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# Higher Education: Obligation or Opportunity?

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# Higher Education: Obligation or Opportunity?

Megan Knowles

## Introduction

From the beginning of my experience at Marquette, I continually observed students that appeared to demonstrate no enthusiasm for getting an education, reflected in a noticeable lack of participation in class discussions. I felt my expectations of academia being crushed as students boasted about skipping lectures and passively sat in class, seemingly disinterested in the professor and the material. If college was truly regarded as an opportunity for intellectual growth, why did students treat education as nothing more than an obligation?

**Q: What changes can be made in the college classroom to combat apathy and promote student engagement?**

## Methods

### Research Design:

This project is a mixed-method qualitative study relying on **observations, interviews, and scholarly literature.**

### Data Collection:

- 4 sets of **observation field notes** from different types of undergraduate classes.
- 2 **interviews**—1 with a faculty member, one with a sophomore in the College of Business.
- Excerpts from Rebekah Nathan's **ethnographic study** of undergraduate life, *My Freshman Year*.

## Results



*Large lecture hall at Marquette.  
Photo by Megan Knowles*

### Students appear more engaged when:

- Classes have **fewer students.**
- Professors **require attendance and participation** as part of the final grade.
- Professors encourage **discussion over lecture.**

Class Type	Number of Students Enrolled	Major/Non-Major Course	Attendance/Participation Graded	Technology Allowed	Discussion Time During Lecture
Introductory Level Biology	~100	Non-Major	No	Yes	Minimal
Upper-Division French	14	Major	Yes	No	Majority of class time
Upper-Division English	16	Major	Yes	No	Minimal
Upper-Division Psychology	~50	Major	No	Yes	Minimal

*When observing undergraduate classrooms, I examined aspects of the learning environment that could potentially impact student engagement, including class size and whether or not participation counted as part of the grade for the course.*

## Proposals for Change

- Promote **discussion-based** lectures.
- Increase **dialogue** between students and professor.
- Encourage **graded participation** in smaller courses.
- Create more opportunities for students to **suggest improvements to lecture style.**

*"It's just that I think we've pushed too many kids who don't, not deserve, but they don't want to go to college."  
—Sophomore in Marquette's College of Business*



*"The teacher-student interaction focused less on what students said than on getting them to say something."  
—Rebekah Nathan, *My Freshman Year**

### References

Nathan, Rebekah. *My Freshman Year*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2005. Print.

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## Higher Education: Obligation or Opportunity?

### **Introduction**

I have always thought of college as the time where everything in my life would just fall into place. I often imagined myself discovering my true passion and choosing a suitable career, finding fun and exciting lifelong friends, being intellectually engaged by my fellow students in a discussion about the meaning of life on a grassy quad, all the while meeting the love of my life in a philosophy class or coffee shop. It seemed as if all the discussion I heard about college verified my musings. Parents, teachers, co-workers, and young adults I encountered all seemed to regard college as the “greatest time” of their lives, and although all of these fantasies are entirely possible, the high bar of expectations common perceptions of the undergraduate experience set can prove to be devastating.

As I entered the realm of the university, I struggled much more with the idea that everything was going to fall into place as the college experience I had idealized fell short of my high expectations. In particular, the aspect of university life that disappointed me the most was not that I hadn't managed to find my soul mate in two months, or that I wasn't certain on what I wanted to do with my life, but that from the beginning of my experience, I continually observed students that appeared to be less than enthusiastic about getting an education. To me, college seems to be devalued if students prefer to complain incessantly about schoolwork and neglect to

participate during lectures as opposed to being fully engaged with academics. The apathetic attitude I have observed here at Marquette is what motivates this undergraduate research project and what has led to the following questions: *Why are students reluctant to fully participate in lectures and discussions? In other words, what aspects of university life have contributed to apathy or disengagement in the learning environment? Do students go to college because they feel obligated to, feeling that it is the only plausible “next step” after high school, or do they truly utilize the academic environment to learn and flourish as independent thinkers?* Through mixed-method, qualitative research, combining observation, interviews, and review of scholarly literature, I hope to add insights into why students so frequently approach higher education as an obligation rather than an opportunity.

The research project is divided into four sections: introduction, methods, findings, and next steps. For the rest of the introduction section, I provide a context for the project by discussing a narrative version of personal experiences I had at Marquette that motivated me to research student attitudes towards education. Secondly, the methods section serves to provide an in depth description of the observations I took in different classrooms, including a chart to explain what specific aspects of the courses I used for comparison. The methods section additionally includes a description of my interview process, including sampling strategies and coding categories, as well as an explanation for the scholarly literature I chose to incorporate into my research and proposals for change. Next, the findings section is divided into four subcategories according to what factors influence student engagement in the classroom: class size, participation/attendance as requirements, use of technology, and lectures incorporating discussion. Lastly, the next steps section introduces initial proposals for change and describes

future research I will be conducting as well as my goals as I continue this project through summer 2015 and beyond.

### *Motivations for Research*

The basis for my interest in this research lies in what I observed as a first-year student at Marquette. Particularly, the disparity between how I expected students to act and participate in the classroom versus the reality I experienced upon attending classes proved to be a continual point of issue. As I attended class after class, I began to notice that barely anyone had the desire to participate in discussions carrying the potential to be incredibly thought provoking and enriching. In high school, I regarded student apathy as a product of a rigidly regulated setting or because of the strong obligation U.S. students face to receive a diploma. In other words, for U.S. adolescents, there seems to be no viable alternative to finishing one's secondary education. Nevertheless, I envisioned college to be where the most ambitious of students sought an opportunity to learn and flourish in an academic environment that promotes freethinking and personal growth. I continually reassured myself, insisting university atmosphere would be altogether different, inspiring, energizing, and by attending a reputable university, a change for the better in student climate would surely be guaranteed. For my own comfort, I concluded that students would surely be more academically motivated, engaged, and competitive at the higher level.

With this idea in mind, during the summer before I left for my first semester at Marquette, I started the summer reading book assigned for all first-year students, *One Amazing Thing* by Chitra Divakaruni. As an English major, I felt that the assignment was particularly important as I wanted to show my professors and classmates that I was truly committed to

working hard at my education. Preparing notes and topics for the discussion that would take place during first-year orientation week, I felt certain that I could bring interesting ideas to any group of peers with whom I would potentially talk. In fact, amongst the chaotic social events like scavenger hunting and uncomfortable mandatory icebreaking activities, the book discussion was the only event I could confidently say I felt comfortable attending. I happily imagined making connections with my fellow Marquette students by talking about common themes and points of emotional interest in the novel.

As I arrived in a classroom full of my peers where desks were strategically arranged in a large circle, I listened to students chatting and asking the standard questions I had heard dozens of time throughout the week:

“What’s your name?”

“What’s your major?”

“Where are you from?”

Everyone looked cheerful and enthusiastic, and I genuinely enjoyed my conversation with a friendly bespectacled boy sitting in the desk next to mine. As the small talk died down, one student took it upon himself to address the group before the professor leading the discussion entered, asking, “Did anyone actually read this book?” The other ten or so students in the room chuckled, sheepishly looking around and shaking their heads. Either nobody wanted to seem “uncool” for actually taking the time to read an assigned book that could be dismissed as lame, or it was the case that no one had actually finished or even read the novel at all.

The entire discussion seemed to lose all of its meaning now, as I realized that students who had not read the book would not have much to contribute. I understood that a summer reading assignment is not the most enjoyable way to spend one’s time off from school or as a

way to prepare for college, but I was genuinely shocked at the lack of initiative shown by my fellow students upon entering a serious university. I knew the school had paid to have the author visit and discuss her novel with the incoming Marquette undergraduates. Out of respect not only for the assignment and the author, but also for how I wished to portray myself as a student, I took the novel seriously. For me, the summer reading book served as a way to make my first impression on the people I would be spending the next four years of my personal and academic life around. One could argue that the assignment is, in the grand scheme of things, completely meaningless and unimportant, or that I perhaps took a simple exercise in getting to know each other too seriously.

However, the student attitudes I experienced in the book discussion were not isolated by any means, and would carry on into the academic environments of many courses throughout the coming semesters. Silence continued to prevail in classroom discussions where the professor was lucky to hear a response from two out of forty people, attendance dwindled as the semester progressed, and countless complaints about dense readings, excruciating lectures, and for that matter, having to go to class at all, persisted. If students are students seemingly uninterested in the part of college that actually involves learning and discussing information, what changes can be made to improve the way lectures are run in order to raise the amount of active participation and engagement in class discussions? A higher level of student engagement at the classroom level could lead to more effective lectures, a deeper understanding of course content, and more worthwhile interaction between professors and undergraduates—vital and valuable aspects of a truly meaningful education. If observing student behaviors in the classroom, getting students and faculty to share their opinions on student engagement, and working with scholarly literature can help to understand why students are reluctant to participate, I feel my research project remains

worthwhile not only to improving the learning environment at Marquette, but also to applying the same proposals to universities across the country.

## **Methods**

This project is a mixed-method qualitative study involving (1) observations; (2) interviews; and (3) review of scholarly literature. Future research will include a survey and focus group as well as additional observations, interviews, and more of a focus on scholarly literature. I chose this research design in order to utilize data collection methods that can combine my own personal experience, the perspectives of students and faculty, and an incorporation of literature exploring undergraduate behaviors and attitudes in order to better understand the problem of student disengagement from a variety of different angles that can be analyzed qualitatively. In combining these methods, I also hope to incorporate quantitative analysis by comparing specific aspects of the observed class sessions. The project received IRB approval on April 20, 2015 and has received a grant through Marquette's Klingler College of Arts and Sciences to continue in summer 2015.

### *Observations*

In order to explore why students seemed reluctant to participate in class, I decided to observe how students behaved throughout the course of a lecture by drawing on my personal observations as a student taking classes at Marquette University. Selected research participants are Marquette undergraduates in the College of Arts and Sciences. To date, I have kept notes informally as both a participant as observer and observer as participant during four different class sessions without recording any identifying information about the course instructor or any

individuals involved. Upon deciding which courses to observe in, I chose settings where I could take notes the least disruptively, either in classes I was currently enrolled in or a large lecture hall where I could observe from the back of the room, unnoticeable to students in the class.

Additionally, I chose courses I knew varied in several ways so I could more easily see patterns across different class types. Each class session lasted from 50 minutes to 75 minutes. Throughout each lecture, I noted my observations of student behaviors in a notebook while making general observations of student engagement as the lecture progressed. The following chart depicts what aspects of the classroom I used as a basis of analysis and comparison for what influences student engagement, including class size, whether the course was taken towards a major or as a requirement, whether the professor included attendance/participation as part of the final grade, whether or not technology use is allowed during the lecture, and how much discussion time is allotted for each class:

Class Type	Number of Students Enrolled	Major/Non-Major Course	Attendance/Participation Graded	Technology Allowed	Discussion Time During Lecture
Intro Level Biology	~100	Non-Major	No	Yes	Minimal
Upper-Division French	14	Major	Yes	No	Majority of class time
Upper-Division English	16	Major	Yes	No	Minimal
Upper-Division Psych	~50	Major	No	Yes	Minimal

**Figure 1: Aspects of the learning environment potentially relating to student engagement.**

### *Interviews*

In order to incorporate perspectives on undergraduate learning environments from different sides of the classroom, selected interviewees include one Marquette student and one Marquette faculty member. I conducted each interview according to a script based on pre-prepared questions catering to the perspective of the interviewee (See Appendix A). The student I interviewed is a sophomore in Marquette's College of Business I recruited using convenience sampling. I selected this undergraduate because they had frequently shared opinions with me on student attitudes towards education and were willing to give me an hour of their time. For recruiting a faculty member, I used snowball sampling by asking a professor if they had any colleagues that would be interested in participating in my research after providing a description of the project. By interviewing members of Marquette's community that were interested in discussing student attitudes towards higher education, engagement in the learning environment, and in participating in undergraduate research, I hope to provide insight from students and faculty who recognize the problem of disengagement in undergraduate classrooms. In analyzing the data, I chose the following coding categories relating to student engagement: educational experience across different types of classrooms, student motivation, amount of participation in class, and the presence of technology during lectures. Although I observed similar patterns in my interviews as I did in my observations, I have chosen not to include data from the interview in my findings section because the data is not sufficient enough yet to make any substantial statements on how Marquette students and faculty perceive student attitudes. Going forward, however, I hope to interview several more students and faculty members from a variety of

disciplines in order to more accurately collect data that can be analyzed under more specific categories.

### *Review of Scholarly Literature*

In order to place my research into a broader context, I utilized articles from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, a literature review on encouraging and evaluating student participation, as well as excerpts from Rebekah Nathan's ethnographic study of undergraduate life, *My Freshman Year*. In searching for literature relevant to my research on Marquette's library databases, I used the same keywords I had created in my grant proposal to narrow my search to terms relating to my research questions, including words such as "student," "engagement," and "participation."

Further narrowing my article choices, I chose articles on *The Chronicle of Higher Education* database written by professors in order to get faculty observations on student engagement. Additionally, I chose articles that specifically concerned how to potentially improve student engagement in the classroom in order to incorporate these professors' results into my initial proposals for change. However, when sorting through articles, I often found articles relating to undergraduate participation relating to political and cultural affairs, and had to narrow my search to articles discussing the classroom. I found it interesting that many articles focused on student engagement in undergraduate affairs outside of the classroom, and would like to research more on motivating factors for students to participate in undergraduate culture.

The literary review I chose directly incorporates ideas of student engagement and participation. The authors present data from multiple different studies of undergraduate classrooms, focusing on aspects of student participation including the relationship between

faculty and students in relation to participation, use of graded participation, and potential reasons as to why students are most likely or least likely to engage in class discussion. In utilizing the compiled data, I hope to provide a context for the proposals for change in my research.

Finally, I chose to incorporate excerpts from Rebekah Nathan's ethnographic study of undergraduate life, as she has delved deeper into undergraduate culture by posing as a student in order to better observe and understand the behaviors of college students. Particularly, Nathan discusses actions and attitudes of students during classroom discussions, observing their engagement with academics. The study resonated with my research ideas as it focuses on student attitudes towards their own education, and takes multiple perspectives into account as Nathan describes her experiences as professor who ventured into the other side of the classroom to become a student.

### *Ethics in Research*

This research project often involves observing and interacting with a variety of human subjects. While taking observation field notes in different undergraduate classrooms, I fulfilled the role of participant as observer in order to not disrupt the regular running of the lecture. Although I did not obtain permission from the professor to observe during the lecture, no identifiable information was recorded. The professors as well as all members of the classes I observed remain anonymous and will be referred to under the terms professor/instructor or student, respectively.

For each interview conducted, I obtained informed consent using a written form (See Appendix B). Interview participants were informed of the intent of the project and notified that they could withdraw from participation at any time. All identities will remain anonymous, as

each interviewee has a chosen pseudonym. The interview with a student was audio-recorded, and the audio file will be kept on a locked computer and promptly deleted after I am finished with the data. Going forward, each interviewee will be given a written consent form based on a template from the IRB that gives a more detailed description of my project's methods, purposes, and goals.

## **Findings**

Based on my observations, I have divided my findings into four subcategories primarily according to what factors influence student engagement in the classroom: class size, participation/attendance as requirements, use of technology, and lectures incorporating discussion. To provide detailed examples of my findings, I chose to illustrate the results of my observations by contrasting the two courses that differed the most in all four of the subcategories, an introductory level biology course and an upper-division French language course.

### *Class Size*

**Class size influences student engagement.** According to the class list on d21 for the introductory level biology class, approximately 100 students are currently enrolled. The lecture is noticeably less intimate and personal than the majority of the other courses I have taken at Marquette, which typically range from 15-30 students in a classroom. I purposefully chose to take my first set of field notes in a class of a larger size, thinking that students could more comfortably fall into regular tendencies under the veil of anonymity, aware that the professor did not know anyone's name and was not going to mark attendance. Appropriately, I observed not only a noticeable lack of attendance as fewer than half of the 100 students came to the lecture,

but also a considerable presence of technology in the classroom when compared to courses with fewer students in a smaller classroom. Students were connected to social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram on laptops smart phones, as well as engaging in sending emails and text messages on computers and phones, respectively. It appeared as if the literal structure of the class, where students could sit a comfortable distance away from the professor among dozens of other people, allowed students to be more inclined to use laptops and phones for social and entertainment purposes rather than for taking notes on the lecture, as opposed to in a smaller class where professors could more easily see and keep track of who was using technology for the purpose of the lecture and who was not.

That being said, to verify these ideas, I contrasted my observations in the biology course with a class of a much smaller size, and upper division French language course. According to the class list on d2l, only 14 students are enrolled in the course. Each student sits in closer proximity to the professor and is known by name. As the foreign language community at Marquette is much smaller than a broader category such as biology, many students know each other personally and have had similar classes together in the past. Therefore, students sit closer to one another and engage in more conversation before and after the lecture. Additionally, the smaller course size allows the professor to form a more personal relationship with students. Accordingly, the professor schedules each member of the class for a one-with-one conference discussing their individual progress in the course. Contrary to the larger lecture, it appeared as if the literal structure of this course being more intimate allowed for greater engagement with the professor and with peers.

The following figures below were taken in the Marquette classrooms I observed in, and serve to illustrate how size influences not only how many students fill the seats in a lecture hall,

but where students do their learning and how that might affect their participation and relationship with the professor.



**Figure 2:** View from the back corner of the introductory level biology classroom where approximately 100 students are enrolled.



**Figure 3:** Photo of a smaller classroom where foreign language classes typically take place.

Taking these findings into account, as a result of student anonymity and lack of accountability, could the size of the class therefore directly influence how much students are willing to pay attention and participate? On the contrary, could a more intimate setting with fewer students and closer proximity to the professor directly influence how much students are willing to participate and be engaged with the content? Going further, I hope to add more sets of notes from classrooms to analyze under the category of class size.

### *Participation/Attendance as Requirements*

**Participation and attendance as requirements of the final grade influence student engagement.** In the introductory level biology course, participation and attendance are not a component of the final grade in the course. As a result, attendance dwindles more frequently. The day I observed the lecture, approximately half of the students were present. Although the professor will occasionally raise questions for the class to answer, students are not penalized for remaining silent.

In a sharp contrast to the biology course, the upper-division French course counts participation and attendance as a major component of the final grade, and students are penalized for failing to turn in a participation rubric at the end of the week. Illustrated in Figure 4 below, students evaluate themselves on a scale of 1-10 including how frequently they contribute to the class, whether or not they display leadership during group activities, if they come on time with all materials for class, if they turn off their mobile phones, and how well they understand concepts. With such a strict grading of participation, it appeared that each student was more motivated to contribute multiple times to the discussion. With the additional facilitation and engagement of the professor, all 14 of the students made their voice heard at least once during

the 75-minute lecture. However, is required participation the only factor that motivates students to be so actively engaged? Moreover, does the nature of the course, where speaking and discussion are a vital part of learning a foreign language, count as a contributing factor to why participation is so emphasized? In comparing a greater variety of class types in the future, I hope to determine what factors influence professors to place greater importance on participation as part of the final grade.

**PARTICIPATION SCALE**

POINTS POSSIBLE	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3
RANGE	HI							LO

**PARTICIPATION RECORD**

- Review the above participation scale.
- Select the number of points that describes your learning responsibility: participation for the designated dates.
- Write the number of points in the correct column for each date. Use **WHOLE NUMBERS** only.
- Turn in the participation record **each Thursday at the conclusion of class. Should a student be absent or fail to turn in the participation record on a specified Thursday, he/she will receive a 3 for that day.** If a student anticipates absence on a Thursday, it is his/her responsibility to turn in the participation record in advance of the absence to receive credit for Tuesday's participation. **The student will still receive a 3 for his/her absence on Thursday.** If the participation record is not turned in on Thursday, the student will receive a 3 for both Tuesday and Thursday.

Weeks	1		2		3		4		5		Behavior Average%
Dates	1/27	1/29	2/3	2/5	2/10	2/12	2/17	2/19	2/24	2/26	
Student Behaviors											
Arrives on time											
Turns off mobile phones											
Remains for entire class session											
Brings required materials											
Completes assignments on time											
Shows initiative individually											
Displays leadership in group activities											
Maintains interaction in French											
Participates civilly and respectfully											
Demonstrates acquisition of concepts											
Daily Behavior Average %											
Mid-Grade											

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**Figure 4:** Participation rubric distributed in an upper-division foreign language course, where students evaluate their own contributions to the class on a weekly basis using a scale of 1-10 where 1 is the lowest and 10 is the highest.

*Use of Technology*

**Lectures allowing or disallowing the use of technology influence student engagement.**

Students in the introductory level biology class often utilized laptops and smart phones for social purposes, ranging from Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram to texting and emailing, Taking the frequent use of mobile phones and laptops during class into account, I wonder if students using technology were purposefully distracting themselves from the lecture in front of them.

Throughout the course of the lecture, I observed 16 students with laptops open, and approximately 5 students that I could see using a smart phone. However, is the way the class is structured the only factor in students' use of technology? How would it compare if I were to take notes in a smaller class? Would the same patterns appear? Moreover, do students use technology in my biology lecture as opposed to taking notes because they do not find the course content valuable? In other words, are students uninterested in required courses, or are they uninterested in courses in general?

In order to answer these questions, I began by comparing the use of technology in the upper-division French language course I observed. As illustrated in Figure 4 above, students are penalized if their mobile phones are turned on during the lecture time. Additionally, the professor encourages students to not take notes on laptops. During the class time I observed, one student had a mobile phone on their desk during the lecture, and the professor asked the student to put the phone away. Students typically have a notebook and textbook on their desk, and refrain from checking cell phones during lecture time. However, how much is the use of technology during class related to the fact that student grades will suffer if they use phones during class? If there were no assessment of participation, how would the use of technology change? Moreover, if the course was larger and students were held less accountable individually, such as in the large biology lecture, how might student choices to use technology in class differ?

### *Lectures Incorporating Discussion*

**Lectures incorporating discussion influence student engagement.** In the introductory biology course, most lectures involve some sort of group activity for the last 10 minutes or so of class. Here, students can work together on answering questions posted on the slides. Often times,

the professor lets the class out a few minutes early if the lecture slides are completed and there has been a chance to work in groups. However, the majority of the 50-minute period is allotted strictly to lecture, allowing for students to be less accountable for knowing the presented information and readings completed outside of class.

During the upper-division French course, active discussion is involved for the majority of the 75-minute class time. Students participate during the lecture by answering direct questions from the professor and discussing other questions in small groups. Although the professor picks on certain students to participate, each student is actively involved in the discussion. How does the nature of a foreign language course contribute to the amount of discussion time? Moreover, what factors carry over into other subjects? In other words, how does the nature of the course affect student participation and discussion time? In collecting more data in the future, I hope to be able to incorporate more comparisons and contrasts between how much discussion time is allotted in different types of classes.

## **Next Steps**

### *Initial Proposals*

Upon examining what factors contribute to student engagement in the classroom and incorporating examples from scholarly literature, I have come up with four initial proposals for change in the learning environment: promote discussion-based lectures, increase dialogue between students and professor, encourage graded participation in smaller courses, and create more opportunities for students to suggest improvements to lecture style. As Nathan noted in her ethnographic study, the problem of student disengagement from learning is prevalent in a variety of classrooms: “The teacher-student interaction focused less on what students said than on

getting them to say something.” As a professor wrote in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, “Grading their participation is a stick to the carrot of learning that helps the students stay engaged” (Coxall 2010). According to another professor, instructors should be encouraged to “arrange for different kinds of activities in the class. Group work became my best friend. I would put the students in groups of two or four and ask them to work together to solve certain problems or analyze different passages” (Templeton 2010). The experiences of these professors can be directly applied to classrooms in universities across the country. The perspectives offered by these professors echo my experiences with student engagement at Marquette, and provide suggestions for focusing on and working to improve student engagement. The literature review offered several other suggestions, recommending, “that explicit performance criteria be established to evaluate class participation, and suggested that this would decrease student anxiety” (Czekanski, Wolf 2013). If students are actively engaged in a variety of activities during class and are evaluated by their professors, it appears that a more productive and effective learning environment is possible.

### *Future Research Plans and Goals*

As I develop an interest in research, this project opens up a variety of opportunities for my future endeavors at Marquette and beyond. After submitting a grant application this spring through the College of Arts and Sciences, this research project has received funding to continue through summer 2015. During this time, I plan to distribute a survey, hold a focus group, conduct several more interviews with students and faculty, and review scholarly literature. In addition, I hope the summer months will allow me to contact faculty and students from other universities to gain perspectives on student attitudes towards higher education outside of Marquette. I plan to

submit this project to conferences focused on higher education, including the Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English (October 2015), which has proposals due in late June. Furthermore, I intend to write an article based on this work and submit it to either an undergraduate research journal or a journal focused on higher education. I am also working on submitting a proposal this May to a workshop held concerning the teaching of writing in Pennsylvania during the fall 2015 semester. As a Writing-Intensive English major, the opportunity to conduct this project helps me not only to develop my skills as a writer and as a researcher, but also to determine the direction of my future career. I am interested in graduate studies, and hope the experience of a long-term research project prepares me for the independent, original research expected in graduate education. I am also considering a career as an educator, so the subject of this research helps me consider what that career choice might entail.

Beyond these individual goals, the project itself intervenes into discussions of how contemporary undergraduate students regard various aspects of higher education in a number of ways, as it (1) evaluates student attitudes and actions in the classroom setting; (2) presents perspectives of both students and faculty; and (3) places findings into a broader context by engaging with relevant literature. Engaging deeper into this project will not only help prepare me for graduate education and help develop my skills as a writer, researcher, and potential educator, but will add a variety of insights into current discussions of undergraduate engagement and learning.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions for Faculty Members:

1. Do you require students to participate as part of their final grade?
  - Have you in the past?
  - If so, in which types of courses do you choose to grade a student's participation?
  - In what ways do you find graded participation to be more or less effective?
2. How do you typically structure your lectures?
  - What teaching methods do you find most effective for getting students to be actively engaged with the course material during a lecture (integrated discussion, group activities, entirely lecture based)?
3. What have you observed about student attendance across classes?
  - What do you think motivates students to attend each course?
  - When do you think students are more likely to attend class (right before/for a quiz or exam, when a paper is due, if attendance is recorded/graded)?
4. What have you observed about students' use of technology during lectures?
  - When is there more of a presence of smart phones and laptops, if there is at all?
  - What is the effect on how the lecture is run?
5. At Marquette, course sizes can differ greatly, from fewer than 20 to over 100. What is the average size of courses you teach?
6. Do you find the size of the course influences student engagement/interest in learning?
7. What changes do you think could be made to the way college courses are run in order to improve the overall amount of student participation and engagement with education?

### Interview Questions for Students:

1. What has been your experience with education before coming to college?
  - How did you feel towards academics during high school?
  - Has your attitude changed since coming to college?
2. What were some of the factors that influenced your decision to come to Marquette?
3. How would you describe yourself as a student?
4. What major have you chosen?
  - Do you have particularly strong reasons for choosing that major program?
5. What were some of the motivating factors for your decision to come to college?
6. Upon entering college, what expectations did you have for the rigor of academics?
7. How has the structure of college influenced your engagement in the classroom (more freedom, fewer classes in a day)?
8. Do you think student apathy and disengagement in the classroom is a problem at Marquette?
9. How do you feel the growing presence of technology in our culture has influenced the way students feel towards education?
10. What kinds of classes do you feel most engaged in (large vs. small, major vs. non-major, differing subject matters, required/non-required classes)?

## Appendix B

### Consent Form for English 3210 Research

As part of the writing-research process for English 3210, Writing Practices and Processes: “Ethnography of the University,” students are conducting qualitative research and gathering data through interviews, surveys, observations, or other fieldwork. Student researchers are investigating questions related to campus and community life, and they will explain their projects (research questions and project goals) when asking for your participation in the research.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact the student researcher (email to: \_\_\_\_\_) or to contact me through email (beth.godbee@marquette.edu) or phone (414-288-3468).

Thank you!

Dr. Beth Godbee

English Department, Marquette University

\* \* \* \* \*

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (participant’s name), agree to participate in qualitative research for English 3210, conducted by \_\_\_\_\_ (researcher’s name). I understand that my name will not be used, unless I give express permission, and that I may choose a pseudonym. My participation in this study is completely voluntary. I may withdraw from participation at any time.

I understand that there are no anticipated risks as a result of my participation in this study. If I become uncomfortable at any point, I may choose not to answer a question or to end the interview. There are no direct benefits from participation.

Consent for Participation / Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_