May.

As I read through each syllabus, I made notes comparing them to previous versions, observing changes such as the disappearance of an assignment type or its recovery after a semester absent. In total, I analyzed 10 first year composition syllabi (2007 being the only year titled ENG105 and the others ENG110) with holes in the chronology for Semester 2 2007, 2008, Semester 1 2009, Semester 1 2012, and 2013 due to missing records. I did not want to approach this data-gathering with a specific theoretical framework in mind when I chose to conduct this nor do I assume that any quantitative data can be reliably gained through direct replication of this study. The lack of much work on syllabus analysis in composition makes this uncharted territory, and my hope is that this methodology can be used and refined by other composition researchers in Belize and elsewhere.

Each syllabus, in addition to more logistical information such as class time and attendance policy, has the following elements most explicitly relating to course pedagogy from which the analysis was conducted: *Course Description*, *Rationale*, *Course Goals*, *Course Learning Objectives*, *Methods of Instruction*, *Course Expectations*, *Methods of Evaluation and Grading Procedures*, *Description of Assignments*, and *Course Content*. Next, I define each section according to what I saw them address throughout the period studied.

Course Description briefly explains the type of work the students will do in the composition course and is the only instance on most of the syllabi where the student is informed that they must acquire a C (70-74) to pass. The text of this section rarely changes over the years under study. *Rationale* states why students need to take the course, informing them of its utility not only for their formal education, but also emphasizing its importance to their everyday lives.

Additionally, it states how it will improve specific facets of their writing. Like the course description, this section rarely changes over the seven years. *Course Goals* outlines what students will do in the class under the most ideal circumstances. These goals change in major ways twice throughout the period of study (between 2007 and 2010, and then from 2013 and Semester 1 2014's syllabi). *Course Learning Objectives* states what students should be able to do once they have completed the course. This is combined with the *Course Goals* in Semester 2 2009, and separated out again in Semester 2 2011. *Methods of Instruction* states the ways the class will be taught, the only change being the addition of PowerPoint presentations in Semester 1 2014. *Methods of Evaluation and Grading Procedures* provides a breakdown of the types of assignments students are expected to complete in the course. This changes with some regularity over the years. *Description of Assignments* states what each major assignment requires the student to do: some detailed enough to function as assignment prompts on their own. Of all the syllabus' sections, this undergoes revision most frequently. *Course Content* refers to the different units of content that the course hopes to cover over the fifteen-week semester.

Through the analysis, some ideas about how first-year composition has changed over the seven-year period emerge, and the purpose for the course at St. John's College takes shape. This purpose appears two-fold: it provides students who intend to continue their studies at a four-year American institution with a curriculum that covers similar concepts to those of first-year composition courses at American institutions that SJCJC graduates often attend, like St. Louis University, and University of Southern Florida (Discussed further in chapter 3). Secondly, the course syllabi show an increased focus on writing outside of the academic sphere as the years progress. One of the more interesting aspects of first-year composition at St. John's College Junior College is its changing emphasis on different facets of its goal-set, which integrates aspects of oral

communication, and literature courses in addition to instructing students on composing essays in a variety of modes. First-year composition at SJCJC also moves from a curriculum focused most explicitly on expository writing to a curriculum increasingly concerned with the social purposes of writing.

Ever-Expanding Mediums and Genres

The goals of first-year composition at St. John’s College Junior College lack a cohesive pedagogical focus as evidenced by the syllabi adding and subtracting assignments without any apparent intent. Following the Semester 1 2007 class, the *Course Description* remains verbatim until Semester 1 2014, which removes any mention of ENG120 or the minimum grade required to pass as well as revises some of the language concerning the course’s emphasis, making it more concise by replacing “well-supported paragraphs and essays” with “well-supported compositions” (“Semester 1 2014” 1). The decision to revise this minor detail could be an attempt to align the course with its multi-modal instruction, which involves students composing in a variety of mediums, including speeches, drawings, fictional narratives, and more traditional essays. Additionally the final *Course Learning Objective* states students will “identify and incorporate source material into writing” (“Semester 1 2007” 2), adding development of research skills to an already whopping list of intended skills to develop. The *Course Goals* in semester 1 2007 each focus on the different mediums and genres of the course.

“Students will

- Develop their ability to compose non-fiction and fiction essays.
- Demonstrate organizing competencies in oral and written communication
- Formulate significant critical questions and responses through critical readings.”

(1)

From these goals, it is difficult to determine the intended purpose the composition class because each goal pulls on a different skill set on the part of an instructor. The first goal gives the impression that the course pedagogy is most interested in creative writing, the second in speech classes and current traditional composition while the third leans towards literature and reading comprehension. The Semester 1 2014 syllabus amends the second point, adding “work-related or post graduate setting” between competencies and the rest of the statement, potentially providing the course greater meaning for students who may not continue with their formal education after graduating from SJCJC. This revision tacitly acknowledges that the course may provide the only means by which many students receive tertiary instruction on their writing. The focus on both written and oral composition shows itself again in the *Rationale Statement* of the Semester 1 2007 syllabus. There, the syllabus states the course will provide students the means to “express him and herself clearly in both the written and oral language” (“Semester 1 2007”, 1). This integration of oral language points to one of the more unique aspects of SJCJC’s English composition course, its intent to teach students how to communicate both orally and textually. In the United States, these skills are predominantly separated with writing composition covered by first year composition courses taught by instructors in English departments while oral communication is generally taught in classes within Communication departments. Oral communication receives further focus in the *Method of Instruction* section, which includes “speech to enhance public speaking and real-life critical thinking skills” (“Semester I 2007” 2). Oral composition receives a significant stake in how students are evaluated in the course. For instance, the Semester 2 2009 increases oral class presentations to 20% of the course’s final grade from an already substantial 10% in previous terms (3).

The *Description of Assignments* section provides the most substantive information about the role of oral composition with the writing course. For instance, the expository speech on the Semester 1 2007 syllabus requires students to ‘Compose a 5-8 minute expository speech...[concerning] topics assigned by the instructor’ (4). However, the prompt seems more concerned with the speech’s written composition rather than its delivery. By Semester 2 2009, the oral presentations have multiplied to three, each exploring a different mode of discourse. The first under the revised syllabus is a reading of the narrative essay written for the class. The second is a group ‘How to’ presentation while the last one requires students to give a persuasive speech based on their persuasive essay (3). The presentations change once again in Semester 2 2010, now starting with a group presentation focused on “developing a process.”. The second presentation that term requires students to collaborate on a cause and effect presentation while the third is an individual expository speech (3). The process presentation occurs only this semester, and is not replaced with another assignment. The changes regarding oral communication within this composition course, and its growth from term to term perhaps address a rising cause for the composition course to teach multiple modes of communication students might employ in their everyday lives. The collapse of those two different modes of communication into one course occurs most likely as a result of a budget that limits the hiring of a separate speech communication instructor. A more idealistic take is that the course integrates the two into a curriculum where the communication modes complement each other with oral communication providing students a means to note the impact their written compositions can have on an audience. This idealistic take loses weight under assignment descriptions that show no explicit pedagogical relationship between having students work in the two communicative mediums. The course’s double duty in teaching

these communicative mediums ultimately adds pressure to instructors and students that impedes the effective development of skills in either medium.

Beyond integrating oral communication, the *Course Rationale* statement also states the class will “facilitate [students’] ability to respond to a variety of literature in appropriate ways” (“Semester 1 2007”, 1). While responding to literary texts has been a long-time staple of first-year composition in the United States, its inclusion among SJCJC’s *Course Goals* shows that the administrators consider responding to literature a central pedagogical tool for developing students’ ideas about writing. The focus on literary analysis gets restated in the *Course Objectives* in which students will “read and analyze a variety of literature” (2). An emphasis on responding to literature in the course may be present due to the lack of a required literature course at SJCJC, further stuffing the course with tasks that lack a cohesive intent. While an abundant variety of work is not inherently a negative, such abundance becomes problematic where students begin to view the variety of tasks as purposeless busy work.

Further expanding the genres that students use, the course includes narrative assignments intended to engage students’ understanding of local and national identities. The Semester I 2007 syllabus includes two prompts for narrative assignments in its *Description of Assignments*. The first requires students to write a children’s story titled “A Day in the life of...,” requiring the inclusion of original graphics. The other requires students to write a ‘Descriptive Narrative Essay’ about ‘an immigrant to Belize,’ asking students to describe the hypothetical immigrant’s “journey and the differences in the lifestyle they encounter” (4). The first assignment invites students to craft a multi-modal composition within the genre of children’s literature, and the second assignment engages students in a mental exercise to consider Belize’s conditions from an immigrant’s perspective. This latter assignment potentially gives rise to thoughts about the country’s social and

political state as well as furthering understanding about Belize’s unique qualities. Both of these narrative assignments require students to portray a perspective different than their own, providing students an opportunity to recognize the way local spaces are interacted with when viewed from unfamiliar perspectives. A concern for local spaces appears with greater presence in later syllabi, making these narrative assignments a precursor to the work necessary

The course further expands across multiple composing platforms in the Semester 1 2014 syllabi, incorporating PowerPoint Presentations into the course. In that iteration, the *Methods of Instruction* add ‘PowerPoint Presentations’, most likely due to greater access to digital technology in the class providing a visual counterpart to the speeches students do. Continuous expansion into other modes of instruction shows the course’s interest in broadening students’ ability to engage in multiple composing platform, yet the lack of explicit intent behind such multi-modality makes the use of multiple modes appear to be little more than a bevy of unsystematically compiled assignments.

The Right Way to Write

In addition to the course’s swatch of modes and genres, the syllabi also develop a more pluralistic view of writing over the years. The earlier syllabi have students writing in a manner that conforms to American academic conventions, and a more singular view of the writing process. The first semester’s course description outlines the ways, macro and micro, that the course will aid students in developing “methods of organization; techniques for developing unified, well-supported paragraphs and essays; grammatical conventions, proofreading and edition skills; and other important aspects of the writing process” (“Semester I 2007” 1). As the course moves from more singular views of writing, it retains a grammar test and a comprehension test. The grammar test

assesses students' abilities to adhere to American English grammar conventions while the comprehension test assesses students' skills in close reading. The fourth *course objective* states students will "demonstrate mastery of the stages of the writing process" ("Semester I 2007", 1). This phrasing gives the impression that the course designers believe in a singular writing process that all students should adhere to, or risk not accomplishing the assignments correctly although it's worth mentioning that such a singular view of the writing process seems to be typical of syllabi in the United States as well, according to the syllabi I analyze in chapter four.

Other evidence for a narrow view of writing in the earlier syllabi can be found in the inclusion of statement regarding the use of Standard American English in the class, found in the *Course Learning Objectives*. The first objective states students will "Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of Standard English usage with respect to grammar, punctuation, and spelling" (2). This statement emphasizes that writing in a manner that adheres to the stylistic and grammatical conventions of the United States should be the writing students strive to produce. This view of writing that has its roots in colonialist attitudes that consider Creole English dialects a substandard form of a 'correct' English. The syllabus' weight on 'knowledge and understanding' of standard English separates the vernacular students use and the language that educational institutions would like them to employ, a distinction that Shondel Nero considers detrimental to students' writing development (Nero 10). It is not until the Semester 1 2014 syllabus that all goals or objectives related to Standard English are removed from the syllabus. The considerable time taken before discarding Standard English from the course shows how vital a part it remained to the course's goal, a colonial aspect of the course that asked students to prioritize linguistic identities that they potentially have little use for in their everyday lives.

Problematizing this reading of the composition course's prescriptive ideas on writing, statements on critical thinking emphasize a more pluralist view of writing. The clearest connection to an emphasis on critical thinking is visible in the *Course Description*, which states students “acquire the skills of gathering and processing of information in a variety of ways” (“Semester 1 2007” 1). This statement acknowledges students can possibly engage in thinking and writing in ways that the course syllabus does not explicitly articulate. The course syllabus repeats the fact that students will practice analysis in the course. In that vein, the sixth *course objective* states students will “Apply Comprehension skills of analysis and critical evaluation to a wide range of oral and written material” (“Semester I 2007” 2). The syllabus also makes it explicit that such an analysis would lead to “producing unified, coherent papers” (“Semester I 2007” 2), connecting the practice of critical thinking with the composing process. This remains in the syllabus through each version. The *methods of instruction* connect the course objectives with the assignments, showing how the latter fulfills the former. For instance reaction papers are “used to develop analytical skills” (“Semester I 2007” 2).

As the terms progress, a pluralist, context-based view of writing starts to emerge that contrasts previous terms through gradual and minor additions to the syllabus that tweak the course's goals toward a rhetorical focus. The earliest signs of this can be seen in Semester 2 of 2009's *Course Description* that adds two sentences to the beginning of the previous terms' description. This new content emphasizes the necessity for communication in everyday lives, stating, “The ability to communicate thoughts, emotions, ideas and attitudes is a critical factor in our management of our physical and social environment” (“Semester 2 2009” 1). This emphasis on the management of environments shows a move towards a more holistic, socially motivated aspect of writing that focuses on heightening students' rhetorical awareness, and using it to improve their

lives more generally as they interact with others within the social realm. The second added phrase concerns “the development of students’ communicative awareness and abilities” (1), supports the course’s shift towards a rhetorical focus that recognizes writing as a communicative mode that develops students’ abilities to engage in thoughts not otherwise possible.

Diminished Presence of Expository Writing

SJCJC’s composition course also decreases its emphasis on expository writing over the period of study. The course description in the semester 1 2007 syllabus has a clear focus on expository writing, stating, “In this course, students will interpret, analyze and evaluate expository writing, and write appropriate and effective exposition for a variety of audiences, purposes and situations” (SJCJC, “Semester I 2007” 1). The types of assignments and grade distribution heavily favor expository writing in this first syllabus and in several following syllabus revisions.

Highlighting expository writing follows from the trend of American current traditional pedagogy that aligns expository writing with the academic essays students write in the course. This emphasis on expository writing contradicts the *Rationale Statement*, which states students “will write in a variety of genres” (1), giving the impression that the course’s focus on expository writing may not be as intentional as formerly thought.

The *Methods of Evaluation and Grading Procedures* section provides the strongest evidence for an argument that expository writing is the course’s priority in the earlier semesters studied. From Semester I 2007 to the last syllabus studied, the course’s grade distribution rarely changes, but the significance of those changes is no less evident. The Semester I 2007 syllabus divides the total grade among the following major assignments:

“Reflective Journal 5%
 Reaction Papers 10%
 Expository Writings 30%
 Expository Speech 10%
 Tests 20%
 Final Examination 30%”

(3)

Through this grade distribution, it is notable that the expository genre comprises 40% of the final grade when writing and speech are combined. The ‘expository writing’ assignment or ‘essay’ as it’s referred to in the *Description of Assignments* requires students to respond to a reading’s premise, using material from their own lives. Once again emphasizing the writing process, the assignment ask students to “transform their free-writing brainstorm into a structured essay,” following a prescribed template from the course text (“Semester 1 2007” 3). This concern with students following an overly prescriptive writing process proves disconcerting given contemporary post-process ideas that support the idea that students engage in unique writing processes. By the Semester 2 2009 syllabus, neither the expository writing essay nor any of the other essays seem to have such strict limits. Instead, the syllabus only states students will complete four essays “each written in a different mode of discourse” (3). No new assignments are added until the Semester 2 2013 syllabus when a ‘Diagnostic Essay’ is added. Like the Semester 1 2007 expository essay, it asks students to reflect on how they would respond to a situation, in this case an instance where they had to make “a decision that others did not support them on” (“Semester 2 2013” 3).

Although more expressivist assignments are found as early as the semester 1 2007 syllabus, the intended goals of those assignments do not align with the syllabus’ stated *course goals* and *outcomes*. For instance, the reflective journals students maintain for a week at an entry a day during the term is supposed to “encourage reflective expression,” according to the *description of the*

assignment yet we don't see concern with reflective expression mentioned anywhere else in the syllabus. Additionally those journals are given minimal weight in the overall grade for the course, only worth 5% ("Semester I 2007" 3), partially due to the minimal amount of time it is kept. The assignment comes with preapproved topics (Family, Friends, Education, Death, Love, Travel, Embarrassing Situation and Honor) that students need to write a "250 word essay on a specific incident relating to each topic" ("Semester I 2007" 3). Considering the highly personal topics selected, this assignment seems contrary to the curriculum's external focus on writing, which for the most part, requires students to analyze topics outside of themselves. The inclusion of this assignment therefore seems like an ad-hoc assignment to the course in 2007, an attempt to engage students through their writing on a personal level but not reflecting that in other areas of the course. Although the reflective journal was absent for the 2008-2009 school year, it gets added again in Semester II 2010, disappearing in Semester I 2014. The removal of the journal at this point seems a conscious decision, perhaps a recognition that its expressivist writing nature did not align with other aspects of the course's pedagogy.

Expressivist-leaning assignments are also found in the reaction papers, providing prompts that extend beyond more typical expository writing assignments. The reaction papers are short, one-page documents that students compose in response to an artifact, such as a reading or classifieds. From the condensed prompt provided in the description, they appear to be formal freewrites. In the Semester I 2007 syllabus, each one seems to address a different skill students develop over the term. The fourth reaction paper in this year asks students to "describe a food that is as "memory-laden" for them as for Allison [a character from a class reading]" ("Semester I 2007" 4). This assignment provides an opportunity for students to develop their ability to communicate a sensory experience in writing using the passage from the class reading as a model. Focusing on developing

another aspect of writing, the final reaction paper requires students to ‘Study a school or business...and write a letter of complaint showing how the Peter Principle applies’ (“Semester I 2007” 4). This assignment requires students to research, write in a specific genre to a specific audience, and apply a rhetorical concept, the Peter Principle, that they have learned in class.

By 2009 though, a noticeable shift occurs that sees the course slightly reorient itself towards thinking about the composition class as more than a grounds for developing their writing, and a greater emphasis on rhetorical awareness. The major addition falls under the *course goal* “Apply basic communication principles to their own communication choice and behaviors in specific situations” (“Semester 2 2009” 1). While a minor change, it reveals a slow rethinking of the types of writings students compose. The reaction papers also go through a revision that term, decentering academic writing and emphasizing students’ interaction with local spaces. Instead, the reaction papers are viewed as “student’s written thoughts and ideas about a cultural event that takes place in the community” (3). This change of focus from personal to community oriented writing seems more in line with a socially-oriented focus for the composition course. The prompt also provides examples of the types of cultural event students might write about including visiting “a museum, the zoo, an art event at The Bliss Performing Arts Center [the national performing arts theater], a film, or a poetry reading” (3). The invitation to engage with the course outside of the classroom shows a concern for students recognizing the culture of their local spaces. At a required length of 300 words each, these assignments prioritize students experiencing these local events since the prompt does not require students to confine their writing according to any conventions. This move to a more explicitly local writing leaves quickly though in the following year that overhauls the reaction paper assignment once again, asking students to write their “thoughts and ideas about a selected reading done in class” (“Semester 2 2010” 3), making me wonder if the

previous iteration did not work well in practice. Given that the change recenters text, I think the previous iteration may have been seen as requiring students to work in a manner that commanded their time inappropriately.

With the last semester in the study, the course assignment once again asks students to consider their external space. The semester 1 2014 reaction paper prompts change drastically again, the first a response to a course reading that asks students to “demonstrate why students should study abroad or at a local college” (3). This prompt not only requires students to respond to a student essay, but also intends to provoke students’ thoughts about their education, and conventional wisdom that leaving the country is the best option when it’s available. The other reaction papers require students to either respond to other mediums, such as a picture, or provide a detailed description. There seems to be no unifying thread between these reaction papers, and it appears as if they function instead as low stakes writing, suggesting a greater interest in generating writing than having the content of the writing students compose. The course objectives in the semester 2 2011 syllabus continue this change for considering writing in a broader sense. Here we see attention paid to the contextual nature of communication, both oral and written, through the statement “Analyze examples of written and spoken communication, taking into consideration the form and content of the communication and the context in which it is presented or constructed” (“Semester 2 2011” 2). This objective addresses that context determines the way in which communication is experienced.

The Story So Far Then

From this analysis, it appears that the composition curriculum at St. John’s College Junior College has made some steady changes over seven years towards a more pluralistic, social view of

writing that deemphasizes writing as an academic composing tool. In the move away from expository writing that is pervasive until the Semester 2 2009 syllabus, the course shows less interest in engaging in academic genres, and more interest in students' recognizing the contextual nature of communication. This is seen in the way that several of the course objectives and assignments steadily integrate language that engage students in issues of identity at different levels, from national to personal, and the manner in which writing, and communicating, more broadly in a public context appears to be the space the course puts its greatest attention.

Considering David Bartholomae's vision of discourse communities that composition allows admittance into, the curriculum at St. John's College puts students in a position to find these discourse communities in the public as opposed to academic or professional sphere, learning through the composition course how to recognize and better persuade one another through textual and oral modes. Such a move in curriculum promotes the creation of discourse communities in which students recognize their own agency, and potential in contributing to a wider dialogue. This generative dialogue can perhaps be put towards addressing the socio-political issues that plague the country.

In the final chapter, I look at the textbooks used in these curriculum as well as the syllabi of two American universities with ties to St. John's College to determine how contemporary American pedagogy continues to be a strong influence on the teaching of writing in Belize. By isolating these intersections, we can more capably determine aspects of the Belizean composition course instructors and administrators have generated to meet the needs of its Belizean students.

Chapter 3
 What Belize Inherited:
 A Close Reading of American Composition Textbooks and University Syllabi

Say What Something Is By What Is Isn't

Having examined the syllabi at St. John's Junior College (SJCJC), it has been determined that a potential purpose for the composition course is a model that validates student voices. I now turn to an examination of the textbooks used at St. John's Junior College during the time of my study to determine how their pedagogical approach to the teaching of writing influenced students' understanding of writing. The selection of a textbook for a course makes the implicit argument that its framing of writing is also a means by which students can think about writing in that course. I can then discuss the aspects of St. John's curriculum that have developed that do not easily align with those texts. Through the textbook analysis, I analyze whether changes in course texts coincided with changes in curriculum.

More, I close read the syllabi from St. Louis University and University of Southern Florida, American universities popularly attended by SJCJC graduates, to see whether the composition curriculum at St. John's Junior College potentially aligned itself with their curriculum. Based off informal interviews with SJCJC English faculty, I learned that changes to composition curriculum at SJCJC were often directly influenced by a desire to align its curriculum with that of schools in the United States in order for students to more easily transfer the credits earned, saving students both the cost of retaking the course and shaving time off their degree. Ultimately, analysis of the textbooks and the American composition syllabi reveal the seedlings of a Belizean composition pedagogy that encourages social discourse communities.

Textbooks serve as a useful tool for pedagogical analysis because they maintain a static view on writing that does not change its delivery based on context. According to Mike Rose, in his

essay "Speculations On Process Knowledge and The Textbook's Static Page," this inflexibility stems from its text-bound nature as well as the desire to not overwhelm students with information (208). At St. John's Junior College, most composition textbooks used are ones that are created and published by American companies that assume American students will use them in first-year composition courses, or accelerated high school writing courses. SJCJC uses American textbooks for multiple reasons, such as Belize's small, if not exactly non-existent, publishing industry, which would make the creation of a specialized text unlikely due to cost. Even in cases where Belizean publishers release books, their cost is often out of reach for many Belizeans. Additionally, Belizean universities lack financial resources dedicated to research, especially within the liberal arts or the humanities (Aird 19). This financial divestment in research makes it difficult for academics to find the time among their considerable teaching loads (six courses a term at SJCJC) and personal commitments to ascertain a means to frame writing for Belizean students. Therefore, the notion that the composition course can and should frame writing for Belizean students is a relatively new conceit just gaining ground as evidenced by the previous chapter's syllabi analysis.

I examine the Preface and/or Introduction of the three American composition textbooks used over the seven-year time span at SJCJC to see how the writers believe the book frames writing, and whether their use reflects changes in syllabi's stated pedagogical intentions at SJCJC. An analysis of SJCJC's composition textbooks can tease out what instructors and composition program administrators view as the most vital aspects of writing since the decision to use a textbook for a curriculum requires choosing among a myriad of possibilities. Like the syllabi, I honed in on a section of each book, the Introduction and Preface, to see what the writers of these books viewed as the purposes and goals of writing. Doing this, we can gain a wider understanding about how these correspond with their adjoining course syllabi's purposes for the teaching of

writing, and consider what a composition textbook created for SJCJC’s first-year composition course might look like.

Following the textbook analyses of books from SJCJC, I conduct similar close readings with syllabi from St. Louis University, a Jesuit-affiliated institution that offers scholarships to top graduates from SJCJC, and University of Southern Florida, an American state university with a sizable Belizean population (In comparison with my position at Oregon State University where demographic data states that I am the only Belizean currently in attendance.). Through a cross analysis with the syllabi of these universities, I will more capably determine where SJCJC aligns with the pedagogy of these composition programs to determine whether SJCJC meets its unstated goal of allowing SJCJC graduates to more easily transfer their course credits to either program, potentially decreasing the total time and monetary investment on the part of students. Applying similar methodology as was done with the SJCJC syllabi in the previous chapter, I analyzed each syllabus by first determining those aspects of their syllabi that concern the purposes and goals of the course, disregarding items such as attendance policy and logistical information, and then hypothesizing how those goals and purposes reflect different pedagogical ideas. By doing this, I hope to determine what, if any, similarities exists between the way freshman composition is framed in Belize and the manner that US universities do it.

Patterns for College Writing

An analysis of the preface from *Patterns for College Writing: A Rhetorical Reader and Guide* by Laurie Kirszner and Stephen Mandell shows that instructors can employ it to suit a variety of pedagogical styles. Over the seven-year period I examined in the previous chapter, the first-year composition course uses *Patterns for College Writing* for the majority of that time,

starting at least as early as ENG 105 in Fall 2007 and continuing in its use until Fall 2011 with at least⁶ one term exempted during which *The Sundance Reader* was used. In *Patterns for Writing*'s preface, authors Laurie G. Kirszner and Stephen R. Mandell state it “has been used by millions of students at colleges and universities across the United States” (vii), making the argument that its widespread-use imbues it with a level of credibility perhaps not found in other composition textbooks. In choosing a textbook for SJCJC's first-year composition course, it follows that SJCJC's administrators would choose a course text with a proven track record since the process of acquiring these textbooks involves importing goods from the United States. Kirszner, and Mandell view *Patterns for College Writing* as not only “a book of readings, but it also a book about writing” (1). Implicit in that description then is that through these readings and their adjoining exercises and activities, a student may acquire a greater understanding about writing and its purposes, a view widely held by compositionists who see a link between students writing and reading literacies. The Preface to *Patterns for Writing* does not explicitly articulate a purpose for writing.

Following each of the book's included readings, it asks students questions concerning different aspects of the essay to “help students to think critically about what they are reading—that is, to ask questions and draw conclusions.” (Kirszner and Mandell 4) These questions are divided into categories such as “Comprehension”, “Purpose and Audience”, “Style and Structure”, “Vocabulary Projects”, “Journal Entry”, “Writing Workshop”, “Combining the Pattern” and “Thematic Connections”. Readers like *Patterns for Writing* are “an old concept-dating at least to the fifteenth century...persist[ing] as a pedagogical tool for composition instructors in many settings since, helping [instructors] present particular readings as exemplars of style, triggers for rhetorical invention, springboards for personal narrative, and scapegoats for argumentative

⁶ I say at least because of the lack of complete records for all semesters studied during this period.

discussions and writing.” (Jordan 169). In contrast to books in other fields where students acquire content knowledge through reading the course text, composition readers generate dialogue and thought for students to employ in their own writing processes. By selecting among the categories students answer in *Patterns for College Writing*, an instructor at SJCJC or elsewhere could privilege certain writing concerns. This gives the book a lot of flexibility as a pedagogical aid. For instance, an instructor who looks at first year composition from a rhetorical pedagogy approach could have students respond to “Purpose and Audience” questions that speak to rhetoric’s focus on accessing the best available means of persuasion. Meanwhile, “Vocabulary Projects” would often be seen as a lower order concern in composition classes. Another instructor could focus exclusively on “Journal Entry” assignments if they were most interested in expressionist pedagogy that would provide students a means to generate writing based on prompts relating to their internal lives. As a reader with little overriding ideas about writing, *Patterns for Writing* presents itself as an ideal candidate for a composition course that changes over the years, allowing itself to be molded to suit the needs of whatever pedagogy a writing program administrator and the course’s instructor deems most effective for student’s improvement.

Patterns for Writing’s use in SJCJC’s first-year composition course continues during the period where expository writing starts to become less of the composition course’s main focus, and expressivist and social modes of writing become more prominent. This is significant because it shows that either the course instructors did not find the pedagogical change sufficient enough of a reason to change the textbook used in the course, or that the changes in the course occurred so gradually that the course instructors were not aware that the curriculum’s pedagogy had developed in a significant manner. Another possibility is that *Patterns for Writing*’s use changed along with the pedagogy, perhaps selecting from readings not previously used or incorporating activities from

the textbooks ignored by previous curriculum. When it is no longer used coincides with the syllabus' move towards "consideration [of] the form and content of the communication and the context in which it is presented or constructed" ("Semester II 2011" 2). With consideration to other variables that determine change in course text, it's likely that the expansion into a more rhetorical view of writing necessitated the use of a textbook to meet the demands of the revised pedagogy.

Steps To Writing Well

Steps To Writing Well by Jean Wyrick provides a more appropriate textbook for SJCJC's composition curriculum, focusing on a rhetorical and process-oriented approach to the teaching of writing. The most recent textbook used during the case study period is *Steps to Writing Well*'s tenth edition, commencing use in Semester I 2014. Unlike the other two textbooks used during the seven-year period, this book provides two prefaces, one to teachers and another to students. The 'Preface to the Teacher' promotes *Steps To Writing Well* as a book "Written for teachers of composition who have had trouble finding a textbook that students cant easily understand" (Wyrick XV). In regards to students at SJCJC, it stands to reason that students may have difficulty fully engaging with the majority of American composition textbooks since those books often assume that the reader engaging with the text is an American student in possession of a particularly American cultural background knowledge like nationally known landmarks, or readings connected to U.S. historical events like the often used "Letter from Birmingham Jail" by Martin Luther King Jr. *Steps to Writing Well* therefore ameliorates this problem by approaching the teaching of writing from a process-oriented angle, providing students with "some practical advice on composition, some coaching to sharpen your skills, and a strong dose of determination to practice those skills until you can consistently produce the results you want" (Wyrick xxii). Problematic about this approach

though is that due to a book’s static nature, it can only provide a limited sense of the processes involved in writing. Due to the finitude of its length it cannot provide breakdowns for the multitude of ways people can engage in the process of writing; therefore, the book must make choices about what writing processes it portrays, inevitably excluding students whose approach to writing drastically differs from the text. As a result, *Steps to Writing Well*’s prescriptive process model supports a limited student audience, not recognizing the likely variations between students writing processes.

Unlike *Patterns for College Writing*, *Steps to Writing Well* provides students several purposes for writing represented in varying composition pedagogies. In line with expressivist pedagogy, the book first states “writing helps us to explore our own thoughts and feelings. Writing forces us to articulate our ideas, to discover what we really think about an issue” (Wyrick xxiii). The prioritization of this reason for writing pairs well with the Semester I 2014 syllabus in which SJCJC’s composition course starts using the text, the term when any mention standardized English leaves the syllabus as well, a move that marks a lesser concern for students to meet American academic conventions and instead engage more fully with their own voices. This connection between the syllabus and course text shows potential awareness on behalf of the administrators and instructors about the direction in which SJCJC’s composition course could potentially move into. Following that reason, the book states

on a more practical level, we need to write effectively to communicate with others. While some of our writing may be done solely for ourselves, the majority of it is created for others to share. In this world, it is almost impossible to claim that we write only for ourselves (Wyrick xxiii).

Here then, we see highlighted the other purpose for the teaching of writing that becomes more prominent in SJCJC's composition curriculum, enhancing students' ability to engage in everyday communication. *Steps to Writing Well*, despite its singular process-oriented approach to the teaching of writing, proves perhaps a better text for SJCJC's composition course since it reaffirms the institution's evolving purposes for the teaching of writing to students, and deemphasizes the role of writing in students' academic and professional lives.

The Sundance Reader

The Sundance Reader by Mark Connelly is the most problematic as a textbook for SJCJC's composition course due to its grounding in American culture, which makes it less approachable by a Belizean audience unfamiliar with the vitality of its content. Although the curriculum does not use *The Sundance Reader* for an extensive period (used only during Semester II of 2009), for the purposes of the study it seems appropriate to include an analysis the text. As its title states, like *Patterns for College Writing*, it is organized like a reader with essays from authors such as George Orwell, E.B. White, Chris Hedges, Richard Brookhiser, Anna Quindlen, Jessica Mitford, Ellen Goodman, and Maya Angelou. This selection of writers points to the book's interest in capturing a variety of voices even if those voices are mostly American ones, the preface later emphasizing this inclusivity, stating "Over a quarter of the selections are written by women. African American, Hispanic, and Asian writers are represented. (Connelly XXXVI). Attempts at representing diverse voices respond to complaints that the Western canons are often mostly composed of white men. Although the dominance of such voices does not only impact students of non-American national identities, those texts within a Belizean composition context cause students to disregard the material since it may appear irrelevant to their own lives, occupying spaces and narratives

unfamiliar to them. Selection of a course text at SJCJC must consider the cultural barriers a book presents that would prevent students' engagement. American composition readers "frequently reinforce dominant ideological views of the kinds of subjectivities students are expected to occupy, as well as their spatial and temporal separation from the texts and authors under study" (Jordan 171). However, efforts to integrate more diverse ethnic and cultural voices often resulting in a tokenization of writers in order to fulfill diversity quotas among such texts. Most ideally, a reader used in a Belizean composition course would feature selections from Belizean writers in addition to writings of other nationalities and cultural identities.

In addition to its selected readings, *The Sundance Reader's* preface states that it is organized according to the four rhetorical modes (narration, description, argumentation, and exposition). However, the author assure readers that the book does not view the separation in the modes in a cleanly delineated fashion as "each chapter highlights a model 'blending' the modes showing how writers use several methods of development to tell a story or explain a process" (Connelly XXXV). *The Sundance Reader's* short tenure at SJCJC may therefore result from Semester II also being the term when expository writing, and the traditional modes more generally, start experiencing a decentering from the course thereby making a text structured according to those modes less desirable in future iterations of the class.

While any composition textbook is fraught due to its static nature, a textbook better suited for first year composition at SJCJC would better attend to the purposes for writing that emerge over the seven-year period. A reader would need to more fully integrate voices that Belizeans students can model, diminishing the privilege shown to American narratives and integrating Belizeans. More, a textbook would focus on engaging students in an articulation of their own ideas about prevalent issues present in Belize such as environmental, social equality and national identity that

the SJCJC curriculum addresses more each term during the study. With an understanding as to how these American textbooks inform SJCJC's composition course, examining the syllabi of St. Louis University (SLU) and Southern Florida University (SFU) will further round out the emerging image about the influences behind SJCJC's evolving pedagogy.

St. Louis University

SLU's first year composition course, titled "The Process of Composition" dates to fall 2009. A relatively short syllabus at four pages, it starts with a course description that reads that the class will "help us better understand the methods and characteristics of powerful and persuasive writing at the college level and beyond" (SLU 1). Already apparent from the course description is the course's college-oriented goals. The course description ends with a promise of transference of writing skills within the university. It tells students they will be able "to produce effective writings in any major they choose, and will be prepared to continue on to the English 190 course" (SLU 1). Therefore, unlike SJCJC's composition course, SLU has a keen focus on ensuring students develop writing for the sake of fulfilling the work within varying academic genres.

The course description provides a prescriptive and linear idea of the composing process. It states students and their instructor "will explore the intricacies of the composition process, from pre-writing to final editing, along with sentence and paragraph organization, grammar, and mechanics as needed" (SLU 1). Also telling is the sequence in which different aspects of the writing process are mentioned, with grammar and mechanics not coming until the end of the statement. According to the description, students will most capably write so long as they follow prescribed steps, promoting a singular view of the writing process that most likely does not suit the way that the majority of students write. The course hopes all students will develop their writing in

the course, but falls short of meeting students' individual needs as a result of employing a fixed idea on the writing process. The only important additional information regarding the assignments is that students submit at least more than one draft of a paper, insisting "Final drafts must be turned in with first drafts, peer edits, and any other pre-writing activities assigned" (SLU 4). Through requiring multiple drafts, the course hopes to engage students in a view of writing as an ongoing process, a pedagogical goal also present in the course's the final assignment, a portfolio that collects "all the work you [students] have done in class and will entail some revision of previous papers as well as a reflection on the class and your writing process in general" (SLU 4).

The course's composition assignments, according to its course description, expand from more expressionistic assignments to assignments that require students to write in academic genres. Specifically, the description states the course starts with "personal narratives and moves toward a more objective professional and academic discourse" (SLU 1). This sequence provides students the opportunity to write about themselves-- a topic expressivist pedagogy assumes students are capable of doing -- before asking them to actively engage in well-established discourse communities. Once students gain confidence in their own internal voice, they will be better able to tackle what we typically conceive as external issues, recognizing their potential to contribute to established fields. Other than the course description's statement that students will begin the course by writing personal narratives, the syllabus provides little information about the types of papers students will write in the course. Instead it only states "five major essays will constitute a bulk of your grade for this course" (SLU 3), a move perhaps done in order to leave the topics or genres of the paper to individual instructor's discretion. Absent of more specific assignment prompts, it is difficult to determine whether SLU's composition curriculum hopes to engage students in topics relating to identity or society like SJCJC's curriculum at the end of the period of study.

Unlike the curriculum at SJCJC, SLU's takes advantage of access to digital composing and learning spaces. In addition to more traditional papers, the course also requires students to contribute to the course's weekly blog. This blog would be used "as a forum for discussing the class outside of class time" (SLU 4). It doesn't provide specific purposes on the forum conversations, but such forums often exist as generative spaces for students to discuss ideas related to class readings and their own writing. The presence of a digital writing space in SLU's curriculum presents a drastic distinction between SLU and SJCJC's curricula, a distinction that most likely exists due to SJCJC's students' lack of access to digital technologies. SLU's course also utilizes e-books in their instruction. Both of its textbooks are published by McGraw Hill, *The McGraw Hill Guide Online* and *McGraw Hill Connect Composition*. SLU's utility of digital technology highlights a major barrier for SJCJC's composition course, a lack of access to digital platforms that can potentially aid students' in their writing development.

University of Southern Florida

In several iterations, University of Southern Florida's syllabus displays a clear focus on introducing students to academic writing. According to its "Course Description" the composition administrators designed University of Southern Florida's syllabus "specifically to introduce you [the students] to academic writing and the associated conventions, styles, and qualities" (USF 1). More than the other syllabus looked at in this project, USF's course designers determined that writing within academic discourse should be the main purpose of the writing course. The course description later adds that "To facilitate this transition [into academic discourse], the First-Year Composition curriculum has student writing at the basis of each class" (USF 1). With such a predilection for academic discourse, it is surprising that SJCJC's composition course sufficiently

aligns with USF's, which hints at the possibility that matching course purposes are not an American university's major concern when considering accepting a student's credit

This focus on academic discourse in the course description is paired with a focus on multiple genres and composing models. The syllabus states students "will develop information literacy skills through reading comprehension and research, refine their critical thinking processes through exploring historical perspectives and visual images, and critically reflect upon their own visual and textual compositions" (USF 1). Such a multitude of genres and composing models intend to equip students to tackle a variety of writing projects in their academic careers, initiating the development of skills students can use later in their careers. The first objective paragraph of the ENC1101 syllabus explains that students will be "introduced to multiple genres, from brief in-class written exams to research reports, lab reports, medical narratives, business reports, legal briefs, field notes, and more" (USF 1). This focus on transference beyond the composition class and to a variety of academic and job-writing genres seems present to show students the long-term benefits of writing. In looking at genre, the syllabus supports the idea that certain qualities are intrinsic to specific genres of writing

The course focuses on teaching students 'forms of inquiry' that develop different skills related to writing. It looks at "Textual Research", "Historiography," and "Rhetorical Analysis," and it examines these modes of inquiry as a sample because the syllabus considers them dominant modes of inquiry. These forms of inquiry all seem chosen for their pervasiveness in academic settings and their ability to hone writing-related skills often used in academia. "Textual Research" is a tool that students will need to complete in order to actively engage with the composition course and other research oriented fields. "Historiography" looks at writing as a "social practice, and knowledge-making" (USF 2), reflective of expressivist ideas as well as working to embed students

into discourse communities. “Rhetorical Analysis” provides students practice in writing often found in the humanities, where “they question how they need to reshape a message when they push the message via multiple media” (USF 2). The last objective mentioned is that the course intends to develop qualities of academic writing in students. The syllabus divides those qualities according to “Focus, Evidence, Organization, Style, and Format” (USF 3).

Rather than explicitly mention the writing process, the ‘course results’ shows students write frequently in this composition course. The results state students will “compose four major writing projects, write in-class essays to help prepare them for written examinations in college, and write informally on a weekly basis” (USF 1). The second result stands out because it positions the composition course as a means of acquiring a skill specifically situated within academia. The idea that first-year composition as preparation for in-class examination aligns with the views of those that think composition should better enable students to meet the writing assignments provided to students throughout their academic careers. In the course goals, the ‘Understanding the Writing Process’ heading states that “academic writers submit texts for publication to disciplinary journals or publishers, these texts are peer-reviewed by other disciplinary experts. This publication process relies on a time-honored tradition: critical feedback from readers” (USF 2). The course models peer review after academic discourse publication, making the implicit argument that academic publication is a model worth replicating. Beyond the major projects the syllabus also list 2-4 peer review sessions as an assignment as well as a required conference. In combination, these assignment requirements display the centrality of process to SFU’s composition course.

The syllabus includes also addresses the issue of improving students’ rhetorical awareness. Under ‘Write and Think Rhetorically’ the syllabus states “an important aspect of a university education...is learning how to assess and think rhetorically about one’s rhetorical (communication)

situation.” (USF 2). This is present in the course goals, which states students need “the ability to assess each communication situation for purpose and audience” (USF 1). That paragraph ends with examples of the different aspects that students can alter depending on their audience and purpose, from issues such as whether to employ first or third person to document design and documentation style, reinforcing the syllabus’ overriding thesis that freshman composition classes should introduce students to academic discourse communities. The course assignments develop different writing qualities and allow students to write towards a variety of purposes and audiences. The first project requires students to write a 600-700 word personal narrative. From there, the second project asks students to write a 600-word bibliographic essay that looks at an ongoing conversation, requiring the use of at least four sources. The third project reflects on the previous assignment, titled ‘Reflecting on Original Research,’ it is a meta assignment that asks students to think about audience, purpose, genre and medium as a way for them to gain greater insight into their topic. The course culminates in a 1000-1200-word essay that asserts a thesis “supported by sound reasoning and research” (USF 3). Through a scaffolding of writing skills and essay lengths, the course eases students into more complex modes of writing.

From the analysis of the American textbooks and SLU’s and SFU’s syllabi, it becomes apparent how SJCJC’s pedagogical approach to the teaching of writing distinguishes itself. The most unique aspects of first-year composition at SJCJC involve an interest in social issues in the assignment prompts. This concern with generating thought about social issues among students positions the composition course as a venue where students can generate and articulate ideas about their surrounding environment.

In a national landscape where individualist ambitions are often derided, the composition course can function to further students’ recognition in the validity of their own perspectives.

Through work in SJCJC's composition course students can recognize the techniques employed by socio-economic systems that overly determine their lives, and further their ability to participate in a democratic society. In my conclusion, I therefore propose that SJCJC's composition course can be used as a model to develop national guidelines for first-year composition in Belize, creating a generative space in which students can explore issues that have appeared inaccessible to Belizeans for far too long. Rather than an academic discourse model, composition courses in Belize can function under a social discourse model, generating conversation to make the operation of the country inclusive to more voices.

Conclusion

With considerable assistance from foreign entities like the Jesuit community that founded St. John's College Junior College, Belize was provided a model of tertiary education that allowed students to further their studies starting in the 1950's. While that model has provided opportunities for students to attain credit before continuing their education (Aird 6), it has perpetuated the idea that the composition course only serves as an item for a limited group of students to check off before continuing with their actual academic work. The composition course can achieve more than simply functioning as an introduction to discourse communities following Western traditions. By no means an original concept, Belizeans can and should use first year composition to generate writing that gives greater attention to developing individual student voices, and generating social discourse to combat the complacency Tom Barry and Dylan Vernon describe as a national condition (Barry and Vernon xviii). Models of composition pedagogy from the United States and elsewhere should be highly scrutinized prior to their adaptation in Belize, and Belizean education should offer equal education to all students—and not prioritize the needs of those continuing in their formal education elsewhere, as this negatively impacts students that remain in the country.

To further the goals of first-year composition in Belize, the country's Ministry of Education, tertiary institutions and composition instructors need to first recognize the potential within first-year composition. Rather than passively include the course in university curricula as part of the country's inheritance from British colonial and American imperial groups, Belize needs to reclaim composition for its own people's ends or risk continuing along a line of reasoning that assumes a lack of significant distinction between the conditions of Belize and the United States. Belize needs a composition course crafted to respond to its own conditions as opposed to those suiting foreign interests. First-year composition can function as a catalyst for critical inquiry that

explores issues close to Belizeans determined by its citizens rather than external bodies or partisan governments with economic agendas. Through a developing comfortability composing their own thoughts in writing, Belizeans can learn to recognize the forces that influence their daily lives, providing them greater agency when engaging in their inherited consumerist capitalist society.

I propose that Belizean university instructors collaborate on the composition and adaptation of national guidelines to intentionally guide the outcomes of first-year composition in Belize. The implementation of national guidelines will give composition instructors a clearer sense of the potential goals they can work towards, and motivate students' engagement in the course. It will diminish the aimlessness with which instructors and students approach first-year composition, and show students that university bodies have thoughtfully included composition and writing literacy as part of a larger national goal, and not a mere requirement with goals irrelevant to the majority of students.

While a call for the establishment of general tertiary level education quality-assurance guidelines has been made before (Aird 2), such a call has gone unheeded by the government even after the establishment of a National Accreditation Council Act in 2004. Lack of government interest in providing guidelines to tertiary institutions however does not mean instructors need to wait for permission to start collaborating among themselves for a set of guidelines with a focus on supporting students in social discourse communities. Instructors currently do not receive any incentive, financial or otherwise, to further their training or involvement in curricular development, which makes the task of initiating collaboration on national composition guidelines unprecedented in some ways. Overworked and underpaid, instructors would need to first be persuaded of the benefit national composition guidelines would provide to themselves and future instructors in order to invest their limited time and energy in this endeavor. I believe, perhaps naively, that this can be

done through starting conversation with writing instructors regarding existing pedagogical difficulties in the teaching of writing. Instructors could come to recognize the vitality of their potential contributions to a larger national conversation on writing instruction. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education and other government bodies would acquire further reasons to find a means of paying instructors a more adequate salary for not only their teaching, but also related teaching and curricular development.

Although I am hesitant to propose specific examples of national composition guidelines due to my own lack of first-hand experience teaching writing in Belize, there are a few motivating strategies writing instructors could consider when working on the guidelines. By motivating strategies, I do not mean a framework that the national composition guidelines would be draped over, but principles that instructors can be mindful of in composing the guidelines and refer to if the experience a loss of momentum in the composing process. These motivating strategies are 1) empathy, 2) critical thinking, and 3) multilingualism. Empathy should be supported in the teaching of writing in order to take advantage of writing and reading's ability to help people recognize more pluralistic perspectives. Recognition, and eventual understanding of multiple perspectives can ensure that the composition course becomes a safe space for students to compose and share ideas and feelings without fear that those ideas will be nullified by the opinions and experiences of others. Critical thinking, long considered a cornerstone in American composition pedagogy, needs to acquire greater articulation in Belize's own composition curriculum. A greater emphasis on critical thinking is especially necessary given the country's colonial educational history, which did not focus on improving students' ability to better articulate their own ideas or come to new ideas based on existing information.

Counteracting Belize's colonial education history with critical thinking as a central point of the teaching of writing would be vital to the course's success as a space where students generate ideas that reflect their personal, local and national realities. Multilingualism would also be an essential principle to consider in Belizean composition classes as it would aid in minimizing the assumed notion that Standard English, American or British, should be the main English vernaculars students should write in. Through a greater focus on multilingualism, students and instructors can find means to use their individual vernaculars in their compositions while also learning how to code-switch between vernaculars commonly used in other countries, as well as the international English used in commerce. Multilingualism could diminish the notion of Belizean Creole as a 'broken Creole,' and put Belize at the fore as an English Creole country that does not place the locally-generated Creole at the bottom of an English-language hierarchy.

Further study into composition in Belize can expand current composition ideas about how dialectical differences, socio-economic conditions, and identity politics impact the teaching of writing. This study can enhance the field's understanding of the relationship between composition pedagogy and society beyond the university, giving greater attention to the influence society has on evolving pedagogical theory and practices. While I no longer think it is vital whether the wider American composition pedagogy community recognizes the importance of studying non-US spaces, I believe that U.S. composition limits itself when it does not consider the significant impact external nation-states can have on the teaching of writing in its own communities.

I hope that work on this thesis, and my ability to arrive at notions about first-year composition in Belize, encourages Belizean instructors to engage in greater experimentation. Since I am far removed from the day-to-day problems of teaching composition in Belize, those instructors possess a substantially deeper knowledge base from which they can develop pedagogical practices

to respond to students' writing needs. I hope to have the good fortune to have my work dismantled and scrutinized again and again by the work of Belizean instructors who directly engage with Belizean college students. Instructors' engagement in ideas about the teaching of writing can model discourse communities for students in Belize, showing them the productive discourse they want students to enact. Without a university system that supports traditional scholarship, these instructors would function as pioneers for the field, eraising thoughts and ideas with the potential for implementation in other countries where English composition is taught.

For the entirety of this thesis, I have worked towards rationalizing to myself that the study of the teaching of writing in Belize warrants time and effort. It took me until the very end of my time with the current iteration of this project to recognize that I had been engaging in the same trap as other Belizeans who lack confidence in the validity of their own ideas. Similar to St. John's College Junior College's attempts to connect its composition pedagogy with American universities', I also attempted to hitch my work onto that of prominent American compositionists to validate this study. The frustration that manifested in the moments when I was uncertain whether my project responded to anyone in the room impeded me at numerous points throughout the process. More than anything, this thesis has provided me a venue to explore how deeply national culture shapes the ways people interact with their reality. I had prioritized finding the right American people in the room to discuss with over saying what I wanted to say, and searching for people interested in listening. The teaching of writing in Belize can aid students in validating their own and each other's voices to engage in social discourse without waiting for the permissions provided by foreign markers of importance such as American academic degrees, and imported consumer goods. Although the image of Belize portrayed in this thesis may appear bleak and far from able to enact a social discourse community, I feel intense optimism for the potential for first-

year composition to become a space where Belizeans can engage in critical thinking, and work towards defining their own identities.

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