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EXPLORING VALIDATION AND SUCCESS AMONG FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS
IN FIRST-YEAR WRITING

by

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A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School, Marquette University,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

EXPLORING VALIDATION AND SUCCESS AMONG FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS IN FIRST-YEAR WRITING

Jenna Green B.A., M.A.

Marquette University, 2023

This qualitative case study examines connections between student writing and student success, specifically among first-generation college students, a growing student population who are less likely to graduate college than their multigenerational peers. First-generation college students are more likely to come from working-class, low-income backgrounds, identify as racial or ethnic minorities, live at home and/or have significant family and work responsibilities (Bond, 2019; Engle & Tinto, 2008). Due to the confluence of barriers many face, first-generation college students exhibit higher attrition rates, contributing to persisting inequities in higher education. Leveraging Rendón's (1994) validation theory, this study explored how first-generation college students experienced validation in a first-year writing course, and how those experiences influenced their ability to see themselves as creators of knowledge, valuable members of the university learning community, and capable of success. Specifically, the study identified moments of academic and interpersonal validation in a first-year writing course to better understand how validation may help support first-generation college students' success.

Through students' reflective writing assignments, interviews with students and instructors, classroom observations, and analysis of pedagogical and curricular artifacts, the study findings indicate that students do experience academic and interpersonal validation in first-year writing and that the validation contributes to their ability to view themselves as capable of success in college. Based on the results, the study offers recommendations for improving pedagogy and practice, and further research to cultivate more equitable success.

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Jenna Green B.A., M.A.

For Elliott & Maeve, my inspirations

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Chapter One: Introduction and Statement of the Problem

My dissertation research examines connections between student writing and student success among first-generation college students. Specifically, I define, identify, and analyze moments of academic and interpersonal validation in a first-year writing course, English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric at Marquette University, to better understand how a writing course may help first-generation college students succeed. First-generation college students, a term referring to students from families in which their parents did not earn a bachelor's degree, occupy many different backgrounds and identities. However, first-generation college students are more likely to come from working-class, low-income backgrounds, identify as racial or ethnic minorities, live at home and/or have significant family and work responsibilities (Bond, 2019; Engle & Tinto, 2008). As a collective group, and because of the confluence of barriers many face, first-generation college students are less likely to graduate college, use campus support services, and possess "social capital [that] has been identified as a key factor contributing to higher attrition rates and lower rates of retention" (Bond, 2019 p.162; Conefrey, 2018).

This qualitative case study seeks to address these inequities by better understanding how a first-year writing course may influence first-generation student success. I apply Laura Rendón's (1994) validation theory, which recognizes that the environments of most colleges were not designed with experiences of marginalized students (such as first-generation, low-income, and/or students with minoritized identities) and their success in mind, hence, these students experience more barriers

than their white, middle-class peers whose parents attended college (Rendón, 1994). Specifically, Rendón's theory "1) validates students as creators of knowledge and as valuable members of the learning community and 2) fosters personal development and social adjustment" (Rendón & Muñoz, 2011 p. 12). While scholars and practitioners in higher education have created interventions to mitigate challenges for first-generation college students and promote student success, many interventions have not been integrated into students' curricular experiences. Additionally, limited scholarship has addressed how a first year-writing course may help validate first-generation college students and support their success.

First-year writing courses serve a unique function in higher education as they are frequently one of the only universal undergraduate curricular requirements and are often designed help students negotiate their identities in and among the discourse practices of higher education. Yet, scholarship in literacy studies and composition shows us time and again the specific challenges experienced by students who find their home or primary discourses incompatible with those of academic contexts (Brandt, 1998; Gee, 1989; Villanueva, 1993). Writing can be especially daunting for underrepresented, low-income, and first-generation students because they may feel unfamiliar with and alienated by academic discourse conventions and demands. The first-year writing course is a site where students hesitations and unique challenges succeeding in postsecondary environments are made visible by their perceptions of and experiences as academic writers (Bond, 2019; Davis, 2010; Peckham, 2010).

However, interventions that affirm students' identities and capabilities can validate students and therefore positively contribute to their success (Rendón, 1994). Acknowledging the need for additional research examining connections between students' curricular experiences, first-year writing courses, and student success, I explore validation in English: 1001 Foundations in Rhetoric, the first-year writing course at Marquette University. English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric was revised in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and 2020 Black Lives Matter protests to focus on racial justice using a cultural rhetorics framework. Students and instructors reported that the anti-racist curriculum helped diverse students to negotiate their connections to local communities and their identity on our predominantly white campus. Given that English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric's revised curriculum centers traditionally marginalized voices and its learning outcomes¹ are designed to help students discern and develop their own ideas while putting those ideas into conversation with those of others, the course serves as a generative site for examining both academic and interpersonal validation.

Problem Statement

Equity gaps in higher education continue to persist. To realize improved outcomes and lessen postsecondary achievement gaps, the phrase "student success" has been popularized in higher education scholarship and practice to describe policies and interventions aimed at more equitably supporting students in reaching their goals (Kinzie & Kuh, 2017). There are varying views on how to define, theorize, and implement

¹ See Appendix A for Course Description and Learning Outcomes

initiatives that support student success, but I begin with Kinzie, Kuh, and Schuh's (2014) broad definition of student success in college as "encompass[ing] academic achievement; engagement in educationally purposeful activities, acquisition of desired knowledge skills, and competencies; persistence; educational attainments; and post-college performance" (p. 17). Focus on student success has emerged partially from concern about low completion rates, high attrition rates, inequities in student achievement, incomplete evidence of student learning, and institutional responsibility to be accountable for and achieve desired outcomes. Kinzie and Kuh (2017) synthesize concern by asking the question, "are students reaping the promised benefits of the postsecondary experience?" (p. 19).

Attainment of a bachelor's degree has long been considered a gatekeeper to individual, financial, social, and civic benefits (Powell, 2009). However, access to the bachelor's degree has never been equitable. Nationally, 42% students of who graduated with a bachelor's degree in 2016 were first-generation college graduates but, attrition rates are higher among first-generation college students (RTI, 2019). The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators' (NASPA) Center for Student Success report that "six years after first entering postsecondary education, 56% of first-generation college students and 40% of continuing-generation students had not earned any postsecondary credential" (RTI, 2019). Students who graduate with a bachelor's degree leave with increased access to social and economic capital as compared to their peers who departed college without completing their degree. Additionally, the cost of postsecondary education is a barrier for both degree completion and increased

economic security. For example, in Wisconsin, the class of 2020's average student loan debt was \$30,270 per graduating senior, which certainly impacts students, their families, and the economy (The Institute for College Access & Success, 2020). Given the increasing cost of attending college and resulting student debt crisis, "[s]takeholders are questioning the value of a college degree, the cost, and preparation for the world of work" (Henning & Roberts, 2016 p. 6). Collectively, institutions of higher education are falling short on their goals of transforming lives and society through education. As institutions of higher education face changes to funding, in students' backgrounds and experiences, and continual questions to prove value in society, it is "increasingly important for colleges and universities to focus on what matters to student success and learning as well as organize the undergraduate program to provide a greater range of student enriched experiences and opportunity to succeed" (Manning, Kinzie, & Schuh, 2014 p. 16).

Attention on scholarship, praxis, pedagogies and interventions to help actualize student success can be framed as attempts to help make higher education more inclusive and beneficial for all students. Institutions must take an active role in creating structure and policies that support student success. Kinzie and Kuh's (2017) define an institution's role in fostering student success as combining educational, financial, and equity dimensions. They advocate for institutions to increase the number of students from different backgrounds "who participate in high-quality educational programs and practices culminating in high-quality credentials (e.g., certifications, certificates, degrees) and proficiencies that enable them to be economically self-sufficient and

civically responsible post college” (p. 20). Examining graduation rates and retention (defined as the percentage of students who re-enroll in their institution each year), has emerged as a popular measure to assess an institution’s ability to help its students succeed. Cook and Pollaro (2010) explain that graduation rates have become synonymous with student and institution accountability measures. The focus on retention as a component of student success requires colleges to be able to gather data on, assess, intervene, and articulate that the time and money spent to earn an undergraduate degree is “worth it.” However, those who leave before completing a bachelor’s degree are still faced with often crippling student loan debt without the promised socioeconomic benefits of the degree. The 2014 Executive Summary from the Office of the President, the White House described attainment of a post-secondary degree as the “surest way” of gaining upward socioeconomic mobility (The White House: Higher Education, 2014, p. 2). Similarly, research studies have emphasized the strong correlation between degree attainment and the ability to gain economic success (Carnevale, Rose, & Cheah, 2011). Students who earn an undergraduate degree will have more employment options and opportunities, while also earning higher salaries. This occupational agency and increased economic security also render the college degree “a vehicle for social justice and equality issues in the larger context of society beyond the college experience” (Do Huynh, 2018). Retention and attrition rates do not provide a comprehensive perspective of student success or quality of life, but are an important, practical consideration when evaluating student investment of time and money as well as institutional accountability. If a student departs without completing

their degree, they are more likely to be socioeconomically restricted, and less likely to in Kinzie and Kuh's (2017) framing, reap the multitude of "promised benefits" of their college experience (p. 19).

Need for Further Study

As student success is tied to equity-minded policies and practices that aim to ameliorate postsecondary achievement gaps for all students, disaggregation of student data to capture the unique experiences of specific populations need to be considered when measuring the success of specific initiatives. The demographics at my research site, Marquette University, a predominantly white, Catholic, urban, midwestern university are shifting to become increasingly diverse, a trend that is expected to continue (Grawe, 2018). Just over 30% of 2022's incoming freshman class identifies as a student of color – a 10.5% increase from the previous year – and 23% of students identify as first-generation (Marquette OIRA, 2023). As more first-generation college students attend college, more intentional support initiatives should be offered to aid their transition and success. Without increased support, universities will limit opportunities for students to successfully complete their degree (Carlson, 2013; Rendón, 1994). College environments that fail to address the specific needs of underrepresented student populations may contribute to graduation gaps that further impede progress toward more equitable outcomes in college and beyond.

Hence, when examining student success, it is necessary to consider a student's identities and background since a student's ability to succeed is heavily influenced by their identities and circumstance *before* they enter college. Scholars such as Crissman

Ishler and Upcraft (2005) and Thayer (2000) have investigated how determinants such as socioeconomic status, race, gender identity, high school grades, and ethnic identity correlate to inequities in degree completion. Another important factor of persistence is a student's parents' level of education; first-generation college students are less likely to graduate. The Pew Research Center's 2021 report describes that "70% of adults ages 22 to 59 with at least one parent who has a bachelor's degree or more education have completed a bachelor's degree themselves," while only "26% of their peers who do not have a college-educated parent have a bachelor's degree." Conefrey (2018) explains "first-generation students often differ from continuing generation students in terms of ethnic demographics, socioeconomic status, and academic preparedness, factors that converge to negatively influence their degree completion rates" (p. 2). First-generation students tend to be less engaged than multigeneration students; Pike and Kuh (2005) attribute this to their lack of familiarity with college campuses and less tacit knowledge of behaviors and role models that could contribute to their levels of participation in activities that could positively correlate with success. For example, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators' (NASPA) Center for Student Success report that nationally, only 30% of first-generation students sought academic-support services as compared to 37% of their multigeneration peers. Conefrey (2018) supports this data, explaining that first-generation are also less likely to utilize campus supports, even though they face more barriers to success, due in part to their weaker sense of engagement and commitments outside of school. Consequently, scholars have "continued to call for more research on how to support this vulnerable student

population, particularly at 4-year colleges, where they are most underrepresented” (Conefrey, 2018 p. 2).

Student success initiatives aimed at addressing these inequalities often include explicit focus on retention and graduation but also expand to consider other metrics such as grade-point average, time to degree completion, extracurricular involvement, social and emotional development, and/or goal achievement (i.e. Medical School acceptance) (Henning and Roberts, 2016; Powell, 2009). Astin (1999) a foundational higher education scholar has long argued for the necessity of involvement in the forms of academic and social engagement as a prerequisite for student success. Astin defines involvement as “amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 518). To summarize Astin’s research, the more engaged a student is, the more likely that student is to experience better academic outcomes. Therefore, institutional policy, pedagogy and culture should be designed and evaluated on maximizing student involvement as that increases learning and personal development. However, scholars such as Museus (2017) and Yosso (2005) have critiqued Astin’s student involvement model because it was theorized on a homogenous population of mainly white, multigenerational students and does not accurately account for the backgrounds and experiences of marginalized students. Involvement is an essential component to student learning and success, but opportunities to engage need to correspond with a students’ values, commitments, and identities.

In response to inequity in student involvement, Rendón’s 1994 validation theory, offers a framework for faculty and staff to help give students “agency, affirmation, self-

worth, and liberation from past invalidation” through academic and interpersonal validation (Rendón & Muñoz, 2011 p.17). Validation is defined as someone actively assisting a student’s learning and interpersonal growth and can come from both in-and-out of class. Examples of validation include faculty learning student names, ensuring curriculum reflects student backgrounds, providing meaningful feedback and communicating to students, “you can do this, and I am going to help you” (Rendón & Muñoz, 2011 p. 15). Validation can also come from advisors, coaches, counselors, as well as family and community members who explicitly help students believe in their inherent capacity to learn and own ability to succeed. Rendón critiques academic environments and policies that reify privilege and silence minoritized student voices explaining “involvement in college is not easy for nontraditional students. Validation may be the missing link to involvement and be a prerequisite for involvement to occur” (Rendón, 1994 p. 37).

Validation theory builds on feminist researchers Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberg and Tarule’s (1986) *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, a longitudinal study, which illustrated that women who internalized oppressive patriarchal sentiments that they could not think or learn as well as men transformed to recognizing themselves as capable of meaning-making and knowledge production after receiving external affirmation from authority figures. Rendón adapted this strategy to college students exhibiting that external support can eventually translate to students gaining internal confidence and agency. Rendón’s identifies two types of validation: academic and interpersonal. Academic validation occurs when university agents take action to assist students to “trust their

innate capacity to learn and to acquire confidence in being a college student” taking actions such as designing curriculum that reflects students’ backgrounds and allowing them to witness themselves in what they are learning. Interpersonal validation occurs when students’ personal development and social adjustment is prioritized. In the classroom, instructors who can recognize students as more than just students and connect with them on a personal level can act as validating agents (Rendón and Muñoz, 2011).

Rendón (1994) interviewed marginalized students “consumed with self-doubt or expecting to fail,” who also articulated the transformative power of validation (p. 36). The students shared that when someone believed that the experiences and knowledge they brought with them to college were valuable, Rendón found that the students “began to believe in their innate capacity to learn and to become successful college students” (Rendón, 1994 p. 36). In other words, when students are authentically and intentionally validated, this validation contributes to their ability to see themselves as capable of success. Such validation can not only help support individual success and degree completion but can also contribute to lessening broader inequitable institutional and national achievement gaps. Felten and Lambert’s *2020 Relationship-Rich Education: How Human Connection Drives Success in College* details the importance of creating and nurturing relationships between students, their peers, faculty, staff, and institutions as “essential to help students believe they belong and can succeed” (p. 18). Since the first-year writing course supports success through engagement, learning, identity exploration, and critical questioning, the course can serve as a rich site to study

validation. As Rendón (2011) explains, at some point, the students she studied “suddenly began to believe in themselves as capable college learners not so much because of their college involvement, but because some person(s), in-or outside of college took the initiative to reach out to them to help them believe in themselves and in their innate capacity to learn” (p. 14). Extending this observation, I apply Rendón’s theory to the first-year writing classroom; inquiring how a first-year writing course can help validate a student and cultivate their perception of themselves as capable of achieving success. I hope this research can help elucidate possible connections between knowledge-making and validation through writing and consider rationale for intervention to increase success among first-generation college students.

Purpose of the Study

Rendón’s concept of validation has been applied to many educational contexts as a student development theory that can help marginalized or at-risk students, such as first-generation college students, succeed (Rendón & Muñoz, 2011 p. 12). Yet, there is a gap in scholarship exploring the role of first-year writing courses in better understanding how validation, a student’s ability to view themselves as knowers and valued community members, can influence their success. Since writing is a meaning-making activity that evokes identities, and most students are required to take a writing course at the collegiate level, there is potentiality for better understanding student success through writing and the lens of validation theory. Writing scholars such as Bloom (1996), Brodkey (1994), and Peckham (2010) argue that while writing can be especially fraught for low-income and first-generation students because they feel alienated by academic

discourse conventions, the writing classroom can also be an environment to critique existing linguistic hegemony and offer more expansive, inclusive ways of communicating. My cross-disciplinary research seeks to better understand how a first-year writing course may help first-generation college students experience validation and therefore be more likely to succeed. Hence, my research seeks to understand how learning in a first-year writing course might influence first-generation college student success. Specifically, the study asks the following research questions:

Research Questions

1. How, if at all, do first-generation students experience validation as creators of knowledge in a first-year writing course?
2. How, if at all, do first-generation students experience validation as valuable members of the university learning community in a first-year writing course?
3. What, if any, role does the first-year writing course play in first-generation students' ability to believe in themselves as capable of success in college?

I explored the questions through analyzing qualitative data in the form of students' reflective writing assignments, semi-structured individual interviews with students and instructors, classroom observations, and pedagogical and curricular artifacts in English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric at Marquette University. I employed a phenomenological case study design. As Yin (2013) advocates, case studies are the preferred strategy for a researcher to focus on questions such as how or why contemporary phenomenon exist situated within a real-life contexts while exerting minimal control over the events. My goal was to gain more insight into how validation can occur in the first-year writing

classroom in hopes that my findings have pedagogical, research, and practical interventional applications that contribute to more socially equitable practices in education that help transform students and our world.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The following section provides a survey of existing frameworks around student success in college environments as well as how validation theory can support that success. To situate my problem of inequity of college completion and explore the potential of validation through writing, I present approaches to student success in student development theory in higher education and explain the role of writing to student learning. This chapter provides theoretical context and a lens for understanding scholarship that relates to the study's main research question: how might learning in a first-year writing course influence first-generation college student success?

Student Success: Engagement and Belonging

In discussions of student success in the field of student development, Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) theory of student departure and Astin's (1999) research on student involvement are foundational. For Tinto, student engagement in academic and social communities is critical for success and universities should actively create opportunities to involve students in the learning process. Prior to Tinto, students who did not succeed in college or dropped out were seen from a deficit perspective; their failure was their fault. Tinto recognized that "[t]he argument about student learning moves beyond the simplistic notion that students are alone responsible for their own effort...institutions also influence the quality of student effort via their capacity to involve students with other members or the institution and their learning process" (1993, p. 132). Tinto argues that students must go through a process of separation from their pre-college life,

followed by a transition to the new college environment before they integrate into the university community. When a student integrates into the community, it maximizes their likelihood of success, but the institution needs to help facilitate that transition by creating opportunities for student learning and integration. Tinto (1993) theorized that “students enter a college or university with particular characteristics that affect their initial commitment to their educational goals and their institution. This commitment is increased or decreased depending on the quality and quantity of academic and social experiences” (*Challenge & Support*, 2005 p. 31). Hence, institutions must take a proactive role by providing opportunities for connection to the environment via academic and social development. Similarly, Astin’s (1999) Involvement theory advocates for student involvement as an important factor of success explaining “the greater the student’s involvement in college, the greater will be the amount of student learning and personal development” (p. 529). Astin defines involvement as the “amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 518). For Astin, institutional policy, pedagogy and culture should be designed for maximizing student involvement as that increases learning and personal development. Thus, Astin and Tinto helped shape conversations around student success to consider integration to the college environment and institutional responsibility in creating opportunities for students to engage in their own learning.

One popular approach to increasing student engagement in learning are high-impact educational practices (HIPs) as coined by George Kuh (2008), the founding director of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). HIPs are evidence-based,

integrative and often collaborative teaching approaches that research has shown yield significant learning benefits for students who participate in them, especially those from historically marginalized demographic groups. HIPs allow students engage in “deep approaches” to learning which are significant because “students who use these approaches tend to earn higher grades and retain, integrate, and transfer information at higher rates” (Kuh, 2008). Utilizing longitudinal NSSE data from more than 1,600 participating institutions across the United States, Kuh demonstrated generally positive relationships between student learning and achievement, such as self-reported gains, grade point averages, and retention. HIPs address student success from both the student and institutional perspective, like Tinto, Kuh frames student success with two critical features student and institutional:

The first is student driven: The amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities. The second is institution driven: how a school deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum, other learning opportunities and support services to lead to the experiences and outcomes that constitute student success (persistence, satisfaction, learning and graduation.) (Kuh, 2008 p. 86- 87).

HIPs exhibit positive associations with undergraduate student learning and retention by facilitating learning outside of the classroom, requiring meaningful interactions with faculty and other students, and encouraging collaboration with diverse others (NSSE, 2007). Kuh (2008) argues that HIPs can have a “life-changing” impact on student development and learning, recommending that every student experience at least two

HIPs in their undergraduate experience—one in the first two years, and the second near degree completion. Ideally, students should engage in at least one high-impact experience every year. The eleven HIPs as explained by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) (2019) are:

- First Year Seminars and Experiences
- Common Intellectual Experiences
- Learning Communities
- Writing-Intensive Courses
- Collaborative Assignments and Projects
- Undergraduate research
- Diversity/Global Learning
- ePortfolios
- Service Learning, Community Based Learning
- Internships
- Capstone Courses and Projects

Most apt to my research is requiring writing-intensive coursework emphasizing writing at all levels of instruction and disciplines and encouraging students to create texts and revise various forms of writing. By including writing-intensive coursework as a HIP, the AAC&U signals the impactful role of writing to student learning and reports that writing can facilitate student gains in quantitative reasoning, oral communication, information literacy, and, on some campuses, ethical inquiry. Hence my inquiry builds on these theories of involvement and learning to more closely examine how first-year writing might contribute to student learning.

Additionally, researchers have explored equity in student success questioning who these theories and practices privilege. Tinto's, Astin's, and Kuh's work has been critiqued in scholarship for its inability to attend to a student's cultural identity and perspectives prior to entering college, specifically that racial minority groups'

integration and engagement's experiences are often more negative and damaging to minoritized students than the majority populations in which these theories were first conceived (Finley & McNair, 2013). Finley & McNair (2013) expose that despite the popularity of HIPs, participation rates of first-generation students lag behind those of peers whose parents did attend college. Museus (2011) extended Tinto's model to account for cultural integration, creating a Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) model, which includes the ways educators can honor a student's cultural identity by integrating "academic, social, and cultural elements into singular spaces, curricula, programs, practices and activities to empower students and create conditions for them to thrive" (Museus, Yi, & Saleula, 2016). Similar to Museus's call for attention to CECE, Rendón's validation theory is intended to foster the academic and interpersonal engagement that contributes to student success while acknowledging different perspectives given students' backgrounds. Rendón explains that students with marginalized identities often lack a sense of belonging in a campus environment. This lack of belonging hinders engagement since students do not identify as knowledge producers who are capable of success. Validation helps move students away from viewing themselves as imposters and toward seeing themselves as valued community contributors, explaining "for many low-income, first-generation students, external validation is initially needed to move students toward acknowledgement of their own internal self-capableness and potentiality" (Rendón & Muñoz, 2011 p. 17). Students need to feel that they are welcome and valued on a campus to maximally engage in

educational opportunities that foster success. For Rendón, validation is a prerequisite for learning and engagement, especially for first-generation college students.

Learning through Writing

Student Development theorists have demonstrated the importance of engagement in learning, whereas writing scholars such as Anson et al. (2016), McCurrie (2009), Powell (2009) and Conefrey (2016) have advocated for the ways that writing, specifically first-year writing and literacy instruction can foster increased academic engagement and student success. The following section outlines how my approaches to research are influenced by related scholarship in writing, literacy, and rhetoric and composition.

First-year writing theory, research and pedagogy has a rich history of describing, documenting, and supporting student learning through writing. Adler-Kassner and Wardle's 2016 edited anthology *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concept of Writing Studies* examine five core principles² of disciplinary knowledge attempting to define and explain epistemological foundations for apprehending and participating in writing scholarship. Specifically, three threshold concepts: Writing is a Cognitive activity, Writing is a Social and Rhetorical Activity, and Writing Enacts and Creates Identities and Ideologies, underlie my research decisions. Writing scholarship has examined learning through writing since the 1970's, theorizing cognitive models of writing attending to a

² The five threshold concepts of writing as presented by Adler-Kassner and Wardle are: Writing is a Social and Rhetorical Activity, Writing Speaks to Situations through Recognizable forms, Writing Enacts and Creates Identities and Ideologies, All Writers Have More to Learn, and Writing Is (Also Always) a Cognitive Activity

writer's knowledge-making processes (Emig, 1971; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Perl, 1979). These scholars helped elucidate that we write to think, explaining "the act of creating ideas, not finding them, is at the heart of significant writing" (Flower & Hayes, 1981 p. 22). This meaning-making component of writing helps engage students in knowledge creation, opening opportunities to in, Rendón's (2011) framing, "foster personal development and social adjustment" (p.12).

Writing is a social, situated act and when writers engage in with the world through writing, they also enact and create identities and ideologies (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2016; Bruffee, 1984). These threshold concepts of writing undergird my approach to research and rationale for studying the first-year writing classroom. Through considering purposes, audiences, contexts for reception, receiving feedback, and perhaps working with others, writers learn how writing is influenced by those around us. Hence, writing is as social activity. The choices writers make when engaging with others through language also reflect the writer's histories, contexts, and environments. As Geneva Smitherman (1998) explains "language is critical in talking about the education of a people because it represents a people's theory of reality: it explains, interprets, constructs and reproduces that reality" (p. 100). Writing can help support students in constructing their identities and building agency to shape their own learning and values. For example, Sommers and Saltz's 2004 study following the writing development of more than four hundred Harvard University students over four years of college reveals the importance of good writing instruction and writing experience to a student's overall academic success. Their research highlights the central role writing

plays in helping students transition to college, synthesizing that “freshmen who see themselves as novices are most capable of learning new skills; and students who see writing as something more than an assignment, who write about something that matters to them, are best able to sustain an interest in academic writing throughout their undergraduate careers” (Sommers & Saltz, 2004 p. 127). The students described writing as an essential element by which they get to self-author and be “invited into their education” (Sommers & Saltz, 2004 p. 127).

In academic contexts, writing remains a crucial means of learning and the dominant way information is created and circulated. Reflecting this reality, most postsecondary institutions require students to enroll in first-year writing courses. Since writing aptitude is a prerequisite for academic success in many disciplines, competency applying the writing approaches and techniques typically taught in first-year writing courses, can translate to success in other courses (Horning, 2007). Horning (2007) explains “writing and the critical reading that is one of its essential components underlies virtually all courses in college; success in college is tied to success in writing, taught well in small classes” (p. 13). Astin’s (1993) report on student success and satisfaction, *What Matters in College* echoes the importance of writing to student learning concluding that “the number of writing-skills courses taken has significant positive effects on all areas of self-reported growth except job skills, and on all areas of student satisfaction except Facilities” (p. 377). Astin’s findings underscore how writing courses can increase students’ levels of engagement in college and their own assessment of their development. Similarly, Anderson et al. (2016) conducted large-

scale national research of nearly 72,000 undergraduates with data from the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) and Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) to question if writing correlates with deep learning through writing-related HIPs. They conclude that writing instruction when done well, which the authors articulate as including iterative processes, meaning-making, and clear writing expectations does positively contribute to student learning success.

A further example of student learning through writing is detailed in Eodice, Geller, and Lerner's (2016) *The Meaningful Writing Project*, a multi-institutional empirical study where the authors sought to answer: "what kinds of writing experiences are undergraduates really having?" (p. 4). The study is based primarily on asking graduating undergraduate students to "think of a writing project from your undergraduate career up to this point that was meaningful for you" (p. 148) and then asking them to answer a series of follow-up questions about that writing. Thirty-six percent of all student survey responses indicated that personal connection facilitated meaningful writing. Writing assignments that allowed students to make personal connections to their background, experiences, histories, and goals increased student engagement and opportunities to enact agency. Eodice, Geller and Lerner (2016) concluded that to maximize meaningful writing, instructors should provide options for student agency, engagement (with instructors, peers, and content), and opportunities for transfer defined as learning that "connects to previous experiences and passions and to future aspirations and identities" (p. 108). These approaches to learning through writing align with validation theory because they illustrate how effective writing

instructors can help students critically examine their background, build their agency as knowers, and participate in shaping their futures.

As Powell (2009) explains, writing faculty are “especially well positioned to participate in conversations about retention” since writing courses are frequently one of the only universal undergraduate curricular requirements and are often designed help students negotiate their identities in and among the discourse practices of higher education. Additionally, first-year writing courses have small enrollments³ which allows for increased interaction among students and with their instructor, a foundational tenant of validation theory. Powell (2009) also acknowledges how writing faculty can help ensure a “focus on teaching and learning, rather than on simply keeping students in seats,” championing the role of genuine student learning rather than university economic gain (p. 669). Hence, the writing classroom can serve as a site of learning and student validation while striving for socially equitable education praxis.

Negotiating and Power Identity in Writing. Scholarship in composition and literacy studies has explored the academic and social demands of college writing. While all students must manage the discursive conventions of academic coursework while simultaneously developing and navigating aspects of their identities, students who find their home or primary discourses opposing those of academic discourse encounter increased challenges (Brandt, 1998; Gee, 1989; Rose, 1985; Villanueva, 1993). David Bartholomae’s (1986) “Inventing the University,” advocated that students need

³ The CCCC Position Statement for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing (2015) advocates for no more than 20 students enrolled in a first-year writing course, however exact class size is determined by individual institutions.

opportunities to write in contexts that help them both understand and join the “academic enterprise” even though new students can only “partially imagine” academic discourses (p. 2). Similarly, Mina Shaughnessy’s (1997) oft-cited *Errors & Expectations* shifted attitudes of error in writing instruction to move from punishing writers to explicitly teaching academic conventions. As a teacher of remedial writing at CUNY during their 1970 open admission policy, Shaughnessy taught students she described as “strangers in academia,” due to their past schooling, often non-white racial and ethnic backgrounds and proficiency in languages and dialects other than Standard Written English. Her work transformed conversations in the field, encouraging teachers to recognize student identities and realize that student error occurs partially because they are “beginners and must like all beginners, learn by making mistakes” as they negotiate their identities while learning academic discourses and demands (Shaughnessy, 1977, p. 5). Bird (2013) synthesizes the pedagogical extension of Bartholomae’s and Shaughnessy’s arguments in first-year writing as “if we teach our students how to integrate their academic community identification with their current identity memberships, they can develop their own academic writer identity” (p. 62).

The negotiation of identity in response to academic norms and goal of more equitable educational attainment can also be explored through Pierre Bourdieu’s (1986) theory of social reproduction, which explains systemic socioeconomic inequality highlighting the ways that education “creates, maintains, and reproduces inequality” (as cited in Patton et al. 2016, p. 250). Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction offers a dynamic model of structural inequality allowing researchers to observe and examine

social and educational advantage. Bourdieu elucidates how the educational system rewards students with privileged backgrounds who already possess valued habits and skills, while further disadvantaging those with marginalized and underrepresented identities, such as first-generation college students.

Specifically, Bourdieu's explanation of cultural capital as "cultural knowledge as a resource of power used by individuals and social groups to improve their positions in society," has been used in education research to elucidate socially acquired advantages that multigenerational, white, affluent students benefit from in educational and social environments (Joppke, 1986 p. 57). Bourdieu explains that, through their socialized upbringing, students whose identities more closely align with traditional hegemonic power structures possess more cultural capital, which affords them salient but often nebulous privileges. Cultural capital can be acquired through work over time but is mostly hidden or invisible to outsiders, meaning first-generation college students often have to work harder to both recognize and identify cultural practices that might help them navigate the academic milieu (Morris, 2020). Lack of cultural capital, in combination with other markers including family income level and minority status has been identified as a key contributor of high attrition rates and lower rates of retention (Choy, 2001). Writing center scholar Harry Denny (2010) explains:

For students whose cultural capital doesn't neighbor the mainstream, they encounter a learning situation fraught with complexity: Do they surrender their code for another alien one? Do they resist and face the material and symbolic

consequences of not fitting in? Do they negotiate some sort of middle ground?

How might they subvert all these confining possibilities? (p.23)

Richard Rodriguez's 1978 "The Achievement of Desire: Personal Reflections on Learning 'Basics'" is a quintessential example, as the author recounts how his immersion into academic spaces also created distance between him and his Hispanic family: "A primary reason for my success in the classroom was that I couldn't forget that schooling was changing me and separating me from the life I enjoyed before becoming a student" (p. 47). Denny's questions on writing's role in identity formation and Rodriguez's experiences explicate my epistemological approach and research decisions as I explored how first-year writing may validate students' own capacity for creating knowledge and if that validation influences their likelihood to stay engaged in college.

The National Council of Teachers of English's branch dedicated to teaching postsecondary English, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) has advocated for writing pedagogy to embrace student's multifaceted identities and ways of expression for decades. In 1974, the CCCC adopted Student's Rights to their Own Language, a position statement affirming that students should have the right to "their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style" in the writing classroom (CCCC, 2022). The statement has been updated since its inception, most recently in July 2020. "This Ain't Another Statement! This is a DEMAND for Linguistic Justice!" more directly addresses racism in response to the Black Lives Matter movement. Responding to the historical moment, Baker-Bell (2020) explains,

the way Black language is devalued in schools reflects how Black lives are devalued in

the world . . . [and] the anti-Black linguistic racism that is used to diminish Black Language and Black students in classrooms is not separate from the rampant and deliberate anti-Black racism and violence inflicted upon Black people in society” (pp. 2–3).

Although Baker-Bell’s scholarship focuses on race⁴, her assertion that language matters and explanation of the relationships between language and larger societal impact undergird my study’s epistemological approach. The relationships between identity, power and linguistic expression are foundational to my study as they help explain why writing can be influential in shaping students’ capacity to view themselves as knowledge creators with potential to succeed in academic environments and also as agents capable of co-creating a more equitable society.

Empirical Studies of Writing. Although student success and engagement have become buzzwords in higher education as approaches to addressing inequitable outcomes with researchers focused on quantifying engagement and linking it to success, less scholarship has explored student experiences of engagement, particularly in classroom settings. Specifically, little focus has been on understanding validation in the first-year writing classroom and how that validation may contribute to success. In the

⁴ Not all first-generation college students belong to racially minoritized groups; 46% of First-Generation students identify as white (RTI, 2019). However, students of color do exhibit higher rates of attrition than their white counter parts (Museus, Yi, and Saelua, 2017).

following section, I summarize related empirical studies of student writing and explain how my research can contribute to the field.

The following scholars have studied writing, learning, and success among college students, but not in the first-year writing classroom. McCurrie (2009) explored retention at a Summer Bridge program for basic writers entering the university calling for examination of retention efforts to ensure those initiatives consider faculty and student-centered definitions of success, not just administrative priorities. His case study of 134 students at Columbia College over two summers explored how varying definitions of student success influence programmatic and curricular decisions. McCurrie found that students felt most successful in the writing course when they had agency to “use their own language, select their own texts, and pursue their own interest” (pp. 44-24). McCurrie warns that critical questioning and collaboration is necessary to keep student learning rather than institutional economic gain or prestige as the main metric of student success and that writing teachers should pay attention to how administrators frame student success. Anson et al.’s 2016 study of almost 72,000 undergraduate students at 80 bachelor’s degree-granting institutions also examined the relationships between writing and student success. In collaboration with the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the researchers investigated the relationship between writing and gains in learning and personal development. Anson et. al correlated students’ participation in the three writing constructs (iterative writing processes, meaning-making, writing tasks and clear writing assignments) modeled after best practices in

writing instruction, with student responses to indicators of learning already measured in the NSSE survey. Their study demonstrated that writing instructors can significantly enhance student learning experiences and that “effective writing assignments may, according to students' perceptions, enhance personal and social development” (p. 10). While these studies show important directions for studying writing and student success, they do not focus specifically on first-generation college students or apply specifically to first-year writing courses.

Two recently published empirical studies have applied Rendón's validation theory to writing, though not first-year writing or first-generation college students. Perez, Acuña & Reason (2021) employed Rendón's validation theory to explore an autobiographical reading and writing course in a college transition program to learn more about first-year low-income students' initial college transitions. Their embedded case study, which had a sample of 53 students in two cohorts, highlights the potential of autobiographical writing to help validate low-income students' lived experiences, build community with peers and engage in critical, sustained self-reflection. Perez, Acuña & Reason's inquiry demonstrates how the writing classroom can enhance student confidence and sense of belonging and highlights the need to validate students' lived experiences to support student success. Studying a campus writing center, Azima's (2020) “Stereotypes or Validation: Lessons Learned from a Partnership between a Writing Center and a Summer Academic Program for Incoming Students of Color” adopts Rendón's validation theory and categories of academic and personal validation to explore the benefits and challenges in requiring campus writing center visits for

students of color. Azima pairs validation theory with Steele's (1995) concept of stereotype threat to illuminate how writing centers can affirm students' sense of academic and interpersonal belonging within their institutions, while being cognizant of the potential damage of simplifying students' complex identities via stereotyping. She concludes explaining that writing tutors can validate writers by signaling to a student that their social identity is valued and advocating for applying more directive tutoring techniques to mitigate gaps in race and class-based cultural capital. Although Azima's research site is a campus writing center, I argue that her framework can extend to the first-year writing classroom to further understand student experiences and adjust curricular and pedagogical approaches in response.

Writing scholars have examined student learning through writing and have recently applied Rendón's validation theory, but no scholarship exploring validation and success among first-generation college students in first-year writing exists. Kinizie and Kuh (2017) advocate that despite the growing body of theory and research on student success, higher education still needs more "know how" and tools for equitably actualizing and re-envisioning student success (p. 24). Therefore, my research can contribute to the field by defining, documenting and better understanding validation among first-generation college students in first-year writing and suggest possibilities for further facilitating student success. Since first-year writing curriculum engages students academically and socially, as well as their identities, and mimics the interventions of High-Impact Practices, which show gains in increased student learning, I argue a deeper qualitative analysis of first year-writing has great potential for examining first-

generation student success. When considered through the lens of Rendón's validation theory, I hope this research can help elucidate possible connections to how learning through writing can validate and engage first-generation college students.

Summary

This literature review demonstrates how conceptual frameworks used in previous research inform and guide this study. Additionally, it illustrates how past empirical studies have investigated barriers encountered by underserved students, like first-generation college students, and emphasizes the need for additional research. Finally, the literature review provides a theoretical lens of validation theory as a heuristic to better understand the research questions and potentiality of a first-year writing course to validate students.

Chapter Three: Methods

In this chapter, I describe how I conducted the study. After reintroducing the research questions, I discuss the research design, case, setting, sample, data sources and collection procedures, and approach to analysis. The goal of the study was to explore how first-generation college students may experience validation in a first-year writing course, English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric, and how those experiences influence their ability to see themselves as creators of knowledge, valuable members of the university learning community, and capable of success. Specifically, I explored the following research questions through a phenomenological case study design:

1. How, if at all, do first-generation students experience validation as creators of knowledge in a first-year writing course?
2. How, if at all, do first-generation students experience validation as valuable members of the university learning community in a first-year writing course?
3. What, if any, role does the first-year writing course play in first-generation students' ability to believe in themselves as capable of success in college?

Method

The case study approach provides framework for an intentional, holistic analysis exploring first-generation college students' experiences in English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric, a first-year writing course at Marquette University. English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric is part of the Marquette Core Curriculum (MCC), a series of required courses all student stake regardless of their chosen major. Since some students are able to bypass English 1001 from previous earned credits (i.e. AP exam scores) or participation in specific programs (i.e. University Honors program, separate English as a Second

Language courses) about 70% of incoming students take Foundations in Rhetoric during their first year on campus. Each section has a maximum enrollment of 19 students. Since incoming first-year students from all majors enroll in the course, it is conducive for analysis of a large population of students representing many different demographics and identities. As English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric is one of the few only universal undergraduate curricular requirements and is structured to help students negotiate their identities in and among the discourse practices of higher education, it serves as a pertinent site for a case study to explore first-generation college students' experiences of validation.

A case study is an exploration of a "bound system," or a case through in-depth data collection (Creswell, 1996, p.62). As a bounded case study, I collected data to better understand experiences of first-generation college students enrolled in English 1001 in the Fall of 2022 at Marquette University. Stake (1994) describes case study as a "medium to understand an issue or theory" (p. 237) and it is a popular method for educational and writing-related research (Grutsch McKinney, 2016; Yin, 2013). Research has repeatedly shown that first-generation college students experience college differently and face an array of barriers that discourage their engagement, retention, and degree completion (Bond, 2019; Conefrey, 2018). However, Rendón (1994) argues that validation theory is vital in helping students succeed. Through the case study approach, I examine the experiences of first-generation college students in English 1001 to understand how validation may influence their learning and success. Utilizing case

study design allowed me to explore how validation may occur in the first-year writing context while exerting minimal control over the events as the researcher (Yin, 2013).

For this inquiry, I used a social constructivist approach to explore how students describe and make meaning of their experience in the first-year writing course (Scholz & Tietje, 2002). Lincoln & Guba (1994) explain constructivist paradigmatic ontological realities as “apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible constructions, socially and experientially based...and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions” (p.110). Language does not exist in a vacuum; it is determined by human relationships, therefore those relationships and the communicative expectations of those relationships must also be considered before claiming to understand an individual’s identities and experiences in first-year writing. Using case study methodology reflects my goal to understand first-generation college students’ validation in a particular course (English 1001) at one institution (Marquette University) and how participants experienced this course.

Writing scholars such as Bransford (2000) advocate for situated learning, which encourages students to utilize the information they can access anywhere at any time, explaining “that knowledge should be situated within the context of specific tasks, because learning can be influenced in fundamental ways by the context in which it takes place” (p. 255). Similarly Flyvbjerg (2001), a leading voice in social science research, considers context and learning through the method of case study explaining that case studies can “produce precisely the type of context-dependent knowledge which makes

it possible to move from the lower to higher levels in the learning process” (p. 71).

Flyvbjerg’s context-dependent considerations connect to concepts of situated learning—that students’ experiences should be assessed with an understanding of the contexts in which they inhabit (Bransford, 2000). Further, the case study approach allows for discovery and interpretation of the context, and thus creates an opportunity to explore how context informs first-generation college students’ experiences in English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric at Marquette University (Merriam, 2009).

Case Study Setting and Context

My research site is Marquette University, a private, Catholic, non-profit, mid-sized Midwestern University, where nearly 30 percent of the student the first-year class (Class of 2026) identifies as first-generation. Overall, first-to-second year retention rate of first-generation students over the past four years has been 4-5% lower than the retention rate of continuing-generation students. From 2016-2021 the retention rate of first-generation students had been between 83-87% as compared to 88-91% for students who have one parent who obtained a bachelor’s degree (See Figures 1 and 2) (Marquette University OIRA Interactive Reports, 2023). Aligning with national trends that first-generation college students are more likely to identify as a student of color as compared to their multi-generational peers, at Marquette 56.48% of first-generation students also identify as students of color, while only 22.47% of multi-generation students identify as students of color (See Table 1) (OIRA, 2023; RTI, 2019).

Figure 1

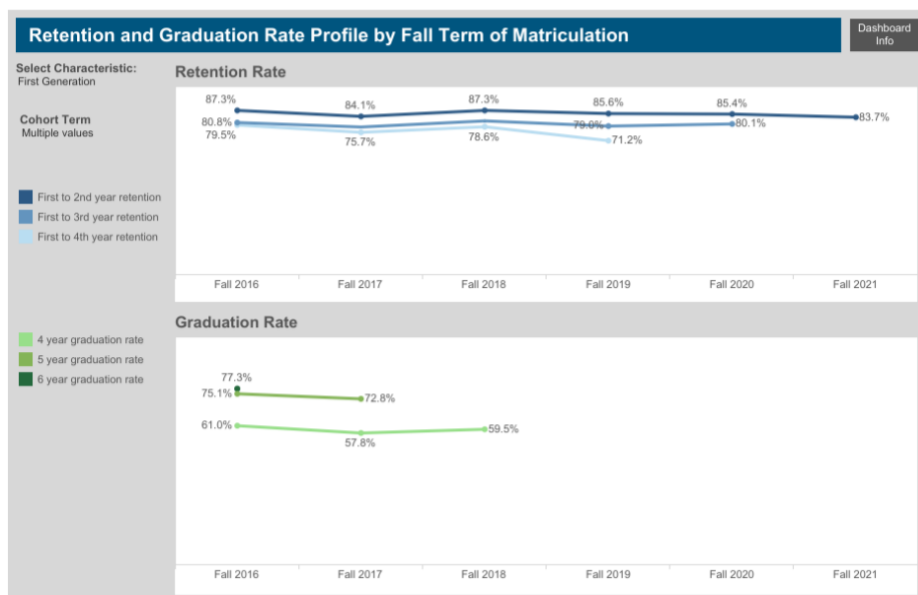
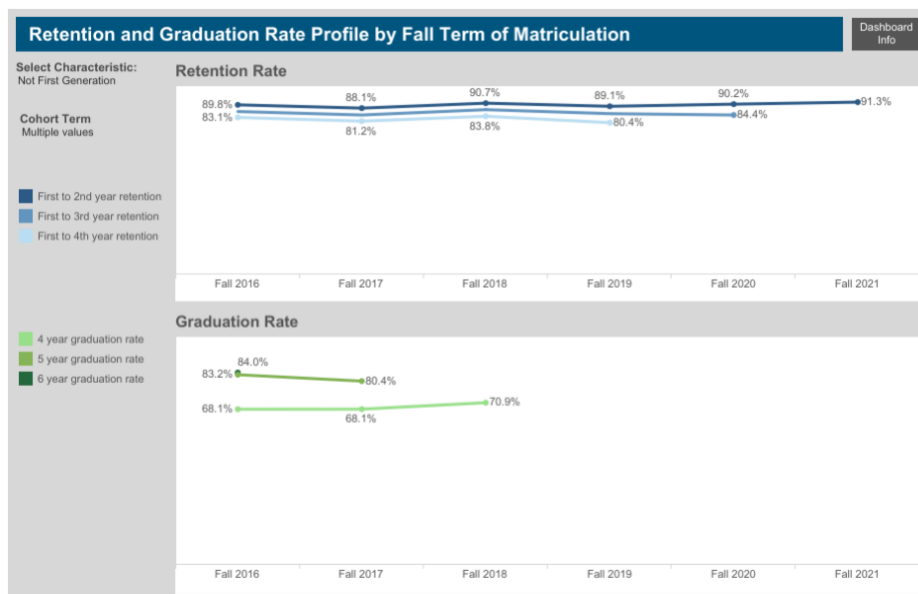
First-Generation College Students by Fall Term of Matriculation 2016-2021⁵

Figure 2

Multi-Generational College Students by Fall Term of Matriculation 2016-2021



⁵ Data available the interactive reports from Marquette's Office of Institutional Research and Assessment <https://www.marquette.edu/institutional-research-analysis/interactive-reports/rate-dash.php>.

Table 1
First-generation students of color

	First Generation		Non-First Generation		Total	
	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Count</i>
White Students	43.52%	198	77.53%	1180	69.70%	1378
Students of Color	56.48%	257	22.47%	342	30.30%	599
Total	100%	455	100%	1522	100%	1977

Given the gaps in retention and graduation, better understanding of the experiences of these students allows more insight into addressing such issues. Although initiatives such as HIPs, first-year seminars, and summer bridge programs have been studied in student success and development scholarship, the role that first-year writing may contribute aiding in retention has been relatively unexplored nationally and on Marquette University's campus.

The Case: Foundations in Rhetoric at Marquette University

As my data was collected in English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric, Marquette University's first-year writing course, in the following section, I provide further information on the course philosophy, curriculum, and context. I have taught English 1001 at Marquette as an instructor since 2014 and have been actively involved in helping shape the curriculum. Additionally, in the Fall of 2022, I was chosen to help lead

the course as Assistant Director of Foundations Instruction. In collaboration with Dr. Lillian Campbell, the Director of Foundations Instruction, I help to develop and revise curriculum, train and orient new instructors, support returning instructors, facilitate staff meetings, assist with administrative tasks and represent English 1001: Foundation in Rhetoric across the university and community.

In the wake of Summer 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, instructors revised our first-year writing course to focus on racial justice using a cultural rhetorics framework (Burrows, 2020). It was an undeniable success, receiving positive feedback from both instructors and students, and diversifying the make-up of English majors as students of color and first-generation students saw English as a space where they belonged. Realizing that our anti-racist curriculum helped students of color to negotiate their connections to local communities and their identity on our predominantly white campus, we knew we must carry that progress further.

Our initial revisions of the English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric curriculum were aimed at supporting incoming freshmen in having complex conversations about racial justice as they developed the essential skills they would need to be successful college writers. What began as a project to create a new unit addressing equity and inclusion using a framework of cultural rhetorics expanded into a larger rethinking of the course. Our goals in revising the curriculum were two-fold: (1) to support students' understanding of and comfort in talking about the cultural contexts surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement and the fight for racial justice and (2) to help all students, especially students of color, to feel like a part of the Marquette community and to see

English courses as places where they could challenge themselves and continue to grow as citizens with a “sense of purpose” who “promote stronger communities” and “advocate for a better tomorrow” (Marquette University Core Curriculum, 2022).

We revised the opening of the course, Unit 1, to introduce readings on Black culture in America as context to inform students’ rhetorical analysis of texts. First, we curated a set of readings that would help give students a way into these conversations that felt both accessible and challenging. These included articles from popular publications like “Why We’re Capitalizing Black” and “Are Job Candidates Still Being Penalized for Having ‘Ghetto’ Names?” As students began to critically consider the intersections between language and power, discussing how everything from street names to first names could trigger biases and exclusion, they also analyzed texts like news coverage, campus websites, and even campus spaces through the lens of cultural rhetorics. We incorporated existing campus projects, like the 2020 MU Cultural Audit conducted by the Committee on Equity and Inclusion and the Mauricio Ramirez mural project, to help students recognize these assignments as part of a larger university and community conversation.

However, altering a single unit of the course without reflecting on how the course as a whole is structured to support access for students of color and under-represented students is an ineffective and even harmful approach. Instead, we worked in collaboration with the Black Student Council on campus to consider the impact that previous writing curriculums had had on their Marquette experience and to revise our assignment sequence accordingly. This led to two key changes in our major

assignments. First, a shift from a research narrative to a research journal, in response to feedback that students often experienced writing classes as places where their dialects were silenced and they were asked to take on academic discourse uncritically. The research journal encourages students to respond to sources in a writing voice that feels comfortable and allows them to interrogate, speak back to, and collaborate. Second, we shifted from a final research paper to a creative project with a critical reflection, which similarly allows students flexibility in choosing a genre and an audience to share their findings that feels meaningful to them and to move beyond a singular academic audience in their writing.

The English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric Curriculum in the Fall of 2022 featured four separate units. All instructors are required to adopt the anti-racist cultural rhetorics framework for Unit 1 and assign three separate mini-analysis assignments. In the Fall of 2022, the mini analysis assignments focused on language and word use across context, campus spaces, and students' own identities. In Unit 2, all student work to write an academic synthesis essay utilizing texts curated by the instructor. Instructors have agency to choose their course theme for Unit 2. For example, instructors asked students to engage in reading and writing about topics such as: identity, literacy, school segregation, immigration, and drug policy and legislation. During the course's third Unit, classes work alongside an assigned university librarian to learn about academic research, particularly finding and evaluating sources. Students can choose their own research question and sources as they catalog their learning in a research journal. In Unit 4, students utilize their findings from their research journal to compose a creative

project with a critical reflection. Students are tasked with demonstrating their rhetorical knowledge by selecting an appropriate genre to convey their findings to a particular audience. Popular student project genres include: websites, brochures, infographics, videos, podcasts, and social media campaigns. Additionally, all instructors were asked to engage their students in sustained critical reflection throughout the semester, including: an initial reflection on the first day of class, a reflection at the end of Unit 1, about a month into the semester, and a final course reflection. Table 2 summarizes the main Unit assignments.

Table 2

English 1001 Main Unit Assignments

Unit	Main Assignment
1 – Cultural Rhetorical Analysis	Three mini-analysis essays; two short reflections
2 – Synthesis	Academic synthesis essay directly citing an engaging with instructor-selected texts.
3 – Research	On-going research journal documenting findings on a topic the student's choice.
4 – Creative Rhetorical Project	Creative project designed to share research from Unit 3 to a target audience in a genre and medium the student selects.

Knowing this curriculum would challenge instructors, the English Department's then chair, Dr. Leah Flack, created a retreat on antiracist teaching practices for the whole English department. The Black Student Council again joined us to share their experiences and to help us reflect on the role our courses have played in their experiences of silencing at Marquette. As instructors embraced this curriculum and brought it into our classrooms, the effects were truly transformative, helping many students to see the inherent power of the language practices they were born into and others to question the powerful discourses they were setting out to learn in college. As instructors moved into different themes and topics for the remainder of the course, students carried these lessons about communication and culture forward, often choosing topics later in the semester invested in equity and change.

Overall, the English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric curriculum has been impactful, in large part because of the committed instructors who work every day to bring it to life for our students with compassion and rigor. Since its implementation, our instructors have received exceptionally high teaching evaluations for the course and we have also found that students of color are majoring and minoring in English with greater frequency. University President Dr. Michael Lovell recognized the program revisions with a Difference Maker Award in Spring 2021. In part due to the revision's success, Dr. Campbell moved into the role of Director of Foundations Instruction in Fall 2021. In this role, she regularly updates the curriculum and supports instructors' professional development; for example, in the summer she collaborated with the Center for Teaching and Learning to focus a weekly reading and workshop group on "Assessment

for Equity.” These instructor-led conversations helped our Department to reflect on how our assessment practices can better support underrepresented students and culminated in revisions of materials. We recently shared this work with interested instructors at Marquette’s Writing Innovation Symposium and presented our model at the 2022 and 2023 national Conference for College Composition & Communication. As we look ahead to updating curriculum, we hope to continue to address inequities and create space where students can learn to listen with others, cultivate their own voices, and begin creating new realities through language (Smitherman, 1998). We seek to help our students, university and community work together to explore languages’ role in constructing a more equitable and racially just reality.

Data Sources and Collection Procedures

To explore my research questions considering how students describe and make meaning of their experience in the first-year writing course, I collected multiple sources of data to discern how first-generation college students experience validation in English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric at Marquette University. The data I collected to answer my research questions included: focal student interviews, student writing, classroom observations, instructor interviews, and course document analysis. I utilized multiple qualitative methods and prolonged engagement to help facilitate triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). In this section, I detail my data collection procedures and rationale.

Focal Student Recruitment and Selection. Since my research questions considered how students experienced validation, I sought to collect their experiences in their own words in both in verbal and written mediums. I recruited sixteen (n=16) first-generation

college students enrolled in English 1001 during the Fall 2022 semester to participate as focal students. Recruitment occurred through institutional connections with colleagues who facilitate the Emerging Scholars Program and Educational Opportunity Program. Both programs are designed to help support first-generation and low-income students succeed. Additionally, I recruited by visiting English 1001 classrooms. Only students who identified themselves as first-generation college students as indicated in the screening survey (Appendix G) were invited to participate as focal students. Recruitment and selection protocol for each is detailed below.

I had three criteria for selecting focal students: 1. They were enrolled in English 1001 in the Fall of 2022 and consented to participate in the study, 2. They identified as a first-generation college student, and 3. They were able to schedule and complete a semi-structured interview with me. I offered students \$25 upon completion of the interview.

Students who wanted to be considered for a focal interview and provided their email address in the Consent Form (Appendix D) were sent a questionnaire via email (Appendix G), administered via Qualtrics. I used the responses to recruit participants for semi-structured interviews. This questionnaire inquired about first-generation students and other demographic information that may influence a students' experiences and perceptions in English 1001. One hundred and one (n=101) students were sent the demographic screening. Thirty-five (n=35) completed the screening survey. Of the thirty-five who completed the survey, fourteen (n=14) identified as first-generation college students and were all invited to schedule an interview. Eight (n=8) followed up to

schedule and attended their interviews. I describe the three different recruitment sites below.

Emerging Scholars Program and Educational Opportunity Program Students. I

specifically collected data from students who participate in the Emerging Scholars Program (n=5). The Emerging Scholars Program (ESP) is an academic support program especially designed for incoming freshmen to build community and become acquainted with campus. This program is administered by the Office of Student Educational Services and enrolls approximately 25-30 students per year. Students enroll in one three-credit course in the summer (either English 1001 or Theology 1001) and two college-prep courses such as: Reading & Study Skills, Mathematics Skills, College Writing Skills and Preparation for College Chemistry. The students in the program also benefit from academic support and personalized advising throughout the year including additional assistance with course selection, major/career exploration and study skills. ESP students have access to tutors, participate in academic workshops and build community through ESP-sponsored social and service activities. Students self-select to participate in the program, but the program aims to serve students with underrepresented backgrounds at Marquette, hence has a higher concentration of first-generation students. I have taught in ESP since 2016, so have established connections with program staff and previous students aided in recruitment and participation.

I e-mailed the Emerging Scholars enrolled in English 1001 in the Fall of 2022 requesting their participation in the study. There were five students enrolled in English 1001 in the Fall 2022. Four of the five students identified as first-generation college

students and agreed to participate in interviews, so were selected as focal students. The fifth student was not yet eighteen years old, so was ineligible to participate per IRB regulations. Since the Emerging Scholars Program yielded too small of a sample size, I also recruited focal students from additional sections of English 1001.

Next, I directly emailed campus contacts in the University's Educational Opportunity Program, a federally funded TRiO program that enables low-income and first-generation students whose parents do not have a baccalaureate degree to enter and succeed in higher education. The colleague provided me with e-mail addresses of all her advisees enrolled in English 1001 during the Fall 2022 semester. I contacted those twenty-five (n=25) students via email and sent them the link to the Qualtrics screening survey. Five (n=5) students completed the survey and four (n=4) completed their scheduled interview.

English 1001 Classroom visit participant recruitment. To recruit 1001 students in classroom visits of English 1001, I first contacted their instructors. At monthly instructor check-in meetings in October of 2022, I explained the study and asked for instructors to complete consent forms (Appendix B). Instructors who completed the consent form consented to: distributing materials to their class, distributing a survey to students, and/or participating in an interview themselves. Eight (n=8) instructors who teach a total of 20 sections of Foundations in Rhetoric in the Fall 2022 semester had signed consent forms. Student enrollment in the 26 sections was 380 (n=380).

Once instructors agreed, my colleague and dissertation committee member, Dr. Lillian Campbell, and I visited English 1001 classes to explain the study and distribute

consent materials to students. A total of 20 sections were visited during November 7 – 18, 2022. Both Dr. Campbell and I visited four classrooms each. Tutors at Marquette University's Ott Memorial Writing Center also conducted classroom visits to recruit students. My committee member, Dr. Rebecca Nowacek, is the director of the Ott Memorial Writing Center and offered her tutors to help visit English 1001 classrooms. Per IRB regulations, all tutors are certified for Human Subjects Research via CITI. They were given a script to help describe the study's purpose and procedures (See Appendix C). The Ott tutors visited a total of twelve English 1001 sections.

Finally, I recruited one ($n=1$) student from my own section of English 1001 during the Fall of 2022 because she elected to research first-generation college students during the course. While I teach English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric regularly and am Assistant Director of Foundations Instruction, 15 of the 16 focal students who were selected to participate in the study were enrolled in sections taught by other instructors to reduce researcher bias. The one student who was enrolled in my class during the Fall of 2022 was selected because she chose to complete her research in English 1001 on first-generation college students and how to support their success. Since she was thinking about these topics both as a researcher and resident assistant in the dorms, she offered unique insight into my research questions. To reduce conflicts of interest, my colleague and committee member, Dr. Lillian Campbell, interviewed that student and provided me with a recording of their discussion. I did not listen to the interview, or analyze or code any of her writing assignments until after final course grades were submitted to the university.

Focal Student Demographics. Sixteen first-generation college students enrolled in English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric in the Fall of 2022 at Marquette University agreed to participate as focal students in the study. In addition to participating in a semi-structured individual interview (See Appendix E), each student agreed to provide written assignments from English 1001: a pre-Unit 1 reflection, a post-Unit 1 reflection and a final course reflection (See Appendix A). These assignments ask students to reflect on their own experiences, identities, and positionalities giving insight into how they demonstrate and describe their learning in English 1001. Table 3 provides each students' pseudonym, intended academic major(s)/minor(s) and demographic information collected on the screening survey and verbally confirmed during the interview.

*Table 3**Focal Student Participants and Demographics*

Pseudonym	Major(s)/Minor(s)	Sex	Race/Ethnicity
Anya	Social Welfare and Justice/Sociology	F	Black
Ariel	Digital Media/Studio Art	F	Black, Mixed
Brooke	Criminology/International Affairs	F	Hispanic/Latino
Butch	Journalism/Sports Media	M	Black
Christopher	Psychology	M	Black
Colin	Engineering	M	Hispanic/Latino
Henry	History/Secondary Education	M	White
Maya	Political Science/Spanish	F	White/ Middle Eastern
Melissa	Speech Pathology & Audiology	F	White
Raúl	Biomedical Sciences	M	Black
Sam	Marketing	M	Black
Sara	Civil Engineering	F	Hispanic/Latino
Sierra	Environmental Studies	F	Black
Taylor	Undecided	Non-binary	Black
Tessa	Political Science/Environmental Science	F	Hispanic/Latino
Victor	Mechanical Engineering	M	Hispanic/Latino

All 16 of the focal students identified as first-generation college students on their screening surveys and verbally confirmed during their interviews. Eight (n=8) identified as females; seven (n=7) as male, and one (n=1) as non-binary/third gender. Seven (n=7) students identified as Black or African American; five (n=5) identified as Hispanic or Latino; two (n=2) identified as White; one (n=1) identified as mixed race and one (n=1) identified as Middle Eastern. Six (n=6) of the students answered that they spoke a

language other than English at home (four Spanish, one Arabic and one French).

Table 4

Focal Student Gender Identity

Gender		Percentage
Female	8	50%
Male	7	43.75%
Non-binary /third gender	1	6.25%

Table 5

Focal Student Racial/Ethnic Identity

Race/Ethnicity		Percentage
Black/African American	7	45.75%
Hispanic/Latino	5	31.35%
White	2	12.5%
Mixed	1	6.25%
White/Middle Eastern	1	6.25%

*Table 6**Focal Student Home Language*

Language other than English spoken at home?		Percentage
Yes	6	37.5%
No	10	62.5%

I chose to collect this demographic information to ensure that my sample was varied in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and native language. I collected data with consideration of student identities. Astin (1999) reminds that it is important to account for how students' identities prior to coming to campus may influence their opportunities for engagement and success. In selecting focal students, I needed to consider their backgrounds because students experience college differently and unequally, based on their identities. First-generation college students are more likely to come from working-class, low-income backgrounds, identify as racial or ethnic minorities, live at home and/or have significant family and work responsibilities (Bond, 2019; Engle & Tinto, 2008). As a collective group, and because of the confluence of barriers many face, first-generation college students are less likely to graduate college, use campus support services, and possess "social capital [that] has been identified as a key factor contributing to higher attrition rates and lower rates or retention" (Bond, 2019 p.162; Conefrey, 2018). As previously mentioned, Marquette University's population of first-generation college students is its highest ever, with nearly 30% of first-year students identifying as first-generation. Historically, first-to-second year

retention rate of first-generation students over the past four years has been 4-5% lower than the retention rate of continuing-generation students. With a larger first-generation college student population, and gaps in retention between first-generation and multi-generation students, attention to student identities and approaches to welcoming them to the university should be more carefully considered. My selection of focal students reflects the need to address these gaps to foster more equitable opportunities for all students to succeed. Since Rendón's validation theory was developed to help marginalized or at-risk students, such as first-generation college, succeed, it is a fitting framework to better understand students' experiences with attention to their identities and context.

Semi-Structured interviews with Focal Students. Sixteen interviews with focal students were conducted in November and December of 2022. All interviews were audio recorded. Twelve (n=12) interviews took place in-person in my faculty office and were recorded using Otter.ai software. Three (n=3) were conducted and recorded virtually using Microsoft Teams. One (n=1) was conducted and recorded using Microsoft Teams by my colleague and committee member Dr. Lillian Campbell. See Appendix E for interview protocol. Additionally, for the interviews:

- I compiled Interview Field Notes. I took brief field notes during the interviews to capture initial responses and my own reflections. Merriam (2009) stated that field notes are an important tool to collect researcher's

immediate thoughts and observations, as opposed to relying purely on recorded sessions.

- During the interviews, I asked students if they had a preferred pseudonym, and honored their requests. For students who did not offer a suggestion, I assigned a pseudonym to each student.
- I transcribed the interviews utilizing the services provided in Otter.ai and Microsoft Teams to aid in transcription. Within one month of the scheduled interviews I listened to and corrected the transcriptions for errors in accuracy (i.e. Marquette transcribed as market).

Written Assignments in English 1001. To learn more about students' learning and experiences in their own words, I utilized a data set of writing collected from Foundations in Rhetoric in the Fall semester of 2022, including a pre- and post writing assignment and an end-of-semester final course reflection essay (Appendix A). The pre-writing assignment occurred on the first day of classes. The second assignment occurred at the end of the first Unit, about four-weeks into the semester. The final reflection essay occurred at the end of the semester. Researchers (myself, Dr. Lilly Campbell and the Writing Center tutors) distributed consent forms in class to include select class writing assignments in the study anonymously. Researchers briefly explained the study during a regularly scheduled class session and distributed the consent forms (Appendix C). Students who participated in interviews also consented to sharing their writing assignments.

At the end of the semester, I collected the focal students' writing assignments via the university learning management system D2L. As Assistant Director of Foundations Instruction, I have access to the instructors' specific sections' D2L sites, which allowed me to download student writing assignments. All instructors were notified that I would download these assignments via email and were given the option to opt out.

Classroom Observations. I observed selected sections of English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric classes to learn more about how students experience the classroom components of English 1001. I attended regularly scheduled class sessions and took field notes observing: instructor pedagogy, classroom context and environment, and students' behaviors. I observed seven different sections of English 1001 taught by six different instructors in November of 2022. I selected sections based on instructor consent and focal student enrollment. When selecting classrooms to observe, I prioritized sections in which a focal student was enrolled. See Appendix H for detailed protocol.

Semi-Structured Interviews with Instructors. I conducted semi-structured interviews with four instructors to learn more about how instructors approach the curriculum and make pedagogical decisions to facilitate student learning. See Appendix F for Interview Protocol. Instructors were compensated \$25.00 for their participation. As with the student interviews, I took field notes, asked instructors for preferred pseudonyms, and recorded and transcribed the interviews using Otter.ai software.

English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric Artifacts. I collected and analyzed artifacts including syllabi, course readings, assignments, Unit calendars, in-class activities and took field notes during orientation and staff meetings. This data helped frame the course objectives, learning outcomes, curriculum and instructor pedagogical strategies to better contextualize the data in relation to validation theory. It also aided with triangulation and validity as I learned more about the course structure and instructor pedagogical decisions.

Data Management

As my case study takes place exclusively at Marquette University, I complied with all Review Board (IRB) permissions, procedures, and policies. To protect student identity, each focal student was invited to select a pseudonym. I assigned pseudonyms to students who did not suggest one. Once the participant had a pseudonym, their data was coded to that name, and their real name will was removed. Codes are used whenever possible to preserve anonymity with identifying information. Only identifying information that is relevant to the research questions will be preserved (e.g. gender, race). I used only pseudonyms and codes on interview transcripts and stored interview recordings and transcripts separately. I kept a reference document linking pseudonyms with identifying information in a separate, secure location.

Data Analysis

Due to the significant amount of qualitative data I collected, I developed a multi-step approach to review, understand, and organize my data. I collected data in the forms of student interviews, student writing, classroom observations, instructor

interviews, and document analysis. Since my research questions explored student perceptions of validation in English 1001, I focused my data analysis on the students' own words—both verbal in the interviews and written in their English 1001 assignments. I used the classroom observations, instructor interviews and document analysis data to triangulate and validate the student-generated data.

Accordingly, I developed a coding process to analyze both the student interview transcripts and writing assignments. My coding process was influenced by validation theory, particularly Rendón's categories of academic and personal validation which influence how I interpret the data. Rendón identifies two types of validation: academic and interpersonal. Academic validation occurs when university agents, like their Foundation in Rhetoric instructors, take action to help students trust their capacity as creators of knowledge. Academically validating actions include: curriculum that reflects students' background, opportunities to witness themselves in what they are learning, and recognize and build on student strengths. Interpersonal validation occurs when students' personal development and social adjustment is prioritized to signal that they are valued members of the university community. In the classroom, instructors who see the students as whole people and connect with them on a personal level, help students foster interpersonal validation (Rendón & Muñoz, 2011). My research questions and study were designed to investigate both academic and interpersonal validation, thus these distinctions influenced my data coding and analysis. Specifically, Rendón & Muñoz outline six elements of validation theory that influence how I interpret the data (2011 pp. 16-18):

1. Institutional agents initiate contact
2. Students feel capable of learning
3. Validation is a prerequisite for student development
4. Validation can occur in and outside of class
5. Validation is an ongoing developmental process
6. Validation is most critical when early in college experience

Open Coding. The first step of coding was an initial reading of all collected student writing. Then, I listened to all the recorded student interviews. When listening to the interviews, I checked for transcription fidelity and corrected any errors in the transcription (i.e. market to Marquette). I analyzed the data using initial coding methodology, described by Saldaña (2013), initial coding “breaks down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examines them, and compares them for similarities and differences” (p. 265). Glaser (1978) recommends initial coding as a beginning point to help identify analytic leads and “to see the direction in which to take the study” (p. 56). I reviewed each interview and piece of student writing line-by-line, for words or phrases that “stood out as significant,” to understand what patterns emerged (Saldaña, 2013, p. 101). I began identifying these significant words or phrases in a hand-written notebook, then transferred the notes to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to help document and record patterns. Reoccurring concepts were noted to highlight themes in student experiences and their prevalence. While this initial coding was provisional and revised with further analysis, it helped me begin to conceptualize moments of validation and invalidation in the data.

A second iteration of initial coding included another review of all student interview transcripts and writing through the lens of descriptive coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2013). Saldaña (2013), defines descriptive coding as “assign[ing] labels to data to summarize in a word or short phrase—most often a noun—the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (p. 262). The descriptive coding analysis allowed to the opportunity to further identify patterns across student responses and determine salient experiences. While I frame the study and approached analysis with validation theory in mind, in first line coding, I was open to what the data would tell me and which categories might emerge outside of the framework (Chamraz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). After the initial open coding process—employing both initial and descriptive coding—I was able to crate categories that informed my codebook.

Second Line Coding. My second level of coding used a focused coding approach of developing categorizes of coded data based on thematic or conceptual similarities (Charmaz, 2006; Saldaña, 2013). Second line codes are salient categories pertaining to thematic grouping of responses occurring across participants experiences and perspectives (Saldaña, 2013). Borrowing from Rendón’s categories of and definitions of academic and interpersonal validation, I developed salient categories from reoccurring themes in all first line codes. From this iteration of coding, I was able to create a codebook with definitions and examples of each code. For example, I identified a category called First-Generation pressure, defined as moments where students described pressure, overwhelming feelings, and family members’ expectations. Examples of this code included students remarking “I feel like it's been a lot of pressure

to succeed because no one's done this before in my family. So like, I'm the first to do it. It's just a little stressful. Because I feel like everyone's looking at me" and "I'm seen as an idol." Another example of a code was Positive Connections to Peers, defined as students mentioning positive connections to peers and other students either in or out of class and learning from/with peers. Two examples of this code include students expressing: "The guy who sits next to me helped me start my paper and explain how I can connect myself to the text more" and "when I showed them my ideas they said they couldn't wait to see my project come to life." I then re-read the student writing and interview transcripts for instances of each code and recorded the tallies in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

Next, with a goal of strategically reassembling the data that was "split" or "fractured" during the first- and second-line coding processes, I turned to axial coding to consider major categorical typology through the heuristic of Rendón's validation theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 124). Axial coding describes categories and dimensions of data while exploring how categories and subcategories relate to each other (Saldaña, 2013 p. 218). I used Mural, a data visualization tool, to facilitate an affinity analysis diagram to synthesize all the codes defined in the codebook in relation to Rendón's categories of academic and personal validation, and to depict the relationships between categories (Charmaz, 2006; Han, 2006). I sorted and diagramed the fifteen codes from the codebook into four categories developed from Rendón's validation theory: Academic Validation, Academic Invalidation, Interpersonal Validation, and Interpersonal Invalidation. After sorting all fifteen codes to these four categories, I was able to tally

instances of each code and achieve saturation, as defined by Strauss and Corbin (1998) “when no new information seems to emerge during coding, that is when no new properties, dimension, conditions, actions/interactions, or consequences are seen in the data” (p. 136).

In summary, I used a multi-step approach to analyze my data utilizing qualitative coding methods of initial, descriptive, focused and axial coding (Saldaña, 2013). The initial coding allowed me to conceptualize moments of validation or invalidation in English 1001 and descriptive coding helped me define and describe codes. In the focused coding analysis phase, I was able to develop salient categories of validation and invalidation and revise my first-line codes into a comprehensive codebook. Finally, the process of axial coding allowed me to view the data I collected through the heuristic of Rendón’s validation theory, which serves as the theoretical framework for my study.

Trustworthiness

I used multiple strategies to achieve trustworthiness. The credibility of my data was established through prolonged engagement with both English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric and my research site, Marquette University, where I’ve been employed as an instructor since 2014 and now serve as Assistant Director of Foundations Instruction (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, the credibility of my work was enhanced by the use of multiple forms of data to deepen my understanding including: student writing, student interviews, classroom observations, instructor interviews, and document analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1999).

Triangulation. I also utilized triangulation from multiple data sources and investigators to increase validity in the data. Triangulation reduces potential misinterpretation by reviewing redundancy of data to explore common themes across multiple data (Stake, 1994). In collaboration with the Director of Foundations Instruction, Dr. Lillian Campbell, who is on my dissertation committee, we interpreted my data by inviting multiple perspectives from fellow instructors to serve as informant checks. Informant checks, as described by Grutsch McKinney (2016) involve researchers talking “through their interpretations with participants or provide participants with a draft of their research report and ask participants to give feedback” (p. 132). During a regularly scheduled meeting of English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric instructors on March 31, 2023, I shared my codebook with examples and emerging themes. Instructors reviewed these documents, asked clarifying questions, and offered further insight into how they aim to support first-generation college students in the classroom. For example, one instructor recalled her experiences as a first-generation college student which inform her choices to explicitly discuss academic conventions such as office hours, utilizing campus support systems, and asking for help with her students. This discussion with instructors helped confirm the accuracy of my findings and ensure that my findings are supported by the data I collected.

Positionality. As a scholar using constructivist methods, it is essential to articulate how my experiences influence how I understand the data. As an English instructor at Marquette University since 2014, and Assistant Director of Foundations in Rhetoric, I am passionate about my job and students. I believe in and work to foster opportunities for

students to create their own pathways to success through deeper understanding of language. I aim to validate my students' backgrounds, perspectives, and intellectual contributions in the classroom. I am aware that my teaching philosophy, pedagogy, and experiences result in my approaching the study with a lens that may influence data interpretation and analysis.

As my study focuses specifically on the experiences of first-generation college students, my overlapping academic background as an undergraduate student underscores both my interest in and approach to my research. I am the first woman in my family to complete a baccalaureate degree. I also emigrated to the United States during my second year of high school, which heightened my awareness to the often-discrete social norms required to navigate and succeed in American higher education. Both factors influenced my experiences as an undergraduate student and inform my teaching and research.

Given that I am an instructor of and Assistant Director of Foundations Instruction, I have taken measures to avoid potential conflicts of interest by making it clear that participation in the study is voluntary. Students and instructors may have declined to participate without penalty. If a student or instructor decided to participate, they were informed they could withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. Participants' decisions did not affect their academic standing at or continuing employment at Marquette University. If a review of this study takes place by government or university staff, I will protect participant privacy and the study records will not be used to put participants at legal risk of harm.

Limitations

Although my study provides in-depth understanding of first-generation college students' experiences of validation in a first-year writing course, given my case study design at one site during one semester, transferability of my study's results may be limited (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, I did not observe all English 1001 sections throughout the semester. Rather, I only visited selected sections to add insights from the student writing and interviews and to triangulate data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I also acknowledge that despite my multiple recruitment efforts, it is likely that my participant selection methods favored students who exhibited higher levels of engagement in English 1001. Students who were showing behaviors of disengagement such as not attending classes, not regularly checking their university e-mails, or ignoring requests to respond to the Qualtrics survey would likely not have participated. Therefore, I acknowledge a degree of participation selection bias in that students who were engaged in the course were more likely to participate and also be successful in the course, which shapes my data collection and analysis. For future studies, a larger sample may be needed to mitigate this limitation.

Summary

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological case study design to explore the experiences of first-generation college students in English 1001 to understand how validation may influence their learning and success. Sixteen first-generation college students enrolled in English 1001 at Marquette University in the Fall of 2022

participated in the study by agreeing to share course writing assignments and experiences in a semi-structured interview. In addition to the student interviews and writing, I also collected data through classroom observations, instructor interviews and review of English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric artifacts. Data analysis included multi-level coding processes including initial, descriptive, focused and axial coding to determine relevant themes to further illuminate research questions.

Chapter Four: Findings

This qualitative phenomenological case study seeks to better understand how first-generation college students experience validation in a first-year writing course and how that validation may influence their success. Laura Rendón's (1994) validation theory recognizes that most colleges' environments were not designed with experiences of marginalized students (such as first-generation, low-income, and/or students with minoritized identities) and their success in mind, hence, these students experience more barriers than their white, middle-class peers whose parents attended college. The research aimed to better understand how a first-year writing course, English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric at Marquette University, may validate first-generation college students, helping them to view themselves as creators of knowledge, valuable members of the university community, and capable of success. Specifically, the study asks:

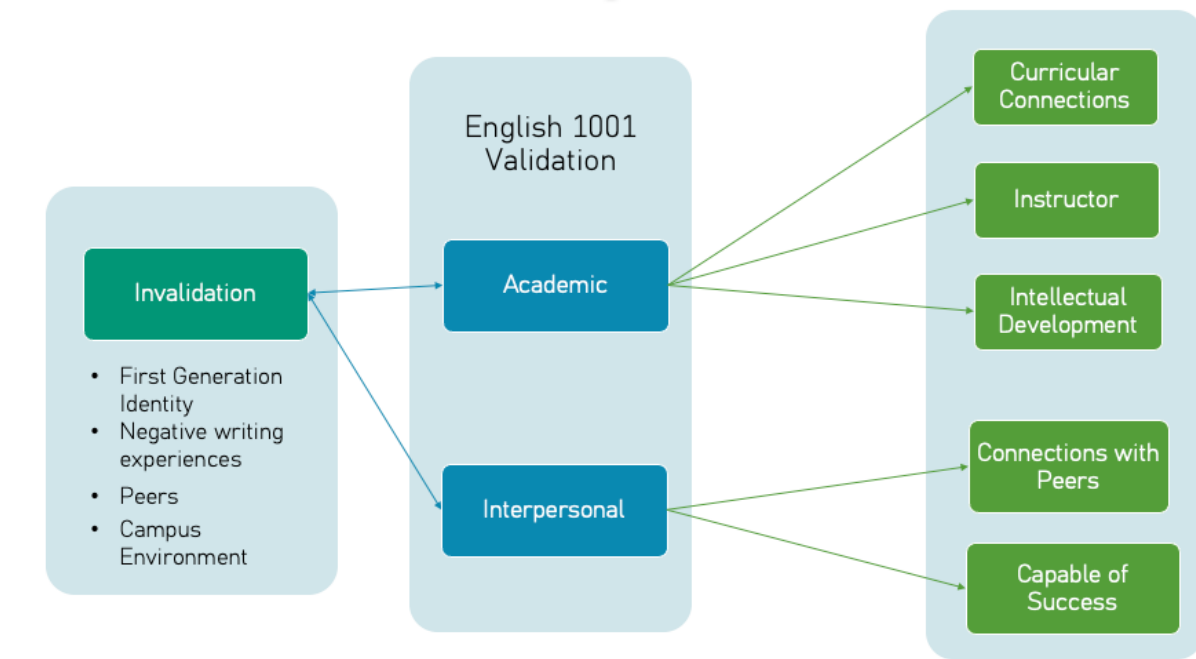
1. How, if at all, do first-generation students experience validation as creators of knowledge in a first-year writing course?
2. How, if at all, do first-generation students experience validation as valuable members of the university learning community in a first-year writing course?
3. What, if any, role does the first-year writing course play in first-generation students' ability to believe in themselves as capable of success in college?

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings of the study; I analyze the data I collected and discussed in the previous chapter and use the analysis to elucidate validation in the first-year writing classroom to answer my research questions. Through

the lens of Rendón's validation theory, this chapter synthesizes the data and findings to illuminate how English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric may validate first-generation college students. The chapter is organized by first summarizing the overall findings and then narrating the five predominant themes and related subthemes that were identified based on the research questions, theoretical framework, and data analysis.

Figure 3 helps illustrate the overall findings, detailing that some first-generation college students begin their college careers feeling invalidated by their identities, previous negative experiences of writing, interactions with their peers, and campus environment. However, English 1001 is overwhelmingly a site where students do feel both Academic and Interpersonal Validation. The data analysis resulted in five subthemes: curricular connections, positive feedback from the instructor, intellectual development, connections with peers, and belief that they are capable of success. According to Rendón (1994), providing and fostering such validation can reinforce students' own ability to believe in themselves as capable of success in college.

Figure 3

Validation in English 1001

Although students do also experience invalidation in English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric, I categorized 83.55% of the coded data responses as validating. Hence, the model in Figure 3 depicts how English 1001 can help externally validate students so they can build their own internal confidence in their abilities to succeed. With the data supporting English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric as a site of both academic and interpersonal validation, the following section details student descriptions of validation as well invalidation in the data to better understand how students experience the course and how validation in the first-year writing course may

contribute to overall success in college. Those experiences were categorized into five thematic findings detailed below:

1. *Academic Validation.* The first theme describes how students experience academic validation in the English 1001 classroom and through the course curriculum. This theme identifies how students report moments of validation as creators of knowledge, specifically through the three subthemes of making personal connections to the curriculum and campus community, receiving validation from the instructor, and articulating how the course helps contribute to their intellectual development.
2. *Academic Invalidation.* This theme is organized around the ways students feel academically invalidated, which negatively contributes their ability to see themselves as creators of knowledge. These invalidating experiences coalesce around the two subthemes of fears about academic writing expectations and negative perceptions of writing they had built prior to college.
3. *Interpersonal Validation.* The third theme details how students experienced validation of interpersonal nature that aided in their personal and social adjustments to the university. Specifically, two subthemes emerged: students were able to make meaningful in-class connections with their peers and express their belief in their ability to succeed.

4. *Interpersonal Invalidation*. Students did report themes of feeling invalidated at the university. Specifically, they experienced interpersonal invalidation outside of the English 1001 course through the sub themes fears about social adjustments and pressures, and through negative interactions with their peers and the campus environment.

5. *First-Generation College Student Identity*. The final theme offers insight into the students' perceptions of and experiences as first-generation college students. The data reveals that while students did describe disadvantages due to their perceived lack of knowledge about college culture and expectations, they were also motivated to succeed by this aspect of their identity and articulated how it helped them build independence. Two subthemes of lack of knowledge and pressure and motivation to succeed emerged.

Summary of Findings

Through the multi-step coding process explained in Chapter 3, I identified 535 codes across the student interviews and writing and then categorized the 535 units of analysis into fifteen separate categories that emerged from data analysis. I utilized affinity analysis diagramming to synthesize the fifteen codes using Rendón's validation theory as a heuristic to determine the four categories of: Academic Validation, Academic Invalidation, Interpersonal Validation and Interpersonal Invalidation as depicted in Table 7 (Han, 2006). During the coding process, a fifth category providing

insight into how students described and experienced their first-generation college student identity also emerged. (See Table 7).

Table 7

Summary of Findings – Code Categories

	Academic	Interpersonal	Total
Validation	Personal Connections to curriculum and Campus Instructor Positive feedback on writing Intellectual Development	Connections to Peers Capable of success Independence as FGCS*	
<i>Interviews</i>	100	81	181
<i>Writing</i>	165	101	266
<i>Total</i>	265	182	447
	Academic	Interpersonal	
Invalidation	Negative feedback on writing Academic Fears	FGCS Pressure FGCS Lack of Knowledge Social Fears Negative Peer Interactions Financial Constraints	
<i>Interviews</i>	7	46	53
<i>Writing</i>	20	15	35
<i>Total</i>	27	61	88

*FGFS is an abbreviation for First-Generation College Student

The results in Table 8 show that students do overwhelmingly experience validation with 447 of the 535, or 83.55% codes categorized as either Academic or Interpersonal Validation and only 88, or 16.45% as invalidating experiences.

Table 8

Total Validating and Invalidating Codes

	Interviews	Writing	Total	Percentage
Validating	181	266	447	83.55%
Invalidating	53	35	88	16.45%

Experiences that contributed to validation occurred consistently in both the student writing and interviews, with 43.73% of the instances coming from interviews and 56.26% from the student writing assignments as detailed in Table 9.

Table 9

Distribution of Codes between Interviews and Writing

	Total	Percentage
Interviews	234	43.74%
Writing	301	56.26%

With the data supporting English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric as a site of both academic and interpersonal validation, the following section synthesizes the study's findings organized into the study findings' five main themes: Academic Validation, Academic Invalidation, Interpersonal Validation, Interpersonal Invalidation, and First-Generation College Student Identity.

Academic Validation. This category can be described by Rendón's definition of academic validation as occurring when university agents take action to assist students to "trust their innate capacity to learn and to acquire confidence in being a college student" (Rendón, 1994, p. 40) and the first research question: How, if at all, do first-generation students experience validation as creators of knowledge in a first-year writing course Academic validation occurs in the classroom by instructors taking actions such as designing curriculum that reflects students' background and allowing them to witness themselves in what they are learning.

Applying Rendón's definition and framing, five specific codes that represented Academic validation: personal connections to curriculum, connections to campus, references to the English 1001 instructor, positive feedback on writing and intellectual contributions emerged. These five coding categories accounted for 100 or 18.36% of the total 535 codes, which I analyzed into the three sub-themes that best described how students experienced academic validation in English 1001 (See Table 7). These subthemes were: Curricular Connections, Instructor Validation, and Intellectual Development.

Curricular Connections. In both their writing and in interviews, students were able to explain the connections they made between the English 1001 curriculum, their personal lives and campus environment. Through the frame of cultural rhetorics, the English 1001 Unit 1 curriculum begins with asking students to question and reflect on their own identities, positionalities, and assumptions. In the course's first Unit, all instructors follow a standardized assignment sequence including initial reflection, three mini-analysis assignments, and a culminating Unit reflection. The three mini-analysis assignments are short 1–2 page essays designed to help students build observational, analytic, rhetorical and writing skills they'll continue to practice throughout the semester. These assignments are intended to be responsive to the fact that students in English 1001 are new to both Marquette University and expectations of academic writing in higher education. In the Fall of 2022 the three standardized mini-analysis assignments asked students to 1) consider a single word and its definition and impact across multiple communities and contexts 2) analyze a space on campus (i.e. campus coffee shop, Engineering academic building, Student Union) and discuss how the spatial design communicated values and established insiders and outsiders and 3) reflect on specialized language in a group they belong to explore how language influenced their relationships. The mini-analysis assignments serve multiple pedagogical functions in that they allow students to ease into college writing in a less-intimidating, low-stakes writing assignments that acknowledge their identities and experiences before arriving at college, are sensitive to the environmental transition they are experiencing as new students and allow for their instructors to give weekly feedback on their writing during

the first four weeks of the semester. Most instructors grade each Mini-Analysis assignment out of 50 points of the 1000 possible in the entire course giving students opportunity to experiment with new writing techniques and genres with less fear of how their approaches might influence their overall course grade.

Additionally, the Unit 1 cultural rhetoric framework asks students to critically consider the intersections between language and power, discussing how everyday discourse practices from street names to first names could trigger biases and exclusion. Instructors continued this inquiry by asking students to analyze multiple genres of texts like news coverage, fashion, campus websites, and even campus spaces through the lens of cultural rhetorics. Instructors connected assignments to existing campus projects, like readings on the 2020 MU Cultural Audit conducted by the Committee on Equity and Inclusion and studying the Mauricio Ramirez “Our Roots Say That We’re Sisters” mural project to help students better understand and involve themselves in university and community conversations. The Unit 1 curriculum design reflects tenants of Rendón’s academic validation in that it honors students’ existing knowledge, allows for intellectual exchange between students and their teachers, and provides opportunity for “reflection, multi-perspectives and imperfection” (Rendón, 1994 pp. 48-9).

Students mentioned personal connections to the anti-racist cultural rhetorics framing of Unit 1, describing that they had positive experiences with the curriculum, for instance, Sam explained:

I like the curriculum of our English class where we're focusing on identities, like how people identify in different communities, and how to be more inclusive....or just being able to recognize other people's identities and stereotypes that may come along with it, or even ignoring stereotypes, cause stereotypes do misguide and lead us blind. I'm just learning a lot.

Like Sam, Brooke's experiences in English 1001 allowed her to reflect more on her own identities and interactions with other people. She remarked that beginning college was a major transition in her life and that she was in the process of determining her academic, personal, and career goals. Thinking about the impact of language and how it can shape relationships helped her reflect on herself as she considered her roles in the university community, she explained:

Taking the course definitely impacted how I personally view myself within groups ... because I am trying to still figure out where I fit with my friends and certain groups and just trying to figure college out at the same time.

In reflecting on the second mini-analysis asking students to rhetorically analyze a campus space, students expressed how it helped them become more aware of their surroundings, think and write in new ways, and about their responsibilities as members of the university community. They saw how what they were studying in the course had implications for their lives outside of the classroom. Maya was opened to new genres, writing techniques and approaches to analysis. As she explained:

They [the assignments] weren't that traditional like, limited essays and they really made us think and we had to learn to write in different ways that I like didn't really use before. So for the space one [Mini Analysis #2] I had to use a lot of like, scenery and descriptive words, which I'm not used to. So I enjoyed it. It was a bit challenging.

When students could make connections between the curriculum and their personal lives and campus contexts, they exhibited that their intellectual contributions were welcomed and saw value in the knowledge they were building with their classmates. The Unit 1's antiracist cultural rhetorics orientation helped instructors explicitly address language hierarchies and assumptions, helping students feel that their language and background was valued at the university. As one instructor explained during his interview:

I think [students] appreciate hearing that perspective that their English classes care about the way that they communicate, the ways that their families communicate, and I enjoy not necessarily feeling like what my job is in the classroom is to instruct them or discipline them into having a voice that is somehow "collegiate."

Within the framework of validation theory, students need to feel validated in their identity as college students to reach their academic potential. Each of these student excerpts provide insight into how students experience academic validation through connections to the curriculum and campus as creators of knowledge and begin to "trust

their innate capacity to learn and to acquire confidence in being a college student.”
(Rendón, 1994, p. 40).

Instructor Validation. In Rendón’s initial 1994 research that led to the development of validation theory, she discovered how critical validation from caring adults was to a student’s success. In English 1001, students described their instructors as positive and supportive through comments such as: “I really like my professor,” “she’s really nice and patient,” “I’m glad I got her as my teacher,” and “[Instructor name] encourages me to write and she said I am a good writer and stuff like that and she recommended me to major and minor or minor in English. That motivates me to write.” Similarly, Sam described encouragement from instructors, “I love my teachers. My teachers are so nice. They always make sure I’m doing good. And they always helped me out and one of my teachers actually helped me get an internship right now.” The positive relationships and feedback instructors cultivated helped students’ gain internal confidence in their academic ability. For example, Christopher described that while his instructor’s academic vocabulary initially intimidated him, the instructor’s extra effort in helping him understand the specialized terminology and assignment expectations was greatly appreciated and support Rendón’s recommendation that “[v]alidating actions should be “authentic, caring, and nonpatronizing” (1994, p. 18):

He used to, like use big words and I didn't really understand what he was saying.
So almost every other class I used to e-mail him when the class was over and
asked him about those words and then he'd explain them and help with what I'm

supposed to be doing when I really didn't get it. He really took out time to do that and he was an amazing teacher.

When asked to describe the feedback they got on their writing from their instructors, students also experienced validation, noting that they found instructor feedback to be positive, affirming and less negative than they had experienced in high school. They described that instructors praised them for and offered helpful suggestions for achieving course learning outcomes, including: narrowing a research question, developing audience awareness, dividing and arranging paragraphs, developing analytical paragraphs and minor grammatical mistakes. Maya explained “I only got like positive feedback. Not negative, but like constructive feedback so I could improve things next time.” The mini-analysis assignment structure of Unit 1 allows for instructors to offer feedback on writing, which the sixteen focal students experienced as a validation of their writing skills and college readiness.

During classroom observations, I documented similar moments of validation from the instructors. Instructors used students’ first names when they entered the classroom, contributed to class discussions, or asked questions. Taking the time and effort to learn and use students’ names helps provide individual attention and build classroom community. All instructors used positive affirmations to encourage student response and co-creation of knowledge such as: “this is a really good question,” and “you can build on these,” “you’ve learned a lot,” “I’m very impressed with everyone’s work” and “anything I can do to support your work?” Noting that students tended to “do a lot of mirroring, so they are kind of watching me” one instructor explained in her

interview how she utilized her students' mirroring behavior as an opportunity to model positive communication. She explained, her goals of modeling "how active listening works. How dialogue it should work. How to work through issues through deliberation" in the classroom.

Each of these instances contribute to creating a motivating environment in which faculty help students believe in their own capability of learning that Rendón names as critically vital to student success. These students' recollections and classroom observations demonstrate how English 1001 can be powerful in helping students feel academically validated as creators of knowledge, which can help foster their internal confidence in their ability to succeed in college.

Intellectual Development. Students also saw value in what they were learning and potentialities for using their knowledge and skills in future courses, careers, and non-school contexts. In these instances, students explicitly remarked on how the knowledge and skills they learned in English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric contributed to their overall intellectual development. They described how they thought concepts and skills in the course might be useful for their futures. When considering the student responses through the lens of validation theory, it is important to note that it is a developmental theory, meaning that while students benefit from initial validation, it is meant to help them build own internal capacity to believe in their own capabilities. As Rendón (1994) explains, validation is "a process that affirms, supports, enables, and reinforces their capacity to fully develop themselves as students and as individuals" (p. 45).

In English 1001, students exhibited moments of gaining confidence and self-reliance in their abilities as knowers and creators of knowledge. As Victor described: “I enjoy the class. Yeah, I enjoy writing because every time I write I feel like there's like, power in a way when I'm expressing myself.” Victor shared that expressing himself was important for his other classes and career as an engineer. Melissa discussed how she saw the research that she did in English 1001 on homelessness in her hometown of Atlanta, Georgia as potentially helping teachers learn and shape curriculum to make their students more aware of the complex social issues surrounding housing inequities, she wrote “my project will help create change by having teachers join the group of educators who support having those hard conversations to help others learn about concepts that may be foreign to them.” Tessa exhibited rhetorical awareness and confidence in her decision-making skills as a writer in her response: “I learned that writing doesn't always have to follow a specific formula. And it's good to incorporate your own ways of writing to your pages.” Both Tessa and Melissa realized that they could draw on their writing skills and voice to help evoke change. Students exhibited moments of gaining confidence in their abilities as knowers and creators of knowledge, recognizing that they could build on the skills they practiced in English 1001 in future tasks and situations.

In sum, students demonstrated that they felt academically validated in that they saw themselves reflected in the curriculum, felt supported by their instructors and the content and skills they were learning was valuable as part of their intellectual development. They felt validation through feeling supported in their learning and

capable of making contributions, signaling that they are building their internal ability to believe in themselves as capable of success in college.

Academic Invalidation. Rendón (1994) posits that “a great deal of invalidation is built into the present model of teaching and learning” and that while some students who already have skills to gain access to opportunities that support their success, first-generation college students are less likely to possess such skills and thus experience invalidation in academic environments (p. 45). While occurring at a much lower rate (with 27 (4.8%) examples of academic invalidation as compared to 265 (49.5%) moments of academic validation of the 565 codes) the sixteen first-generation focal students did experience invalidating moments (See Table 7). Two subthemes occurred in academic invalidation: students expressed fear about college-level writing expectations and demands and students conveyed negative views on writing because of their invalidating writing experiences in high school.

College-level writing fear. Students expressed reservations about the demands of college-level writing based on their high school experiences. They predicted that English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric would be challenging. For example, Colin said that he “was a bit scared. Just because my senior year, English class was tough. And so I'm like: This is college. This is gonna be intense.” Brooke echoed ideas that academic writing would be difficult: “it's going be hard. A lot of essays, a lot of writing.”

Prior Invalidating Writing Experiences. Anya, an immigrant and non-native speaker of English, recalled hesitancy about taking a writing class because of past experiences learning English, expounding “Often, I would have most of my teachers look

down on me because English was not my first language.” Anya declined to take English 1001 until the first semester of her sophomore year due to this sentiment. She expounded that she wished she “would have taken this class earlier. Especially because for my major [Social Welfare and Justice] we write a lot. Yeah, we write a lot of research papers. So yeah, I learned a lot from this class.” Yet, her decision to postpone English 1001 until her sophomore year exhibits the fear and judgement she had experienced that invalidated her as a writer.

During instructor interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, I noted how actively instructors attempted to challenge these pre-existing experiences of and feelings of invalidation. As one instructor expounded in her interview, her big picture goals in the course are:

“continuing to strengthen [student] critical thinking, critical reading and critical writing skills. And so I make them write a lot more than I did in the past, but I low stakes writings that are like credit, no credit, between like 20 or 30% of their overall grade. I like to start by telling them: you guys are writing all the time, even if it doesn't feel like it. You're texting. You're like writing on social media. And I just want to keep getting more comfortable. And so I think the most important thing has just been getting them out of that mindset of staring at a blank Word doc until they know exactly what they want to say perfectly...and getting them to think about why writing matters and the fact that like they have a voice and they have things to say.”

Despite the instructor's goals, approach, and assignment structure, the student experiences demonstrate how their previous invalidating experiences inform their attitudes toward writing. Although all the study's documented instances of invalidation were related to general attitudes of and previous experiences of writing, rather than specific moments of invalidation in English 1001, these instances can be seen as site for improvement in fostering positive, validating experiences and helping students to see writing as a way to create knowledge. As first-generation college students are less likely to "know how to take full advantage of the [university] system," it is important to be able to identify moments of invalidation to actively address and ameliorate them (Rendón, 1994 p. 45).

Interpersonal Validation. Interpersonal validation "occurs when students' personal development and social adjustment is prioritized" (Rendón & Muñoz, 2011 p. 19). In the classroom, instructors who can recognize students more holistically and connect with them on a personal level can act as validating agents. To help achieve an interpersonally validating environment, Rendón (1994) advocates for a therapeutic learning community, a "college culture that promotes healthy relationships among students, faculty, and staff, fosters cultural pride and recognizes potential of all students to attain success" (p. 49). Two subthemes prevailed in the data when considering interpersonal validation: students making meaningful connections to peers and students viewing themselves as capable of success. The themes presented in this section help answer the second research question: How, if at all, do first-generation students experience validation as valuable members of the university learning community in a

first-year writing course? The sixteen first-generation focal students communicated 182 instances of interpersonal validation, accounting for 34% of the 535 total documented codes (See Table 7).

Connection to peers. Rendón & Muñoz (2011) explain connection to peers as vital for interpersonal validation and advise faculty to “allow students to validate each other and to build a social network through activities such as study groups and sharing of cell phone numbers” (p. 19). Since English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric sections are capped at an enrollment of 19 students, the relatively small class size aids in helping students make connections. The instructors I observed and interviewed provided opportunities for students to interact with one another through activities of pair-and-share discussions, turn-and talks with small groups, break-out group discussions, peer review, and support for students to collaborate on similar projects. For example, during her interview, one instructor explained how she used peer review and small group work to help students “to be part of a community and this is so critical in that first semester.” During Unit 4, when students get to decide which genre to share their research, one instructor placed students in work groups based on their genre choice so they could work together to better understand genre expectations and how to execute them.

Additionally, the cultural rhetorics Unit 1 curriculum, which supports students in considering how their backgrounds inform their communications choices and how those choices may influence their perceptions to and interactions with others provides opportunity for students to develop interpersonal relationships with their peers. For example, one instructor asked his class to examine fashion as a form of rhetoric as

means to encourage self-reflection and build community. He described the readings and activities he assigns as designed to help students see fashion as “one of the many ways that we express belonging and express the values that are shared within a cultural context.” He hopes students use “use that as a jumping off point for thinking about the cultural rhetorics ethos in the class itself” and as an opportunity to both be vulnerable in assessing themselves and generous when encountering others. He described a palpable “sigh of relief” in the classroom when students admit things like “I dyed my hair black once because like I wanted to be seen like this way” or “ I listened to this record once and I just really want it to like look like that person.” He recalled that such admissions normalize the conversation for the whole room and others begin to “realize that [they're] not the only one who ever did that,” which helps students build community with one another.

In their interviews, students remarked on the comfortable classroom environments and that they were encouraged to learn to listen to each other and respect their peers’ ideas even when discussing topics they had considered challenging such as racism, school segregation, and immigration. Tessa’s recollection of how her class improved at discussing challenging topics describes this sentiment:

I would say the group discussions, they were pretty fun. At first, they were very like tense. Maybe we were all just scared to participate. But after a while, we all just like had real conversations about our own problems. So that made me feel like I wasn't alone.

In describing the classroom environment, Maya remarked, “I like the overall like feel for our classroom like how it’s been really easy to work with people and in groups and see we’re all in the same boat... there’s no one that’s like, oh, yeah, I’m better than you like there’s no cockiness or anything like that.” Sam summarized that “Everyone’s really calm and chill, it’s a really good at class environment and school environment.”

Positive connections with peers were also fostered by engaging in peer review. While peer review facilitation logistics varied across instructors, peer review—asking students to read and provide feedback on their peers’ writing is a hallmark of English 1001 and best practices in writing instruction. Students found these opportunities to be mostly generative and valuable for improving their work and aiding in building interpersonal connections with their classmates. One student noted that it was helpful to have “an extra eye” on their work and that they appreciated specific compliments on their writing from their peers, such as that their work was “interesting,” “easy to read,” and that their “ideas were good.” When describing her Unit 4 creative project, where students make informed rhetorical decisions based on their research and rhetorical situation—including genre, purpose, audience, and medium—Tessa, described a connection she made with a classmate because they both decided to create a podcast:

There was another person in my class who was doing a podcast who sits near me. So I was mostly just asking him like what he was doing, like structure-wise for his...I really actually liked to share my idea with him. We talked about my project idea and how to bring it to life. And he said that he really liked it and couldn't wait to see it.

English 1001 instructors encouraged students to share their final Unit 4 creative projects with their classmates at the end of the semester. Instructors explained that they wanted students to share their work so they could learn from each other and experience how writing might be used to benefit others. One instructor said she “wanted them to imagine how their project would contribute to the public good.” Raúl expressed this as an opportunity to connect with peers when he wrote in his final course reflection that “Looking at my peers' projects in the class gallery, really showed me two main things: that my classmates are very creative, and it showed a lot of interesting topics, such as how social media can cause negative effects on mental health as well as self-image.” In sharing their final research and creative projects, students were able to learn from one another and witness their classmates’ approaches.

The classroom observation data and reviews of English 1001 documents support that instructors made pedagogical decisions to help foster and nurture these interpersonal connections between peers such as addressing students by first names as a way to model authentic interpersonal relationships, scaffolding and explicitly stating norms for respectful in-class discussions in the course syllabus, encouraging pair and small-group work during class periods, and requiring student encounters with each other’s writing through peer review and presentation activities.

Capable of success. Another important element of interpersonal validation is helping students to believe in their own ability to succeed. Rendón & Muñoz (2011), theorize that the “most vulnerable students will benefit from external validation that

can serve as the means to move students toward gaining internal strength resulting in increased agency in shaping their own lives” (p. 170). The data show English 1001 as a site where the external validation students receive helps them develop their confidence and agency. Students expressed moments of confidence, gaining agency as a knower and person who can reach their own goals and use their skills to influence others.

Upon successful completion of English 1001, Viktor felt more prepared for academic writing, explaining that he is now “more confident to write more college papers and take more English classes. I am glad I learned effective ways of reading, writing and communicating to diverse audiences.” Brooke described how her Unit 4 creative project, where she composed a presentation exploring how social media shapes identity, helped her build confidence in her decision-making, “this one was able to encompass everything that we've been talking about, but it also gave me the freedom to choose how I want to present it and it gave me options and the reflection requirement helped me understand it.” She realized she had choices in how she approached and presented her work and that she was not solely dependent on her instructors’ requirements. For Henry, the curriculum’s focus on current events, students’ lived experiences and attention to context was interesting, which helped motivate him,

My old English classes, I didn't look forward to. I didn't like them at all because it was just like, repetitive and like, just boring to go through. But now I feel like it's actually interesting stuff we're learning about and the projects they're kind of

like fun to do. When we finish it and you look over it and realize it's like actually interesting stuff we're writing about.

When Henry was more interested in the curriculum and writing tasks, he felt more engaged and optimistic about his writing skills.

Students also demonstrated moments of believing in their own ability to succeed by describing how their emerging rhetorical skills might help the communities around them. The work they did in class helped position them as assets to their communities. For example, Sam, who is involved in the University's Urban Scholars Program, designed to help first-generation college students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds succeed, drew connections between his background and rhetorical agency. Acknowledging the societal inequities that deny equal access to education, the Urban Scholars Program offers full tuition scholarships to 45 students per year, including Sam, with admission priority given to Black students from the City of Milwaukee. He discussed how his Unit 4 creative project in the form of a video essay helped him consider his own ability to influence change: "This project allowed you to have a voice for your community and help spread awareness about current issues that do not allow the Black community to thrive." Similarly, Raúl, who is also a member of the Urban Scholars Program, described the research he embarked on in Unit 3 as "fun" because of his "medicine background and the understanding I already had for queries and using different search terms to find the specific topic." His research on how socioeconomic status influences identity helped him better contextualize crime rates in Milwaukee and

consider how he might use his first-hand lived experiences and research knowledge to advocate for new solutions. He explains in his final course reflection:

I linked the high crime rate to people not having as much opportunity as well as not having a role model to push them in the correct way. Living here in Milwaukee has become very traumatizing and scary because the crime rate is so high. The research process while it was rigorous, it was very helpful in understanding my question, especially because it is something I am passionate in and want to help change.

These experiences of interpersonal validation through the subthemes of students making meaningful connections to peers and students viewing themselves as capable of success, show that English 1001 can help provide external validation that can serve as the means to move students toward building internal strength needed to succeed in meeting their goals in college and beyond.

Interpersonal Invalidation. Although the data illustrated that students overwhelmingly experienced interpersonal validation while taking English 1001, students did also experience interpersonal invalidation, moments when they felt devalued and as if they did not belong. The data reflected 61 examples of interpersonal invalidation, representing 11.4% of the total collected data (See Table 7). Interpersonal invalidation occurred most saliently in two subthemes: social fears and invalidating experiences with their peers. Although students did not remark on interpersonal invalidation that occurred in the English 1001 classroom in the data, instructors were able to expound on recollections of student interpersonal invalidation.

Social Fears. As fifteen of the sixteen first generation focal students were interviewed during their first semester of college, it is not surprising that fourteen of the students shared fearful emotions when I asked them “What was it like to arrive on campus for you at the start of the year?” during the interviews. Their fears were predominantly interpersonal with students described feeling “nervous,” “worried,” “anxious” and “overwhelmed.” Colin’s response synthesizes the group’s overall sentiments:

The very beginning of the year was scary because I didn't know anyone. I didn't really know what to expect. Like how hard it was going to be or how easy it was going be, or what I should do or like, if I was going to meet anyone. Social stuff, it's definitely hard.

Sierra was a participant in the University’s Upward Bound Program, a Federally-funded TRiO program designed to prepare high school students who are low-income and first-generation college students to enter and successfully complete college. Despite her previous experiences and familiarity with Marquette, she found the transition to becoming a college student challenging:

It was overwhelming to me, to be completely honest. It's like kind of weird because it's just like I've been coming here since I was like, in the eighth grade. But it was like, now I'm in college, so it's kind of like a completely different expectation and pressure on it. So you know, I was very just like overwhelmed.

All students were interviewed in late November and early December, at the culmination of their first semester, and when asked during the interviews, “How do you feel being at Marquette now?” all sixteen students provided positive responses. They expressed that they were “more relaxed,” “confident” and “comfortable.” Taylor expounds,

I'm feeling more comfortable. Because at the first part of the semester, I felt very, like nervous, very stressed because it was a lot of things and it was all something new. And it's a lot to get used to. It's taught me a lot, like how to study for hours and hours. And it also like it's helped me connect with like, myself because before I was shy, and afraid of like coming up to people and now it's like, I feel more comfortable coming up to them.

In these responses, students who had participated in summer programs like the Emerging Scholars Program and the Educational Opportunity Program credited their time on campus in the summer prior to their freshman year as beneficial to easing their transition because they met friends and academic staff such as advisors to help connect them to resources. Brooke, who participated in a summer ROTC program prior beginning the Fall semester explained, that the friends and University employees she formed relationships with have “been the most welcoming as far as like, being ‘Hey, we're in this together’.”

While the focal students reported feeling much less social fear by then end of the semester, their initial recollections of social fear when first arriving at campus help

underscore the importance of interpersonal validation, especially when students are adjusting to campus. The invalidation they described did not occur in English 1001 yet these students were negotiating a major transition to the college environment, which influenced their ability to feel like they belong on campus and can succeed.

Invalidating experiences with peers. Students expressed 20 total (3.7%) incidents that I classified as invalidating experiences with peers (See Table 7). In the English 1001 classroom, the negative interactions that occurred between peers centered around peer review. Although some students did remark on positive peer review experiences, four students expressed frustration with peer review, complaining that they “didn’t share their writing with people,” and “only skimmed” comments received from peers. Taylor admitted that “I did not read [peer review comments] because I had a person that I just didn’t think gave good comments.”

In the data I collected from the sixteen focal students, they did not directly report on invalidating interpersonal experiences in the English 1001 classroom. However, I did document invalidating experiences in the classroom observations and instructor interviews. In one classroom observation, I noticed very little interaction between peers. Students were given time to work on their final Unit 4 Creative Projects and asked to check-in with their instructor for guidance. The instructor stated that his goal was for students to “leave class with our questions answered and a clear idea of how to make the project succeed.” While the time and one-on-one pedagogical support could certainly be beneficial, I observed six of the eleven students online shopping,

scrolling in their phones, and not discussing work with one another. The instructor asked students pertinent questions like “how do you plan on incorporating the rest of your scholarship?” and “what medium are you going to use?” as well as providing encouraging feedback, such as “that’s fantastic; that’s really bright” and “you’re on a great start. Excellent.” As students were not interacting with each other and helping each other succeed, in this class session, I did not observe any moments of connection between peers relating to the assignment.

Similarly, during her interview, one instructor expressed concern about how sometimes classroom “dynamics just don't produce the same results in a different class in terms of student willingness to work together or kind of talk openly in their in their breakout groups.” The instructor expressed concern about one class section that only had three women and only one person of color, a Black woman, of the 19 enrolled students. While the instructor was conscientious to “not target her” or ask “her to act as a representative of her identity,” she expressed distress that she did not fully understand how the student experienced her class because “she did not participate” in class discussions. Another instructor questioned how students with marginalized identities experience the course content differently “because of their cultural backgrounds.” The instructor said he was constantly thinking about and trying to learn more about “how students from minority communities perceive this content differently than the white middle class students that are most the most significant portion of our student body.”

Other invalidating experiences that students shared occurred outside of the classroom. Two students remarked on parts of their identities that made it harder for them to connect with peers, for example Colin, a commuter student explained “‘I'm a commuter, right? So there's just like a split between like people who hang out more and I'm left out sometimes.” Maya was not confident in her major choices of Political Science and Spanish and felt that she didn't fit into groups that coalesced around their major or common sets of classes such as engineering, nursing, or pre-physical therapy tracks. She explained, “when I'm signing up for classes or like when I'm, confused about where I want to go with what I'm doing. It's just there's so much room I guess, and there's not as much like structured support to like, help me navigate where I want to go.”

Two students directly referred to the University's New Student Convocation on August 25 during orientation during their interviews. For context, administration postponed the convocation after it was disrupted by a demonstration held by members of the Black Student Union, Marquette University Student Government, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People at Marquette University and the Latin American Student Organization, which stemmed from some students' frustrations with university's commitment to expand diversity and inclusion initiatives (Abuzzahab, 2022). Ten students of color later faced university sanctions over the demonstration and student leaders who participated were forced to step down from their leadership positions. Melissa voiced her concerns, “I will say when we had the convocation, I did not like how they [the administration] responded to that...I don't like how they took

their leadership positions away. It just like irritated me the way they handled the situation.”

Echoing concerns about the University’s pre-dominantly white environment, four students, who all identified as Black on their demographic screening questionnaire and interviews, commented on the racial tensions at Marquette. As Sierra explained “being in a majority white space overall is kind of just like a culture shock to me. I didn't have any bad experience with students like everyone's been generally like, very sweet. But it's just different.” Butch recalled “inherent struggles with being a minority on campus” when describing an incident when he heard a group of white students using the n-word and making derogatory comments toward people of color at a party. Anya shared a painful experience of being the only Black person in a class and the only person to not have a partner for a project, expressing her frustration that her professor did not intervene, she recalled, “the professor didn't say anything, even though I went in for office hours. So I just did the whole project by myself.”

Although students did not report on interpersonal invalidation in English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric, to help interpersonally validate students, understanding of their lived experiences and sense of belonging in the university environment is necessary. As interpersonal validation requires “attention to students as whole human beings who can best function with an ethic of care and support,” documenting and understanding these instances of isolation, microaggressions, and racism that influence student experiences’ serves as insight to help direct and administer proactive validation

(Rendón & Muñoz, 2011 p. 28). These experiences of invalidation provide complexity in describing students' lived experiences that can be used to develop direct validation efforts that can build to support students' internal confidence in their ability to succeed.

First Generation College Student Identity. The final theme my data revealed offered more insight into how students described and experienced being first-generation college students. As previously discussed in Chapter 2, nationally, first-generation college students have a higher rate of attrition and are less likely to complete their intended degree as compared to their peers. Similar gaps exist at Marquette University, where first-to-second year retention rate of first-generation students over the past four years has been 4-5% lower than the retention rate of continuing-generation peers (OIRA, 2023). OIRA also reports that first-generation college students experience a weaker sense of belonging when they arrive on campus. In the 2021 and 2022 First-time, First-year survey of incoming students during orientation, first-generation students reported a weaker sense of belonging (Marquette University OIRA, 2023). For example, 87% of multigenerational incoming freshman in the class of 2022 answered that they strongly agreed (26%) or agreed (61%) to the question "I find Marquette to be welcoming to people like me." While as only 71% of the first-generation incoming freshman in the class of 2022 answered that they strongly agreed (18%) or agreed (53%) that Marquette was welcoming to people like them. This accounts for a 16% gap between first-generation and multi-generational students. The data collected from the sixteen focal students at Marquette illuminate two subthemes that give insight into why these gaps exist: that they have less access to experiential

knowledge and feel pressure as the first college student in their families. However, the findings reveal how their identity as a first-generation college student also serves as a motivator to achieve.

Across all the student-provided data, assigned codes were nearly evenly split among the written reflection assignments (56.26%) and interviews (43.74%). For the most part, students expressed similar sentiments in both their writing and interviews. However, one notable exception is that none of the sixteen students mentioned or referred to their status as a first-generation students in their writing. Even though the initial pre-Unit 1 reflection prompted students to consider: “Which identities were visible to others and which ones were hidden? and What communities, groups, and activities shaped your story in high school?” no students wrote about their identities as first-generation college students. Instead, all data came from the interviews in which students were directly asked: “How many first-generation college students do you think there are at Marquette?” and “What differences do you experience as a first-generation college student compared to your peers?” In responding to the first question estimating how many other students shared their first-generation college student identity, they replied “a lot,” “I don’t know a number, but lots of people in our summer program,” and “in my class I know there are more than other years.” If students gave specific numbers, they consistently over-estimated the number of first-generation college students answering, “a third,” “a little less than 50% of the student body” and “7,000.” Additionally, only one student, Anya, specifically remarked on her family’s socio-economic status, describing that she had to work more hours at the library

compared to her friends. This indicates that financial concerns related to their first-generation status were not at the forefront of the focal students' minds.

These responses indicated that while students were aware of their identity as first-generation college students, they did not feel alone or isolated in their experience, highlighting their nuanced self-perception and experiences.

Lack of Knowledge. When directly asked to consider their first-generation college student identity in the interviews, students remarked about the lack of knowledge they experienced in terms of applying to, selecting and preparing for college. For example, Taylor explained,

I feel like if your parents went to college, they're, they kind of know what to prepare you for a little bit better. So you're more likely to come in, prepared and ready to succeed rather than a first-generation student who really has no idea what they're going into, and whose parents have no idea what they're going into.

Maya commented,

Personally, the whole like, college experience was confusing for me like, because my family obviously like my parents don't know how to help me like with certain things like filling out forms or like, what to do for certain stuff as compared to my friends. One of my friends, who I have made here like, I think his whole family went to Marquette. They are a Marquette family. So he's pretty like acquainted with everything.

Sierra also voiced that she had less access to institutional knowledge, reflecting that she didn't get "general advice that like my parents, wouldn't have any idea about. Like if they went to Marquette themselves, they could be like, oh, make sure you apply for this." Similarly, Tessa explained that she relied on her cousin to help fill her parents' knowledge gap that "Um, well, there was definitely a lot of questions that I had. And I did not know what to expect at all. So I had to ask, you know, like, I have an older cousin, that is a college student, so she helped me a lot." Even though they did not write about their experiences as a first-generation college student in their English 1001 assignments, they identified a lack of knowledge once that aspect of their identity was made salient in the interview. Students were aware that their identity as first-generation college students influenced the knowledge they accumulated before arriving to college but did not feel isolated in or limited by that aspect of their identity.

Pressure and Motivation as First-Generation College Student. Additionally, students described pressure they felt to succeed as some of the first members of their families to attend college. Colin succinctly summarized a sentiment expressed by the students in the interviews, "I feel like it's been a lot of pressure to succeed because like, no one's done this before like in my family. So, I'm the first to do it. It's just a little stressful. Because I feel like everyone's looking at me." Viktor echoed the pressure to be a positive familial example, explaining

as a first-generation student, my family kind of looks up to me because I'm the first kid to be like in college out of my whole family. And as being the oldest, I'm seen as like an idol, an idol for like my younger sister. Since she's in high school

and she's also like, planning on going to college too....I'm motivated to make them proud and live a happy life after college.

While Viktor felt pressure to make the most of an educational opportunity his parents didn't have, he described that same pressure as a motivator to succeed. Christopher also expressed how being a first generation-college student was motivating to him, "It really made me like motivated and put myself in my parent's shoes. It made me like feel that I'm not just at Marquette or in college in general, just for me. I'm doing it for them too." Anya also saw her first-generation college student identity as a motivator and opportunity to serve as a positive role model, "I want to set a great example for other students that look up to me. I also respect myself and my family. So I need to work hard and be recognized as a great person and student."

Students articulated that their first-generation status did afford them opportunities and helped them gain independence. Christopher explains,

I mean, I've gotten to the Upward Bound and SSS (Student Support Services) programs due to the fact that I'm first generation and I feel like really, if it wasn't, I wouldn't even be here. So that really impacted why I'm here in the first place and really, impacts like, anything socially and educationally.

Christopher articulated a nuanced view of his first-generation college student identity recognizing both the disadvantages and opportunities, in this case admission to the Educational Opportunity Program's Upward Bound and Student Support Services, which provided him with financial, academic, and social support for which he wouldn't otherwise qualify. Sara described how her parents' lack of knowledge about college as a

“learning curve” that provided her the chance to develop her independence, “living on my own, getting to experience buying stuff I need on my own, buying clothes and stuff for myself” and managing her time, studying “outside of like class hour.” Raúl also saw his first-generation college student identity as an opportunity for increased agency, detailing “I got to figure it all out myself. But I have like a good support system that helps me through here.” These recollections help explain validation as a developmental theory, where “external support can eventually translate to internal strength as students gain confidence and agency” (Rendón & Muñoz, 2011 p. 27). Although students did not explicitly write about being first-generation college students in their English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric written assignments, in their interview responses, students thoughtfully reflected on the complexity of their identity as a first-generation college student. They did not expound on this identity in their coursework, but offered thoughtful responses when directly asked about their first-generation college student identity in their interviews. They recognized disadvantages and lack of access to knowledge they’d experienced as first-generation college students, but they did not solely view their identity from a deficit perspective. Instead in English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric, the first-generation focal students saw opportunities to be motivated and develop their own agency.

Limitations of Findings

The study contributes to existing knowledge on the experiences of first-generation college students and provides valuable insights regarding how first-generation college students experience validation in a first-year writing course. The

findings illustrate how English 1001 as a site of validation, describe that validation as perceived by the student, and further elucidate students' self-perception of their first-generation college student identity. However, the data was collected on a relatively small sample size of sixteen students at one research site. The study's themes could yield different results depending on student population, sample size, curricular changes, etc., and at other campuses.

A larger sample size may have helped decrease selection bias as the students who agreed to participate in the study were more engaged and therefore more well-positioned for success in English 1001. Since recruitment for the study was conducted through class visits and emails, students who were engaged by attending class, paying attention to announcements, and more regularly checking their emails were more likely to participate in the study. Additionally, the intrinsic reason a student opts to participate can be vastly different from one student to another. For example, one student may want to share a positive experience they had while another may see an opportunity to voice their concerns through participation in the study. Given the high ratio of validation that students experienced, it is likely that those with positive experiences were more willing to participate in the study. Again, a larger sample pool for future studies may be needed to decrease this limitation.

Finally, the current findings do not allow for connections between students' perceptions of validation and degree attainment. Longitudinal studies that followed-up with students throughout their college career examining quantitative markers of success such as grade-point average, persistence, time to degree completion, and qualitative

dimensions such as engagement, sense of belonging, and validation could shed further light into how to support first-generation college students.

Connecting First-Year Writing to College Success

The following chapter summary synthesizes the data and findings to illuminate how English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric validated first-generation college students through the lens of Rendón's validation theory. The study's third research question asks: What, if any, role does the first-year writing course play in first-generation students' ability to believe in themselves as capable of success in college? While it is an overreach to tout a that one course can single-handedly transform a student's experiences, the data show that English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric does provide both academic and interpersonal validation that can help build a student's own belief in their abilities to succeed. Rendón's original study concluded that "when external agents took the initiative to validate students, academically and/or interpersonally, students began to believe they could be successful" (1994, p.40). External validation in English 1001 can positively contribute to helping students trust their own innate capacity to learn and build confidence in succeeding as a college student.

Students experienced academic validation through recognizing personal connections to both the curriculum and campus community, forming personal relationships and receiving encouraging, meaningful feedback from their instructors and crediting the course to contributing to their intellectual development. The cultural rhetorics theoretical framework of Unit 1 allowed students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum and helped them learn to listen to others' experiences, as Ariel

described it as “opening up to think and listen to other people's stories.” Sierra reflects on the significance of the curriculum,

I definitely just found it surprising and like welcoming that it was about culture identity and stuff like that. And just like the overall discussions that we had about immigration and race and how that all like plays into each other. Having discussions like that and having a teacher that was very adamant about teaching about it and sharing these different experiences was welcoming and good.

They also experienced interpersonal validation demonstrated in the themes of students making meaningful connections to peers and expressing belief in their ability to succeed. Students connected that studying writing and rhetoric in English 1001 was particularly well-suited to developing their ability to internally validate themselves. As Sam shared, “I like writing because it like allows a way for me to express myself. Like on paper and whatever's on my mind, I could just write it down.” Colin concluded the course reflecting, “I feel like I have more confidence in myself. When I write, I know how I should feel when I write something that I want people to take away and remember...I feel like when I write something, I am being heard.”

Although students did experience moments of both academic and interpersonal invalidation, these experiences occurred much less frequently and largely outside of English 1001. Students felt academically invalidated by fears about the academic writing expectations and their abilities to meet them based on prior negative experiences of writing. Interpersonally, students expressed invalidation through social fears and invalidating experiences with their peers. The findings also show insight into how

students experience being a first-generation college student, mainly that despite the knowledge gaps and barriers to resources, they were also motivated by this identity to succeed and build their own agency. In his final course reflection, Henry, who aspires to be a secondary History teacher, provided a response that summarizes the study's main themes:

Overall my experience with English 1001 has greatly impacted my college experience. I was able to expand on my writing and rhetoric skills. Through the help of Professor [last name], I am now confident in writing multi page papers or big projects. The skills I have obtained from this class are ones that will not wither away after this semester or even my time at Marquette. Instead, throughout the next years I plan to increase and expand my skill set, for not only in my intended career path, but also adulthood.

He explicitly mentions his professor's impact, his own increased confidence, as well as the ways he values the skills he learned in the course and intention to continue developing those skills. Like Henry, the sixteen first-generation focal students, experienced moments of validation in English 1001. Their experiences in the course afforded opportunities for both academic and interpersonal validation that helped foster their own belief in their ability to succeed.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This dissertation explores how first-generation college students experience validation in a first-year writing course, English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric and how those experiences influence their ability to see themselves as creators of knowledge, valuable members of the university learning community, and capable of success. Utilizing a combination of qualitative data collected from assigned reflective writing in English 1001, semi-structured individual interviews with students and instructors, classroom observations and document analysis, the study gained deeper insight into how first-generation college students experience academic and interpersonal validation. The findings presented in Chapter Four were organized within a framework of understanding the phenomenon of first-generation college students' experiences of validation in English 1001, including exploration of academic and interpersonal validation, a student's ability to view themselves as capable of success, and insight into how students describe and experience their first-generation college student identity (See Figure 3).

In this concluding chapter, the relevance of the findings is situated within scholarship and practice. I first interpret the research findings to make sense of the study's conclusions through related theory. Then, I map the new insights developed through this dissertation research in relation to overlapping scholarly perspectives. In existing literature, I found noticeable gaps in studies considering the extent to which first-generation college students are validated in the first-year writing classroom and

how that validation influences their success. The discussion of findings in this chapter will contextualize the sixteen focal students' experiences given Rendón's validation theory, and with scholarship in writing studies and student success. Finally, the discussion section will conclude by providing recommendations for future direction for both practitioners and researchers.

The study's findings contribute to a greater awareness of first-generation college students' identities and experiences, while identifying and exemplifying themes of academic and interpersonal validation as well as invalidation. To contextualize the following findings, the data provide clarity and insight into the main research questions:

1. How, if at all, do first-generation students experience validation as creators of knowledge in a first-year writing course?
2. How, if at all, do first-generation students experience validation as valuable members of the university learning community in a first-year writing course?
3. What, if any, role does the first-year writing course play in first-generation students' ability to believe in themselves as capable of success in college?

The following discussion will be organized into three areas: validating experiences, invalidating experiences, and connections to student success.

Validating Experiences. As indicated in the findings the data shows that students do overwhelmingly experience validation with 447 of the 535, or 83.55% coded student interview and written data described as either academic or interpersonal validation and only 88, or 16.45% as invalidating experiences (See Table 7). Students experienced

academic validation through making personal connections to the curriculum and campus community, receiving validation from the instructor, and by articulating how the course helps contribute to their intellectual development. They experienced interpersonal validation through making meaningful in-class connections with their peers and articulating their belief in their ability to succeed. Due to the existing structure of English 1001 including: small classes capped at 19 students, an anti-racist cultural rhetorics framework for Unit 1, curriculum that reflects students' identities, frequent opportunities to receive feedback from their instructors and peers, and opportunities for learning that "allows for reflection, multi-perspectives and imperfection," English 1001's existing pedagogical practices are currently successful at validating first-generation students (Rendón, 1994 p. 49). Academic validation can occur in the classroom by instructors taking actions such as designing curriculum that reflects students' background and allowing them to witness themselves in what they are learning. Rendón (1994) offers sixteen examples of pedagogical decisions and practices that foster a validating classroom, including the following examples that are applicable to the English 1001 classroom:

- Students bring rich reservoir of experience and are motivated to believe they are capable of learning
- Faculty share knowledge with students and support students in learning
- Students are allowed to have a public voice and share their ideas openly
- Teachers may be learners; learners may be teachers
- The core curriculum is inclusive of the contributions of women and minorities

- Learning allows for reflection, multi-perspectives and imperfection (pp. 48-9).

These practices helped foster a validating classroom environment in the first-year writing course and could be reinforced for English 1001 instructors and adapted to other courses and contexts. To my knowledge, my dissertation is the only research study that has specifically examined how or if validation occurs in a first-year writing course. Therefore, the findings extend knowledge by concluding that the first-year writing classroom can serve as a site of validation for first-generation college students and by describing the types of validation and invalidation students experience.

The study's results can help instructors and other university stakeholders maximize validating experiences in first-year writing to support student success. Particularly, the anti-racist cultural rhetorics framework of Unit 1 is important for validating students because it "invites them to explore the connections between their personal histories, group, and community contexts to allow students to affirm their own identities and create new knowledge" (Rendón & Muñoz, 2011 p. 27). At the onset of the course, students are asked to write about themselves and their communities. Bookending Unit 1 with autobiographical reflection assignments that attend to students' past, presents, and future as well as mini-analysis assignments that encourage students to listen to and reflect on their surroundings help support the self-awareness of their identities required to see themselves as creators of knowledge. Perez, Acuña & Reason (2021) highlight the power of incorporating such autobiographical activities in writing

courses as having the potential to “bolster students’ confidence in their abilities, enhance their sense of belonging, and developing their writing skills” (p. 637).

Additionally, analysis of shared readings in Unit 1 help underscore that multiple perspectives are valued and encouraged in the English 1001 classroom, helping students feel that they belong on campus. Curating and assigning readings on Black culture in America as context to inform students’ rhetorical analysis of texts helped give students a way into conversations about race, identity, and belonging. As students began to critically consider the intersections between language and power, discussing how everything from street names to first names could trigger biases and exclusion, they also analyzed texts like news coverage, fashion, campus websites, and even campus spaces through the lens of cultural rhetorics. Investigating existing campus projects, like readings on the 2020 MU Cultural Audit conducted by the Committee on Equity and Inclusion, Mini Analysis #2 analyzing campus spaces, and studying the Mauricio Ramirez “Our Roots Say That We’re Sisters” mural project helped students recognize their role in the larger university and community conversation. This increased awareness of conversations on the campus can help students succeed as campus environments have a noticeable impact on students’ sense of belonging (Museus, 2014). As Gopalan and Brady, 2020 conclude, finding a sense of belonging increases the likelihood that students will persist to graduation. Museus and Chang (2021) show that students’ sense of belonging is positively shaped by “greater access to people with whom they share common backgrounds and experiences, learning that is relevant to their communities...and validation of their backgrounds and identities” (p. 367). The anti-

racist framing of English 1001: Foundation's in Rhetoric, particularly Unit 1, provides an example of how to bring this relevance into the classroom, thus helping students to better understand themselves in relation to the campus environment, which can help foster their sense of belonging and success.

From a pedagogical perspective, validation theory shares consonance with liberatory pedagogies as developed by scholars such as Paolo Friere (1971), bell hooks (1994), and Henry Giroux (1998) and reflected in the data. English 1001 offers an alternative to Friere's (1971) well-known "banking model" of education, where knowledge is "deposited" by faculty into students' minds. Instead of the instructor as the sole source of information, students are encouraged to co-create knowledge by researching a question of their choosing in Unit 3 and exhibiting their agency to make rhetorical decisions that effectively influence audiences in their Unit 4 creative projects. The critical self-reflection assignments throughout the course also contribute to students experiencing academic validation as described by Rendón (1994) and transformative learning as Merizow (1990) suggests. Additionally, the first-generation focal students remarked on increased engagement with in English 1001's curriculum describing it as more interesting and applicable to their lives and contexts in contrast to their high school English classes. This co-construction of knowledge and agency associated with liberatory pedagogies has potential to "transform" both students and faculty away from traditional approaches to learning that oppress and silence marginalized students (Rendón & Muñoz, 2011 p. 24). The opportunities for students to honor diverse ways of

knowing and participate in knowledge production help them experience validation in first-year writing.

Additionally, the three mini-analysis assignments in Unit 1 allow for frequent instructor feedback. The data revealed that students felt encouraged by their instructor's feedback, which helped contribute to experiencing validation in English 1001. Finally, the classroom environment including full, class discussions, and small group work all provide for opportunities for students to interact with peers and form relationships that Rendón attributes to helping students experience validation (1994).

Invalidating Experiences. I view the moments of invalidation as missed opportunities for validation. While occurring much less frequently than validating experiences, students reported feeling academically invalidated by their fears about academic writing expectations and negative perceptions of writing they had established prior to college. Students did report themes of feeling invalidated at the university through fears about social adjustments and negative interactions with their peers and the campus environment. One site of a missed opportunity to foster validation occurred in peer review, with four of the sixteen focal students reporting that they either skipped or did not find peer review helpful. In the classroom, peer review practices can help students connect with each other, co-create knowledge and help one another succeed. As we continue to revise English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric to best meet our students' contexts and goals, continually investigating and improving on peer review approaches as a program would allow for increased opportunities for peer-to-peer relationship building and validation.

Since the English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric course exists as one part of a student's experience at Marquette University, any moments of invalidation occurring in the classroom should also be considered with attention to the larger campus climate. While English 1001 may be an influential site for validation, it would be much more effective in helping marginalized student populations like first-generation college students succeed if it was administered in concert with other campus initiatives. As the students' remarks on the 2022 New Student Convocation illustrate, they are affected by their perceptions of the University's environment writ large. Again, Marquette University's Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) reports a 4-5% lower retention among first-generation college students and a 16% gap in agreeing that they find campus welcoming to people like them as compared to their multi-generational peers. McCurrie (2009), Museus & Chang (2021), and Tinto (1993) indicate that a students' belonging is a significant factor in student retention or departure; when students feel connected to a community, they are validated and more likely to stay engaged and succeed. I see potential for the study's data and thematic findings to help the campus community work together to better understand first-year writing and its ability to help reduce such demographic gaps by helping students feel welcomed, valued, and like they belong on campus. This would also encourage discussion about collaboration across academic units to help foster consistent validation, as Rendón & Muñoz (2011) advise, "when students are validated on a consistent basis, they are more likely to feel confident in themselves and their ability to learn and get involved in college life" (p.18).

Connections to Success. Rendón (1994) indicates that validation should not be viewed as an end, but instead as a “developmental process which begins early and can continue over time” (p. 18). Validation theory does not ask for faculty to lower standards or expectations but is instead devoted to making students feel stronger and assisting them in building their own motivation. When universities provide various support services to students, such as high impact practices as described by Kuh et al. (2013), these supports can assist in this process. The findings in this study suggest that English 1001 is an ideal context for students to experience validation. The themes demonstrate that English 1001 was helpful to students developing their ability to believe in themselves as capable of success in college through engagement with curriculum, assignments, the classroom environment, and interactions with their instructors and peers. Without these validation opportunities in English 1001, students may miss opportunities to gain targeted support along their developmental journey toward graduation and success.

Students reported that the curriculum had value to both their academic and interpersonal pursuits because it connected to their lived experiences and contexts. Rather than using English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric as a means of socializing students to hegemonic norms of academic writing discourse conventions (Bloom, 1996; Brodkey, 1994; Peckham, 2010), instructors focused on honoring students’ backgrounds, various ways of communicating, and supporting student learning. Additionally, students were given multiple options to approach course requirements in terms of readings, research topics, and final assignment design that helped foster their agency. These

findings connect to Eodice, Geller, and Lerner's (2016) *The Meaningful Writing Project*, a large-scale multi-institutional empirical study on student perceptions of writing, concluding that to maximize meaningful writing, instructors should provide options for student agency, engagement (with instructors, peers and content), and opportunities for transfer defined as learning that "connects to previous experiences and passions and to future aspirations and identities" (p. 108). English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric offers all these elements as means to increase engagement and validate students in ways that contribute to their overall self-determination to succeed in college.

The data also provided insight into the students' experiences as first-generation college students and how it impacted their experiences on campus. Astin (1999) identifies student involvement as an important factor of success explaining "the greater the student's involvement in college, the greater will be the amount of student learning and personal development" (p. 529). Yet, Rendón (1994) reminds that "involvement in college is not easy for nontraditional students," and while the focal students' experiences reflect gaps in knowledge and understanding of how to maneuver higher education bureaucracy and culture, they were also able to draw inspiration from the opportunities that attending Marquette University may afford themselves and their families (p. 37). External academic and interpersonal validation can help build on that motivation and serve as a strategy to help foster student development because external validation helps students build internal validation that Rendón describes a "prerequisite for involvement" and hence greater likelihood of success to occur (Rendón, 1994 p. 37). Thus, the validation students experience in English 1001 through engagement with

curriculum, assignments, the classroom environment, and interactions with their instructors and peers can increase involvement and help students to develop their belief in themselves as capable of success in college.

Implications

The following section offers recommendations for extending the study's findings for pedagogy, practice, and research.

Implications for Pedagogy. Based on the findings and discussion, there are three implications for practice that can be implemented to help continue to support validation students receive in English 1001, decrease the invalidating experiences and actively increase pathways for first-generation college students to view themselves as capable of success. The recommendations for practice in English 1001 based on the data and thematic findings are: 1) committing to the anti-racist cultural rhetorics framework and course structure, 2) offering opportunities to educate and train faculty on validation theory and potential interventions, and 3) forming meaningful collaborations with other campus units committed to student success.

Students resoundingly articulated moments of validation through the English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric curriculum and particularly the first unit's anti-racist cultural rhetorics framework. The course's first unit allows students opportunities to reflect on their own identities and experiences, challenges adjusting to the university community, and see themselves as co-creators of knowledge while listening to multiple and diverse perspectives. The third and fourth units extend these opportunities, providing students options to research questions pertaining to their own interests and

exercise their own agency to create rhetorically effective communications. Additionally, the opportunities for reflection throughout the course help students internalize their learning and recognize their successes. The Unit 1 assignment sequence offers instructors five opportunities to read and give feedback on student writing within the first four-to-five weeks of a student's first semester—a critical time to administer validation and support to influence student belonging. This alignment between theory, the study's findings, and pedagogical practice could be beneficial for leveraging opportunities for validation and intervention.

However, neither the existing curriculum, orientation materials, nor monthly instructor meetings explicitly discuss validation and instructors have not yet been encouraged to scaffold the course to support student success as framed through Rendón's conception of validation. Rendón & Muñoz (2011) advocate for training to help instructors learn and administer academic and interpersonal validation both in and outside of the classroom. Since instructors of English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric have not been made aware of validation theory, they have not had the opportunity to align their assignments or pedagogy to its tenants. Since approximately 70% of incoming students at Marquette University take English 1001 during their first semester on campus, as fifteen of the sixteen focal students did, actively educating instructors to serve as validators could become an important opportunity for fostering validation. Rendón (1994) highlights how critical it is for institutional agents, such as instructors to make contact early: "because nontraditional students can benefit from early validating experiences and positive interactions in college, validation is most critical when

administered early in the college experience, especially during the first few weeks of class and the first year of college” (p. 18). Given the attentive, affirming, and caring pedagogy exhibited in the data, it is safe to assume that with exposure to and discussion of validation theory, instructors would find more opportunities to validate students and help them view themselves as capable of success. This would be especially beneficial during the crucial first few weeks a student spends on campus.

Additionally, considering Marquette’s growing population of first-generation college students, it would be strategic to include more explicit attention to that aspect of identity either in written assignments or reflected in curricular materials. Although students reported that they did not feel alone in embodying this identity, they did not address being first-generation college students in their writing at all. None of the sixteen first-generation students reflected on that part of their identity in their writing assignments, yet all of them discussed it when directly asked in interviews. Revising initial introduction assignments and Unit 1 reflections to ask students about their parental education level and background could provide instructors more information to help them identify and offer explicit validation to first-generation college students.

Rendón (1994) recommends that faculty receive a “yearly demographic profile of the institution’s student population” to help determine “the unique needs and concerns of diverse students” (p. 46). While such data is publicly available via the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, explicit discussion of the university’s student demographics could help English 1001 instructors make adjustments to their approaches to and instructional materials. For example, they could include readings

written by certain populations or addressing issues that influence the communities those students belong to. As long as first-generation college students, and other marginalized populations of students enroll in English 1001, there is opportunity to validate them both academically and interpersonally and contribute to their success. However, Azima's (2020) research on validation and stereotype threat in writing centers warns that stereotyping students based on demographic data can result in inauthentic, incomplete interactions that end up invalidating students. Azima (2020) explains, "there are absolutely risks to this process: well-intentioned but ill-conceived attempts to validate students of color may well backfire and lead students to feel targeted in a negative way" (p. 92). English 1001 instructors need to commit to a reflective practice that avoids stereotyping students based solely on demographics. Azima (2020) concludes reminding educators that "studying our practices, maintaining key partnerships, and listening carefully will help us learn how best to provide validation and affirm that students" do belong at and can succeed at the university (p. 92).

Implications for Practice. In order to maximally help students succeed, faculty and staff need to work together to create a validating campus culture and environment. One possible approach is a shift of perspective transferring responsibility from the students to the staff and faculty (Do Huynh, 2018). McNair et al. (2016) argue for the necessity for campuses to be "student-ready" campuses, as opposed to the previously held notion for students to be "college-ready." A "student-ready" campus can begin with faculty and staff who are prepared to understand, address, and support student needs. This includes the understanding of campus demographics and awareness of how

specific populations, like first-generation college students may face barriers to success. However, as Azima (2020) reminds administrators, it is imperative for institutional members to avoid viewing students from a deficit perspective. Efforts should not imply that first-generation college students themselves are responsible for the challenges and barriers to success they encounter (Patton Davis & Museus, 2019). Such efforts should instead recognize that all students have positive attributes “as well as assets and knowledge that the student has brought from their past and continues to exhibit during their journey in college” (Do Huynh, 2018 p. 164). Museus and Chang (2021) conclude that campuses have the capacity to construct environments that promote belonging among first-generation college students and that validation can “mediate the impact of other [negative] elements of campus environments” (p. 371). English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric has much potential to help validate students by valuing their experiences and adjusting curriculum and pedagogy to consider such experience, but the validation could be much more successful if it occurred consistently across campus.

It is my hope that the themes from this study could be used to open conversations and foster connections across campus to help the entire university community to ask: How can we offer and maximize genuinely validating experiences for students that are not based on stereotypes and incomplete assumptions? Existing programs and initiatives to aid in students retention and success such as the Marquette Core Curriculum, Educational Opportunity Program, Emerging Scholars Program, Office of Student Education and Student Success and Division of Student Affairs’ First-Generation Student Network, the I’m First student organization, the new campus-wide

Lemonis Center for Student Success would be generative sites for collaboration to ensure more cohesively validating experiences for all students. For example, recall Anya's reticence to take English 1001 during her first year of college due to her previous invalidating experiences learning English and writing. Had English 1001 instructors and Anya's advisors had more opportunities to interact and discuss how to holistically support students, perhaps she could have enrolled in and benefitted from increased writing skill and confidence earlier in her college career. A comprehensive, integrative approach as advocated for by Kinzie and Kuh (2017) could ensure collaboration and wide coverage to more wholistically support student success.

Recommendations for Future Research. This case study provides insight into how students experience academic and interpersonal validation in the first-year writing classroom. Though the findings resulted in themes that described validation as perceived by the student, confirmed English 1001 as a site of validation, and further illuminated students' self-perception of their first-generation college student identity, these themes could yield different results depending on student population, sample size, curricular changes, and at other campuses. For example, future studies could include a larger sample pool of students, which would also help decrease selection bias as the students who agreed to participate in the study were more engaged and therefore more well-positioned for success in English 1001.

The study identified that instructor feedback was important in contributing to student experiences of validation. Another case study approach collecting instructor feedback and student perceptions of that feedback could provide generative insight into

how comments on student writing might help bolster experiences of validation. For example, Yeager et al. (2014) developed the concept of wise feedback—emphasizing the teacher’s high standards and belief that the middle school students they studied were capable of meeting those standards—as increasing the likelihood of students submitting a revision of an essay, improving the quality of their final drafts, and reducing the racial achievement gap between white and Black students. Additionally, current scholarship in writing studies such as Anson et al.’s (2016) national, multi-institutional study, supports the idea that specific interventions in the writing process matter more in learning to write rather than how much students are writing. Exploration of specific writing process interventions could be generative to connect with validation theory. Further qualitative research examining the nuances of how students experience validation in other classroom and campus contexts, and which learning opportunities are most salient could further extend the study’s conclusions. Similar case studies investigating instructor feedback and interventions could be helpful for deeper understanding of the role of validation in student success.

Additional longitudinal research could also shed further light on the relationship between first-generation college students, validation, and grade-point averages, attrition, graduation, and prolonged experiences of academic and interpersonal engagement during their time at Marquette. This longitudinal approach would offer further insight into connections between English 1001, validation, and student success. Overall, there are ample research opportunities to increase knowledge and understanding of how student validation is influenced by experiences in first-year

writing. Future research can continue to provide clarity on the transferability of these findings to other institutions and more insight into how student build internal validation over time.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that students experience academic and interpersonal validation in a first-year writing class, English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric, and that the validation contributes to their ability to view themselves as capable of success in college. Thematically, students experienced academic validation through making personal connections to the curriculum and campus community, receiving validation from their instructor, and they were able to describe how the course helps contribute to their intellectual development. They experienced interpersonal validation through making meaningful in-class connections with their peers and recognizing their belief in their ability to succeed. These findings support three main implications for practice: continuing the anti-racist cultural rhetoric framing of Unit 1, including the three mini-analysis assignments and opportunities for reflection; introducing instructors to validation and educating them on opportunities to administer it to help marginalized students succeed; and creating partnerships with other campus initiatives aimed at supporting student success. The study's findings also support avenues for future research including considering instructor feedback techniques, larger sample sizes, other research sites, and longitudinal follow-up.

The first-year writing classroom has potential to validate students, particularly for underrepresented populations, like first-generation students, as creators of knowledge and foster connection to the campus community which positively contributes to their success. As Costa (2017) reflects, “one of the most inspiring parts of Rendón’s findings is that students’ lives were often transformed by just one caring adult who was willing to reach out and build a human connection to validate that the student had the potential to succeed” (p. 15). English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric offers many opportunities to apply validation theory and create transformative educational experiences that validate and support the success of all learners.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: COURSE DESCRIPTION, LEARNING OUTCOMES, AND PROMPTS

Course Description

This course aims to help students develop their abilities to communicate effectively in writing, speaking, and across multimedia for diverse audiences. Grounded in rhetorical principles, the course focuses on helping students to read and analyze texts critically and put their own ideas into conversation with those of others.

Marquette Core Curriculum Learning Outcomes

This course is part of the Marquette University Marquette Core Curriculum. This course introduces the following Marquette Core Curriculum learning outcomes:

Responsible & Ethical Communicators

Marquette students will be able to responsibly and ethically use written, spoken and visual communication to express ideas, create meaning, build relationships, foster understanding, and advocate for a better tomorrow.

Moral and Ethical Actors

Marquette students will be able to articulate appropriate professional and personal judgments that are rooted in an ethical and moral foundation and informed by Catholic, Jesuit thought. They will use these foundations to make decisions that promote stronger communities and a just society.

Citizens with Purpose

Marquette students will develop a sense of purpose professionally, personally, and as global citizens who demonstrate critically reflective discernment processes that are rooted in their theological, intellectual, and personal commitments.

Course Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Develop ideas and arguments informed by inquiries that involve the acquisition and critical analysis of diverse sources, including academic and nonacademic texts.
- Express informed ideas and arguments in multimedia writing and speaking for different audiences.
- Represent information, ideas, and points of view fairly, accurately, and in ways that are accessible to others.
- Critically reflect on their performance and growth as ethical communicators.

Unit 1 Pre-Writing Prompt

After watching Chimamanda Adichie's talk "The Danger of a Single Story," please take 10-15 minutes to free-write on the following questions.

- How were you perceived prior to college? Which identities were visible to others and which ones were hidden?
- What communities, groups, and activities shaped your story in high school?
- Who do you want to become at Marquette and how do you hope to get there? You might think about identities (ie scientist, athlete, roommate) or characteristics (ie curious, determined, brave)

Unit 1 Post-Writing Prompt

As we conclude unit 1, please take 10-15 minutes to think back to our first week of class and Adichie's "Danger of a Single Story" TedTalk. Consider the following:

- Whose stories have you encountered in your first month at Marquette? Consider your experiences both inside the classroom and out.
- How have you listened to those stories? How have they changed the "single stories" you heard before about different groups or people?

Final Reflective Essay Prompt

Your roughly 3-4 page double spaced reflective essay is intended help you demonstrate what you've accomplished this semester and assess the ways your writing has changed. It should also help you recognize your strengths and areas to keep working on to improve your writing.

Specifically, be sure to:

- 1) Explain the specific things you learned about reading, writing, rhetoric, and communicating in this course. You might use the course outcomes to organize your ideas or to brainstorm what you've learned. The course outcomes are:

- Develop ideas and arguments shaped by a **process of inquiry** and understanding of sources, including academic and nonacademic texts that represent both dominant and underrepresented perspectives
 - Demonstrate **rhetorical knowledge** through their ability to analyze contexts and audiences and create tailored multimedia texts that represent information accurately and accessibly
 - Engage in a **process of writing** including overlapping phases of invention, synthesis of ideas and information, and revision undertaken in response to others' feedback and self-evaluation
 - **Reflect** on their performance and growth as ethical rhetors striving for effective written and spoken communication given the rhetorical situation and standards set by this course.
- 2) Reference specific examples from your writing as evidence of what you learned. For example, if you are showing that you have gained rhetorical knowledge, you might talk about an example from your mini analysis that demonstrates your ability to analyze rhetorical effects in relation to situation and audience.

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

Consent Form for Classroom Instructor

Researchers:

Lillian Campbell, Ph.D, Associate Professor of English at Marquette University
lillian.campbell@marquette.edu | 414-288-5266

Jenna Green, Assistant Teaching Professor of English at Marquette University
jenna.green@marquette.edu | 414-288-3468

Please note that I cannot guarantee the confidentiality of information sent by e-mail.

Researchers' statement

I am asking you to be in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what I would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When I have answered all your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent."

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study investigates the effects of an anti-racist first year writing curriculum on student and instructor experience and its alignment with Jesuit mission and values. This research can offer insights into the importance of anti-racist writing curriculum and contribute to practical activities such as instruction, teacher training, and curriculum development. It will inform a growing body of research on anti-racist teaching practices in the writing classroom.

STUDY PROCEDURES

We will be observing first year writing courses, collecting student writing, interviewing students, surveying first year writing students, and interviewing first year writing instructors. We are asking you to participate in 1-2 semi-structured interviews to discuss your experiences teaching English 1001 and to share course documents with the researchers including assignments, in-class presentations, and activities. Researchers may also ask to observe select class sessions and take field notes.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

There is a risk of breach of confidentiality. There are no other known risks from participating.

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

Your participation in this study will help me learn about pedagogical practices in first year writing, especially related to anti-racist pedagogy. You will not directly benefit.

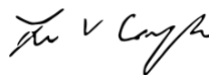
OTHER INFORMATION

All information about you will be kept confidential. I will code the study data by assigning pseudonyms to students and instructors and store the reference document linking pseudonyms to identifying information in a separate, secure location from the rest of my data. I will delete the document when I no longer need it to de-identify the data to reduce the risk of breach of confidentiality to the subjects. I will delete study data after ten years. Your name will not be used in publications or presentations of my results.

Your participation in the study is voluntary and you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate you may withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. Your decision will not affect your standing at or continuing employment at Marquette University.

Government or university staffs sometimes review studies such as this one to make sure they are being done safely and legally. If a review of this study takes place, your records may be examined. The reviewers will protect your privacy. The study records will not be used to put you at legal risk of harm.

Lillian Campbell



Printed name of investigator

Signature

Date

Jenna Green



Printed name of investigator

Signature

Date

Subject's statement

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later about the research, I can ask the researcher listed above. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the Marquette Office of Research Compliance at (414) 288-7570. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

_____ I am 18 or over and am therefore eligible to participate in this study.

_____ I give my permission for the researcher to collect classroom documents.

_____ I do NOT give my permission for the researcher to collect classroom documents.

_____ I give my permission for researchers to observe select class sessions and take notes.

_____ I do NOT give my permission for researchers to observe select class sessions/ take notes.

_____ I give my permission to participate in 1-2 audio-recorded semi-structured interviews about my experiences teaching the Foundations in Rhetoric curriculum.

_____ I do NOT give my permission to participate in 1-2 audio-recorded semi-structured interviews about my experiences teaching the Foundations in Rhetoric curriculum.

Printed name of subject

Signature of subject

Date

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

In-Class Recruitment Script

To be presented in participating FiR sessions towards the end of the course.

Hello. My name is _____ and I am _____ in the English department at Marquette University. I am researching the cultural rhetorics unit in first year writing courses at Marquette. I am here to give you a bit of background on the study and to see if you are willing to participate. Our research is interested in understanding the impact of a cultural rhetorics unit on student and instructor experience and its alignment with Jesuit mission and values. This research can offer insights into the importance of anti-racist writing curriculum and contribute to practical activities such as instruction, teacher training, and curriculum development. It will inform a growing body of research on anti-racist teaching practices in the writing classroom. To participate, I ask you to give consent to collect your writing from class.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Your participation will have no effect on your course performance or grades. We will collect consent forms today and after course grades are submitted, we will contact your instructor to request writing from students that have agreed to participate. Therefore, your instructor will not know if you participated in this study until after grades are submitted.

Please feel free to ask me any questions at this time. The consent form has more contact information.

Do you have any questions?

Thank you for your help and have a nice class.

APPENDIX D: RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

Consent Form for Students

SUSTAINING AN ANTI-RACIST CULTURAL RHETORICS UNIT IN FYW

Researcher:

Lillian Campbell, Ph.D, Associate Professor of English at Marquette University
lillian.campbell@marquette.edu | 414-288-5266

Jenna Green, Assistant Teaching Professor of English at Marquette University
jenna.green@marquette.edu | 414-288-3468

Please note that I cannot guarantee the confidentiality of information sent by e-mail.

Researchers' statement

I am asking you to be in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what I would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When I have answered all your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent."

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study investigates the effects of an anti-racist first year writing curriculum on student and instructor experience and its alignment with Jesuit mission and values. This research can offer insights into the importance of anti-racist writing curriculum and contribute to practical activities such as instruction, teacher training, and curriculum development. It will inform a growing body of research on anti-racist teaching practices in the writing classroom.

STUDY PROCEDURES

We will be observing first year writing courses, collecting student writing, interviewing students, surveying first year writing students, and interviewing first year writing instructors. We are asking you to consent to **collecting select writing from the course (to be submitted by your instructor)**. We will collect consent forms today and after course grades are submitted, we will contact your instructor to request writing from students that have agreed to participate. Therefore, your instructor will not know if you participated in this study until after grades are submitted.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

There is a risk of breach of confidentiality. There are no other known risks from participating.

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

Your participation in this study will help me learn about pedagogical practices in first year writing, especially related to anti-racist pedagogy and Jesuit mission integration. You will not directly benefit.

OTHER INFORMATION

All information about you will be kept confidential. I will use this consent form to generate a list of students for your instructor to collect your writing. After the writing is collected, it will be anonymized and consent forms will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in publications or presentations of my results.

Your participation in the study is voluntary and you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate you may withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. Your decision will not affect your grades or relationship with your professor in Foundations in Rhetoric or enrollment at Marquette University.

Government or university staffs sometimes review studies such as this one to make sure they are being done safely and legally. If a review of this study takes place, your records may be examined. The reviewers will protect your privacy. The study records will not be used to put you at legal risk of harm.

Lillian Campbell



Printed name of investigator

Signature

Date

Jenna Green



Printed name of investigator

Signature

Date

Subject's statement

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later about the research, I can ask the researcher listed above. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the Marquette Office of Research Compliance at (414) 288-7570. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

_____ I am 18 or over and am therefore eligible to participate in this study.

_____ I give my permission for the researcher to collect classroom writing.

_____ I do NOT give my permission for the researcher to collect classroom writing.

_____ I am interested in participating in 1 semi-structured interview relating to this research for a small stipend. You can contact me at:

_____ (email)

Printed name of subject

Signature of subject

Date

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol for Students

General Background

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
 - How many years have you been at Marquette?
 - What are you studying (major(s)? minor(s)?)
 - How do you identify in terms of sex and/or gender?
 - How do you identify in terms of race and/or ethnicity?

2. Do you consider yourself to be a first-generation college student (meaning that your parents did not obtain a bachelor's degree)?
 - How do you think being a first-generation college student has impacted you at Marquette?

3. How many first-generation college students do you think there are at Marquette?
 - Have you met any other first-generation college students?
 - How do you think your experience might differ from multigenerational students (students whose parents did graduate from a 4-year college)?

4. How would you describe yourself as a writer and your writing abilities? Can you share some details about your past writing?

5. What did you expect from taking English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric?

Writing Assignment Discussion

I asked you to bring an assignment that you think is a good example of your writing from English 1001. We'll shift now into discussion of that assignment.

6. Can you tell me about a piece of writing from English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric? Could you walk me through, in as much detail as possible, your process

for this piece of writing? Can you describe the end product in detail? Could you tell me about the most difficult aspect of composing this piece of writing?

7. What kinds of feedback did you get from your instructor?
8. What kinds of feedback did you get from your peers?
9. Did anyone else help you or give you feedback on your assignment?
10. What did you learn from the writing assignment?
11. In the process of writing this assignment, do you feel like your intellectual contributions were valued?
12. In the process of writing this assignment, do you feel like your identities were valued?
13. How did your writing assignment and experience connect to your other classes, or experience on campus? Did you see any overlaps or similarities?

Validation and Success

14. What was it like to arrive on campus for you at the start of the year?
15. How do you feel being at Marquette now?
16. What, if anything, has helped you feel more connected to or welcome at the university?
17. Who, if anyone, has helped you feel more connected to or welcome at the university?
18. Did anything about your English 1001: Foundations in Rhetoric course make you feel more connected to or welcome at Marquette?
19. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experiences?

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol for Instructors

The following is a sample protocol for an instructor interview

General Background

1. Can you give me some background on your teaching experiences in first year writing at Marquette?
 - How long have you been teaching composition at Marquette? Elsewhere?
 - Have you taught different versions of the curriculum?
 - If so, how would you describe the current version of the curriculum? What makes it distinct?
2. What are your big picture goals for students' understanding of race and language coming out your FiR class?
 - What aspects of the curriculum contribute most to those goals?
 - What aspects of the curriculum do you see as most successful? Why?
 - What aspects of the curriculum do you see as least successful? Why?
3. Where do you see students drawing connections between the first unit's focus in FiR and the remaining three units?
 - What readings have you chosen to help students bridge between units?
 - What similarities do you emphasize for students across assignments?
4. How have students with different educational and cultural backgrounds responded to the course's focus on race and language?
 - Are there certain kinds of students that you think benefit more from this revised curriculum? Why?
 - Have you made revisions to help the curriculum to reach a larger number of students or a wider variety of experiences?
 - What aspects of the curriculum might you change if your class demographics changed? Why?

Assignment/Activity Discussion

I asked you to bring an assignment or class activity (or observed you teaching an assignment/class activity) that you believe contributes directly to the anti-racist orientation of this curriculum. We'll shift now into discussion that assignment/activity.

5. Why did you choose this assignment or activity? In what ways do you feel it contributes to your course's anti-racist orientation?
6. How does this assignment/activity fit into the arch of your course?
 - What unit is it part of? What comes before and after it?

- Where do you make connections for students to other assignments/activities?
7. How have students experienced this assignment/activity in the past?
- What aspects have come easily for them? What have they struggled with?
 - Are there certain kinds of students that you think experience this assignment/activity as more challenging? Why?
 - What revisions might you make in the future to reach a larger number of students with this assignment/activity?
 - What aspects of this assignment/activity might you change if your class demographics changed? Why?

APPENDIX G: SCREENING SURVEY

Demographic Screening for Interview Recruitment

Students who opt-in to be focal students and provide their email address in the Consent Form (Appendix D) will be sent this screening questionnaire via email, administered via Qualtrics. Responses will be used to recruit focal participants for semi-structured interviews.

The following is a sample survey for FiR Students

Demographic Questions

- What is the highest level of education that either of your parents have received?
 - Some high school
 - High school diploma or GED
 - Associates degree
 - Baccalaureate degree
 - Masters degree
 - Doctorate degree
 - Other: _____ (please specify)
- I identify my gender as...
 - Male
 - Female
 - Genderqueer/Non-binary
 - A gender not listed here: _____ (please specify)
 - Prefer not to say
- How do you identify in terms of race or ethnicity? [check all that apply]
 - Asian or Pacific Islander
 - Black or African American
 - Hispanic or Latino
 - Native American or Alaskan Native
 - White or Caucasian
 - A race/ethnicity not listed here: _____ (please specify)
 - Prefer not to say
- Do you speak a language other than English at home?
 - Yes: _____ (please specify)
 - No

APPENDIX H: CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS PROTOCOL

The following is the initial protocol for classroom observations.

All instructors participating will be reminded that these observations are for research purposes and are not related to evaluations or employment at Marquette University. PIs will be prepared to observe:

- Instructors' materials including: assigned readings, assignments, and in-class activities
- Instructors' pedagogical and classroom management techniques
- Students engagement with class material
- Classroom discussions and questions

I will utilize descriptive field notes during the class sessions and make reflective notes post-observation.