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SANTA CRUZ

**EXAMINING COLLEGE 1 INSTRUCTORS' PEDAGOGICAL DECISION-  
MAKING**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

SOCIOLOGY

by

Megan Alpine

June 2020

The Dissertation of Megan Alpine is  
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ABSTRACT  
Examining College 1 Instructors' Pedagogical Decision-Making  
Megan Alpine

Since the founding of UC Santa Cruz in 1965, first-year undergraduate students have enrolled in a class called Core: a seminar offered by their college that introduces students to the theme of the college and, in recent decades, college-level writing. Beginning in Fall 2018, Core was reformed into a new course called College 1. Unlike Core, College 1 focuses on academic reading rather than writing and includes a common set of learning outcomes designed around the “ACMES:” analysis, critical thinking, metacognition, engagement across difference, and self-efficacy. This dissertation examines the implementation of College 1 from the perspectives of the instructors who first taught it in Fall 2018. Drawing from interviews, classroom observations, and an original survey, I examine how instructors understood the College 1 learning outcomes and taught these in their classrooms. This study sheds light on the process of implementing curricular change in higher education and, more broadly, on how individuals’ sensemaking shapes change in institutions. Three main findings emerged from this study: College 1 instructors tended to adopt explicit, implicit, or oppositional approaches to teaching the course learning outcomes; instructors’ classroom practices were related to their sense of autonomy over their classes; and a central challenge articulated by instructors was the integration of Chinese international students into their untracked classes. From these findings, I offer practical recommendations for future professional development trainings for College 1 instructors.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In Fall 2018, first-year students at UC Santa Cruz walked into a course that was new to students and instructors alike: a class focused on academic reading skills called College 1. College 1 is a result of two years of faculty and administrators' deliberations over how best to reform a course called "Core" – a writing-centered course that had been offered since the founding of UCSC in 1965 and was aligned with the theme of each UCSC college.<sup>1</sup> A key impetus for these deliberations was the criticism, shared by many faculty and administrators, that the Core course was wildly inconsistent across the colleges. The course did not have a common set of learning outcomes (apart from those tied to the Composition requirement it fulfilled), unevenly emphasized writing skills, and took many different forms and credit loads across colleges; it also "tracked" students according to their writing abilities, which resulted in inadvertent segregation along lines of race and class.<sup>2</sup> These deliberations around reforming Core culminated in a proposal for an overhaul of the undergraduate first-year curriculum, put forth by the Council of Provosts and the Writing Program, that became known as the Academic Literacy Curriculum (ALC). The ALC replaces the Core course with College 1, re-interprets the writing requirements for UCSC undergraduate students, and creates new pathways for students to fulfill these requirements. College 1, as defined in the ALC, teaches what ALC authors call the "ACMES" – analysis, critical thinking, metacognition, engagement with others across

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<sup>1</sup> Core has been offered throughout the history of UCSC, with several exceptions. The "History of Core" chapter describes changes to this course since 1965, including several colleges' decision to eliminate Core for a few years during the 1970s.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Abrams, interview with author, February 15, 2019.

difference, and self-efficacy – alongside academic reading skills (Abrams et al. 2017:5). The premise of the College 1 curriculum is the claim that, in order to become college-ready writers, undergraduate students must first become more adept *readers* of academic texts.

On paper, College 1 appears as a consistent, campus-wide curriculum centered on the ACMES and on reading, with slight variations in material according to the theme of each UCSC college. In practice, sections of College 1 vary enormously both across and within colleges. Instructors differ significantly in their interpretations of the College 1 curriculum; these include differences in their assignments, use of class time, readings, and the focus of their classes. College 1 is taught primarily by lecturers: non-tenure track instructors, most of whom hold PhDs, who are often hired part-time to teach specific undergraduate courses. These instructors hold degrees in a variety of disciplines, though few have degrees that specifically qualify them to teaching writing or reading at the college level. The lecturers and other teaching faculty (Graduate Student Instructors and tenure-track faculty) who taught College 1 in Fall 2018 often carried heavy teaching loads: many taught multiple sections of College 1, including across UCSC colleges, and some faculty taught different courses across several higher education institutions. In Fall quarter 2018, UC Santa Cruz employed 565 tenure-track faculty members, 300 lecturers, and 17 “other teaching faculty,” making lecturers 34 percent of the faculty population (Office of Institutional Research, Assessment 2018).

The instructors who teach College 1, many of whom had previously taught Core, play a crucial role in mediating how the campus-wide ALC reforms are implemented in classrooms across UCSC. At the same time, few instructors were involved in developing the ALC or the College 1 curriculum at their college; some learned about the reforms only a few months before teaching the course. To better understand how the ALC moved from formal curricular policy to everyday classroom practices, this dissertation examines the implementation of College 1 from the perspectives of instructors who taught the course in Fall 2018.

### ***Research questions***

My decision to focus on how instructors understand and make decisions about teaching College 1 both fills a gap in the ALC's self-assessment plan, which focuses on student outcomes, and engages with broader scholarly debates by providing an in-depth analysis of the *process* through which a curricular reform and the learning outcomes it introduces are adopted in practice. Existing higher education scholarship considers how curricular reform happens, how instructors respond to reforms, and how effective reforms are in achieving their goals (Anakin et al. 2018; Bantwini 2010; Colbeck 2002; Harpe and Thomas 2009; Kirk and MacDonald 2001; Lattuca and Pollard 2016; Mellegård and Pettersen 2016; Roberts 2015); other scholarship in higher education and writing studies considers the value of learning outcomes for student learning in higher education settings and how university instructors respond to and make use of learning outcomes (Allan 1996; Behm, Glau, and Holdstein 2012; Harrington et al. 2001, 2005; Hussey and Smith 2002, 2003; Ikuenobe 2001; Maher

2004; Prøitz 2010; Prøitz et al. 2017; Stoller 2015; Sweetman 2017, 2019). This study uniquely brings these debates into conversation by examining how instructors make sense of the new learning outcomes introduced by a university-wide curricular reform.

Three central research questions guide this study:

1. How do College 1 instructors teach the College 1 learning outcomes centered on the “ACMES” in their classrooms?
2. How do they make decisions about teaching practices related to the learning outcomes?
3. How do they navigate teaching-related dilemmas that arise in the implementation of the College 1 curriculum?

To address these questions, I conducted in-depth interviews with and classroom observations of ten College 1 instructors across six colleges at UCSC, distributed an online survey to all Fall 2018 College 1 instructors, and interviewed two faculty members involved in the development of the ALC. This study has important implications for both the future of College 1 at UCSC and, on a larger scale, for scholarship in sociology, higher education, and writing studies.

Conceptually, this study draws from recent developments in institutional theory, “inhabited institutions” and sensemaking theory, that examine how people within institutions make sense of and enact institutional change (Hallett and Ventresca 2006; Weick 1995). The study engages with a diverse set of scholarly debates that ask how people make sense of and enact institutional change, how instructors engage with

curricular reforms, how to understand the value of learning outcomes in higher education, and how to teach academic literacy and the ACMES at the college level.

***Researcher positionality***

The inspiration for this project emerged out of my experiences teaching undergraduate writing at UCSC and my broader interests in pedagogy. Since Winter quarter of 2017, I have taught a course called Writing 2: a writing course required of most UCSC undergraduates that teaches analytical writing and research skills. Each quarter I teach the course I gain a deeper understanding of the challenges first-year students face in their writing – and at the same time, I become troubled by more unanswered questions about teaching writing. How do students learn how to write? Can a class “teach” writing, or is this a skill that develops only with practice? Are students with low reading comprehension skills doomed to be “bad” writers? What makes for a “good” college essay, and what biases inform my vision of “good?” Which students succeed in writing classes and which do not? How can writing instruction serve all students equitably and justly?

My choice to study instructors who teach College 1 for my dissertation speaks to some of these questions that I ask about my own teaching and, more generally, about the promise of higher education to help address social inequities. College 1 appeared to me, when I first chose to study the course, as a reform that advances equity and justice goals: it “untracks” students’ placement in sections to help develop community across differences, it explicitly teaches a skill (academic reading) in which minoritized students arrive at UCSC disproportionately underprepared, and it

names “self-efficacy” (self-confidence, in other words) as an outcome of the course and which, like reading, is unevenly shared among first-year students upon entering the university. By studying how instructors make sense of the class, I wanted to know how they understand the goals of the class, how (and if) they try to advance equity through their teaching, and what challenges they face in teaching this new curriculum.

This dissertation also has roots in my own experiences and identity that extend further than my brief experience teaching Writing 2. My identity, life experiences, and education are all inextricably bound up with my interests and values, including those that shape this dissertation. As an elementary school student in Southern California, I attended a well-funded public school, was placed in a Gifted and Talented program, and was given plenty of time, by my college-educated parents, to work on homework at home. I progressed easily through each grade level. In middle and high school in suburban Idaho, I attended public schools that offered some Honors and (in high school) Advanced Placement classes. I worked a few hours a week after school, but not by economic necessity. I found that, for me, hard work in school was consistently rewarded with high grades and encouragement from my teachers.

Given the ease with which I had moved through school up until college, I was surprised to find myself struggling as an undergraduate student at a small, private liberal arts college in Portland, Oregon. Many of my classmates came from elite private high schools and had already read the “Classics” that dominated the syllabi of our first-year introductory courses: texts from Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Homer,

among others. Our first academic assignment, required of all entering first-year students, was an essay on the topic of the Enlightenment. This assignment followed a lecture, given to the entering class shortly after Convocation, that reflected on the present-day relevance of Immanuel Kant's essay, "What is Enlightenment?" I did not know who Immanuel Kant was, and had only a surface-level understanding of "The Enlightenment." Compared to my classmates, I felt drastically underprepared to succeed in college – an experience shared by many undergraduate students<sup>3</sup> that, in part, informs my interest in studying a curricular reform intended to "level the playing field" among first-year students.

At the same time that my undergraduate experience challenged me, it also introduced me to rewarding and engaging intellectual conversations in seminar-style classrooms. These seminars are ideal against which I still compare (sometimes consciously, sometimes not) the classes I have taken, taught, and observed as a graduate student. The majority of the classes I took as an undergraduate had 30 or fewer students and followed a similar format: the professor gave context for the authors and readings assigned, often in a short lecture at the beginning of class, but students were primarily responsible for asking questions, finding relevant examples from the texts, responding to each other, and carrying the discussion forward. Not all of these classes generated brilliant discussions – there were often periods of silence –

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<sup>3</sup> Many scholars have documented "imposter phenomenon," also known as "imposter syndrome," among high-achieving students and professionals (Clance and Imes 1978; Hutchins 2015; Kolligian and Sternberg 1991; Peteet, Montgomery, and Weekes 2015). "Imposter phenomenon" refers to the experience of feeling as though you are not deserving of the success you have achieved, are incompetent in comparison with your peers, and are at risk of being discovered to be a "fraud" (Kolligian and Sternberg 1991).

but many of them did. Today, when I lead discussions in my own Writing 2 class or observe College 1 classes, I notice the extent to which these discussions resemble or depart from the engaging and thoughtful seminars I participated in as an undergraduate student.

Both my experiences of struggle and intellectual engagement during college help shape the questions that interest me about College 1. My experience struggling through my first paper on the Enlightenment pushes me to wonder: can College 1 help “level the playing field” among first-year students who are unevenly prepared to read college-level texts, and what do instructors do to facilitate this? At the same time, my memories of rich discussions of academic texts with my classmates in seminar classes lead me to consider: what do seminar discussions look like in a College 1 classroom? How do students engage with and across their differences in these discussions? Throughout this dissertation, I aim to recognize the influence of my identity and experiences on my perception of College 1 instructors, while also allowing my research to broaden my perspective on the possibilities for what teaching and student engagement can look like in an undergraduate classroom. Research questions and a methodology centered on interviews with, observations of, and survey data from instructors reflect this commitment to centering instructors’ perspectives in my analysis of College 1.

### *Chapter overviews*

Chapter two draws from oral histories of UCSC faculty and administrators, institutional data, policy documents, interviews with current faculty, and historical



accounts of UCSC to describe five decades of developments in and reforms to the Core course since it was first offered in Fall 1965. The chapter gives a detailed account of the development of the ALC, a process which began in 2016. The chapter concludes by comparing the ALC and College 1 to earlier reforms to Core in order to highlight the novel contributions of the new reforms.

Chapter three introduces the theoretical framing of this study: institutional theory. The chapter offers a broad overview and history of this field, as well as its more recent applications in higher education scholarship. The chapter then explores two recent developments in institutional theory that inform this study's approach, inhabited institutions and sensemaking theory, both of which center on how institutional actors make sense of and enact institutional change. The chapter concludes by describing the relevance of these two theoretical approaches to the case of College 1.

Chapter four defines the methods of this study, including data collection, limitations, and data analysis. The chapter also describes the sample of College 1 instructors who took part in the study, the recruitment process, and response rates.

Chapter five addresses the first set of research findings of the study: College 1 instructors' approaches to teaching the ACMES learning outcomes. This chapter engages with higher education and writing studies scholarship on the value of learning outcomes for student learning and how best to teach using learning outcomes. I argue that instructors tend to take one of several distinct approaches to teaching the College 1 outcomes: an explicit approach, in which instructors name the

ACMES skills in their teaching and assign materials that directly address each skill; an implicit approach, in which instructors embed ACMES skills in their teaching without naming them; or an oppositional approach, in which instructors critique the use of learning outcomes altogether.

Chapter six presents the second set of research findings on College 1 instructors' sense of autonomy over their teaching. I examine the relationship between instructors' sense of autonomy and their classroom practices, differentiating instructors by high, moderate, and low senses of autonomy. I find that College 1 instructors' perceptions of their autonomy over their courses profoundly shapes their decision-making around their teaching. I then consider these findings in the context of scholarship in higher education, sociology, and writing studies that describes the relationships among faculty members' senses of autonomy, identity, and responses to change.

Chapter seven addresses the third set of research findings: College 1 instructors' perceptions of and decision-making around "untracking" and one of its key impacts, the increase in Chinese international students in their classes. This chapter begins by examining a larger trend in US and California higher education toward recruiting international students, particularly from China. I then examine how these instructors made sense of and navigated challenges related to teaching Chinese international students in their classrooms. I situate these findings alongside higher education and writing studies scholarship on supporting international students in US higher education.

Chapter eight concludes the dissertation by providing an overview of the study, revisiting the findings in the context of the study's research questions, considering its implications for institutional theory, offering recommendations for practice at and beyond UCSC, reviewing limitations of the study, and offering directions for future research.

## CHAPTER 2: HISTORY OF CORE

### *Introduction*

Since its founding in 1965, UC Santa Cruz has branded itself as a university that is “different” from other large public universities and the other UCs: different because it was developed as a system of small colleges, each with a distinct thematic focus, that would prioritize high-quality undergraduate education (Jarrell 1988:8–9). This college system, envisioned by UC President Clark Kerr, drew from the British model of universities, which centered on the undergraduate experience and strong ties between students and faculty. This model departed significantly from the German model, which emphasized research productivity and which shaped most public universities in the US, including UC Berkeley (Jarrell 1988:7). The structure of UCSC and the selection of its site were informed by Kerr’s and by founding UCSC Chancellor Dean McHenry’s vision for a “alternative campus,” made up of “small communit[ies]” at each college, that would be located in a “beautiful and inspiring place” (Jarrell 1988:24,26,36).<sup>4</sup> The campus was composed initially of one college, Cowell College, and what its founders called “Boards of Study,” a term borrowed from the University of Sussex that referred to a variation on traditional academic departments (Jarrell 1988:30). McHenry envisioned that, eventually, UCSC would expand to include as many as 20 colleges serving up to 27,500 students (Noreña

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<sup>4</sup> Some students had a different interpretation of the layout of UCSC than that described by Kerr and McHenry. At the 1969 UCSC Commencement ceremony, Kerr recalls, a group of students took the stage and accused Kerr and McHenry of designing a campus made up of small Colleges, “in order to reduce the revolutionary fervor of the students by putting them off here in the wilderness and creating a campus which would take their minds away from the revolution” (Jarrell 1988:36). Students have reiterated this accusation at multiple points throughout the history of UCSC (Noreña 2004:186).

2004:37). Each UCSC college, in collaboration with the Boards of Study, would hire its own faculty across a range of disciplinary expertise, and these faculty would all participate in the teaching of multidisciplinary undergraduate courses: one- or two-year course sequences called “Core.”

The first cohort of first-year students at Cowell College, in 1965, was required to enroll in a two-year sequence of Core courses aligned with Cowell’s “bias” (not yet called a “theme”), which was “a humanistic view of the aims of learning” (Noreña 2004:93). Each subsequent college added to the campus – Stevenson (founded in 1966), Crown (1967), Merrill (1968), Porter (1969), Kresge (1971), Oakes (1972), Rachel Carson (1972), College Nine (2000), and College Ten (2002) – taught its own Core course centered on the particular thematic bent of the college.

In this chapter, I draw from oral histories of early UCSC faculty and administrators, historical accounts of the history of campus, institutional data on UCSC undergraduate demographics, minutes from Academic Senate meetings, interviews with faculty members involved with the development of College 1, and proposals for curricular reform put forth by faculty (as well as the responses they prompted) to piece together a history of reforms to the Core course. Unlike the findings chapters of this dissertation, this historical chapter centers administrators’ accounts of institution-level processes and decisions rather than instructors’ accounts of classroom-level changes. I take this approach for two reasons: first, instructors’ accounts of the changes to Core are largely absent from the archive of sources about this course; a chapter based solely on these limited accounts would overlook many of

the changes to the Core course described in institution-level accounts. Second, centering administrators’ accounts of changes to Core and the development of the ALC in this chapter illuminates the context in which decision about this course were being made. Changes to Core over the past five decades have largely been top-down, initiated by campus administrators and leaders rather than instructors. Centering this historical chapter on the accounts of administrators, rather than those of instructors, sheds light on how decisions about reforming Core have been made. My findings chapters, in contrast, will attempt to tell an alternative account of the history-in-the-making of College 1 by centering on frontline instructors’ perspectives.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I trace varied developments in the Core course from 1965 to 2016, when discussions leading to what would eventually be called “College 1” began. I situate these developments in the contexts in which they took place, including shifts in student demographics at UCSC, enrollment growth, and changes in campus administration. Then, I give a detailed account of the creation of the College 1 curriculum that highlights the conditions that created the impetus for this reform and the debates and scholarship that informed its development during 2016-18. Lastly, I consider what we learn by understanding College 1 in the context of reforms to the Core course that have taken place over the past five decades.

***Reforms to the Core course, 1965-2016***

<i>Year enacted</i>	<i>Change to Core</i>	<i>Colleges Impacted</i>
1966	End-of-year cumulative exam replaced by quarterly exams in Core.	Cowell College

1969	Number of Core seminars reduced, taught by faculty teams rather than individual faculty; content of Core seminars become aligned more closely with faculty interests than with college theme.	Crown College
1965-74	Teaching Assistants begin to replace faculty as instructors of Core; reduced number of Core classes offered; some Core classes become optional rather than required; some Core classes become “studio” classes rather than seminars; several colleges eliminate Core temporarily	All
1970s	UCSC creates a Writing Program; writing instruction becomes a central goal of Core	All
1985	Chancellor Sinsheimer calls for an evaluation of the Core courses; Vice Chancellor Moldave convenes faculty committee to make recommendations for the future of Core. Committee recommends that colleges employ more Graduate Student Instructors to teach Core and to standardize assessment of Core across the colleges.	All
1985	Academic Senate’s Committee on Educational Policy convenes Core course organizers from across the colleges to share their academic plans for Core. Committee calls for more campus-wide planning and assessment of Core, separating Core from the campus’ general education writing requirement, and increasing involvement of senior faculty in the teaching of Core.	All
2002	Committee on Educational Policy reviews Core course, finds that Core succeeds in developing writing skills among less prepared students and fostering sense of belonging, but is not challenging for highly prepared students.	All
2005	Academic Senate splits Composition general education requirement into two new requirements: Composition 1 and Composition 2. Most Core classes fulfilled Composition 1 requirement; honors Core classes fulfilled Composition 2 requirement. Core becomes formalized as a writing course.	All
2005	An 8-unit, Fall quarter “Jumbo” Core introduced, required of all first-year students	College Eight

2009	“Stretch” Core introduced at several colleges to teach Core over two quarters to ELWR-required students	College Nine, College Ten
2014	“Stretch” Core adopted by more colleges	College Eight, Oakes College, Kresge College, Porter College
2014	“Winter Core,” consisting of a 2-unit Fall course and 5-unit Winter course introduced	Crown College
2015	Writing Program introduces Multilingual Curriculum for international students; students in this program take remedial writing courses before enrolling in Core	All

*Figure 1: A timeline of reforms to the Core course, 1965-2016*

While the shift from Core to College 1 is singular in its renaming of this first-year course, it is not the only major reform the Core course has undergone. Since its establishment at the time of UCSC’s founding in 1965, Core has experienced a range of structural and pedagogical reforms across the colleges. Core began as a one- or two-year (depending on the college) “immersive learning experience” in “intense, intimate classes” that were taught by Senate faculty members (Council of Provosts 2016:25). It was initially conceived as an introduction to the college community and to university-level coursework (Noreña 2004:191), but was not intended as a writing course, because “in the earliest days students were expected to arrive at UCSC with writing skills intact” (Council of Provosts 2016:25). Carlos Noreña, former Provost of Stevenson College and Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at UCSC (1967-96), describes the first iteration of Core at Cowell College in the 1965-66 academic year – a two-year curriculum called “World Civilization:”

“On October 4 [1965], at 9:30am, 500 freshmen met in the Field House to attend the first introductory lecture given by Professor William Hitchcock. There were no ‘textbooks’ and only two final exams: the first at the end of the



first three quarters and another more comprehensive exam (six hours long) at the end of all six quarters. The reading list included roughly a book per week, with a grand total of approximately 60 books for the entire course. The group was divided into discussion seminars of 20 students each, led by regular faculty members – no TAs and no lecturers.” (Noreña 2004:71)

The first UCSC Chancellor, Dean McHenry, described the first year of Core at Cowell as both “a brilliant success and an abysmal failure” – a success in the quality of the lectures and the course’s interdisciplinary nature, but a failure for its lackluster discussion sections, excessive reading requirements, and a 20 percent failure rate for the final comprehensive exam (cited in Noreña 2004:72). By the next year, Cowell faculty had decided to give quarterly exams in the Core course rather than only end-of-year cumulative exams (Noreña 2004:73).

The first year of Core at Crown College, in 1967-68, had a similarly tumultuous start. Founded as a “college of scientists,” Crown offered a Core course called “Science, Culture, and Man;” the Fall quarter of this course centered on “the history and impact of technology in America,” Winter quarter on “science, philosophy and religion,” and Spring quarter on “the cosmos and the arts” (Noreña 2004:106). Students complained about the Core course openly; a May 1968 issue of the UCSC student publication, *The City on Hill Press*, was dedicated to student critiques of Crown Core – essentially, that it was not interesting to science majors (Noreña 2004:107). Crown Provost Kenneth Thimann defended the philosophy of the course, arguing that it provided necessary context for why scientific work matters. Still, Crown Core was reformed in 1969 to consist of “nine seminars, most of them interdisciplinary and taught by faculty teams” (Noreña 2004:107). Crown Core then

took the form of seminars loosely related to the college theme but which were, according to Noreña, “conveniently stretched to suit the intellectual taste of individual faculty members” (2004:107). Core courses included specialized seminars with titles like “Catholicism and Society” and “Race, Rats, and Riots” (Noreña 2004:107-8).

Data from the Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Policy Studies (IRAPS) show that over the course of Chancellor McHenry’s tenure, 1965-1974, the undergraduate population of the campus grew significantly – from 652 students in Fall 1965 to 4,666 students in Spring 1974 – while, at the same time, the Core courses across the colleges became fewer and more varied (2019). In the early 1970s, some administrators were “less inclined to provide incentives and to give financial support” to faculty who taught Core courses, since, in their view, Core courses were lacked “programmatically justification” (Noreña 2004:190). According to Noreña, “the first sign of decline [of Core] was the gradual pull-back of faculty and their replacement by TAs and/or part-time lecturers recruited by the college” (2004:191). As Carol Freeman, founding director of UCSC’s Writing Program, explained in her oral history, “[n]obody *wanted* to teach freshmen to write” when she arrived to the campus in 1974 (Freeman and Rabkin 2013:69). Core courses moved from “required” to “optional” in some colleges (Stevenson, Crown, Merrill), were replaced by “studio experiences” in College Five (now Porter), and were abandoned totally for several years in Oakes and College Eight (now Rachel Carson) (Noreña 2004:192-93). At the same time, according to the Council of Provosts, UCSC also developed a Writing Program that began with the hiring of the campus’ first writing

instructor at Oakes College in 1973, Don Rothman (Council of Provosts 2016:25; Freeman and Rabkin 2013:26). This new Writing Program then became “closely intertwined with the teaching of Core,” and Core took on a more writing-intensive focus (Council of Provosts 2016:25). Writing Program faculty increasingly taught the Core courses, and in the 1980s, the Writing Program offered “two-workload-credit tutorials for core course students who had not satisfied Subject A [later known as the Composition requirement,” deepening the connections between Core and Writing Program (Freeman and Rabkin 2013:93, 111).

The Core courses came under renewed scrutiny with the appointment of a new UCSC Chancellor in 1977, Robert Sinsheimer, who served in this role until 1987. Sinsheimer’s appointment followed the short, turbulent tenures of two Chancellors succeeding McHenry: Mark Christensen (1974-76) and Angus Taylor (1976-77). Undergraduate enrollment grew moderately during these three Chancellors’ tenures, hovering around 5,500 from 1974 to 1980. It then began to climb steadily, reaching 7,700 by the time of Sinsheimer’s departure in 1987 (IRAPS 2019). Sinsheimer, who arrived as an outsider to UCSC and the UC system, held a vision for the campus that departed significantly from that of UCSC’s founders: to bring UCSC into line with the rest of the research-oriented UC campuses (Noreña 2004:247). Sinsheimer called for a major “reorganization” of the college system at UCSC by doing away with faculty’s appointment to a college rather than an academic department and with the “college fellows” program, in which faculty were paid half their salary by a college (Noreña 2004:251). In his oral history, Sinsheimer reflected that, at the time of his

appointment as Chancellor, there was “no effective organization of the colleges; they were each going their own way” (1996:92). Still, Sinsheimer supported the continuation of the Core courses and the role of the colleges as “social and cultural centers” of the campus (Noreña 2004:257). John Dizikes, former Provost of Cowell College and Professor Emeritus of American Studies at UCSC (1965-2000), gave a less charitable assessment of Sinsheimer’s view of the colleges. Dizikes, in his oral history, stated that Sinsheimer “did not really believe in [the collegiate system]... he recognized that he had to put up with it, because so many of the faculty were still associated with it” (Dizikes and Vanderscoff 2012:80). Sinsheimer saw the diverse offerings of Core courses across the colleges as “funny and not very academically rigorous,” and thus in need of reform (cited in Noreña 2004:108).

By the early 1980s, under Sinsheimer’s reorganization, the Academic Senate and campus-wide administrators began to hold more power over undergraduate education on the campus. All courses apart from the college Core courses needed sponsorship from an academic division rather than a college (Noreña 2004:279). According to Dizikes, multi-quarter Core courses also became seen as “too great a demand” on students’ time as they needed “to start doing [coursework for] their major in their freshman year” – particularly, students majoring in the hard sciences (Dizikes and Vanderscoff 2012:83). In this context, Noreña writes, “Core courses’ quality and cost came under severe scrutiny” (Noreña 2004:279). Vice Chancellor Kivie Moldave convened a temporary committee consisting of the Crown Provost and four other faculty members in 1985 to review and make recommendations for the

future of Core courses. The committee's first recommendation was to "employ graduate students as section leaders in the Core courses" (Noreña 2004:279). Later, the committee presented a report to Vice Chancellor Moldave supporting the continuation of the Core courses as part of the first-year curriculum, though it called for "a cross-college evaluation mechanism" to maintain quality standards for the course (Noreña 2004:280).

At the same time, in Summer 1985, the Committee on Educational Policy (a permanent committee of the Academic Senate) brought together the "Core course organizers" from seven of the eight colleges to describe their college's curriculum and plan for the next academic year. The Committee on Educational Policy, Noreña writes, "was impressed by the commitment of the colleges to Core courses and praised their stated objectives;" however, the Committee noted that not all faculty were equally enthusiastic about Core, and they called for more "communal" planning of the course, more campus-wide "quality controls," a separation of Core from the campus' general education Composition requirement,<sup>5</sup> and the involvement of more senior faculty in the teaching of Core. The committee made the latter recommendation even as they recognized the "lack of proper incentives and rewards [for faculty] for doing so" – that is, faculty did not receive additional compensation for teaching Core (Noreña 2004:280). Sinsheimer continued to scrutinize the colleges in the years following these reports, but ultimately, Noreña finds, he "failed to *de jure* disestablish the UCSC colleges, or even to uproot the faith in the collegiate system

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<sup>5</sup> This recommendation was not implemented until the adoption of College 1 in Fall 2018.

that a large and influential section of the faculty still professed” (2004:262). Dizikes offers a more pessimistic assessment of Sinsheimer’s impact on the colleges, describing it as “ultimately a profoundly destructive legacy in terms of being able to sustain the collegiate system as such” (Dizikes and Vanderscoff 2012:84). The campus structure that Sinsheimer left when he resigned in 1987, both Noreña and Dizikes note, has remained largely intact up through the 2000s (Dizikes and Vanderscoff 2012:84; Noreña 2004:247).

The debate about the role of the colleges and the Core course quieted under the Chancellors who led UCSC during the late 1980s and 90s: Robert Stevens (1987-91), Karl Pister (1991-96), and M.R.C. Greenwood (1996-2005). Stevens argued for standardizing the Core courses across the colleges, but this vision that was never put into effect; he did succeed, however, in forming the Committee on Undergraduate Education, which further diminished the power of the colleges to make decisions about undergraduate curricula (Noreña 2004:307). By the mid-1990s, Noreña writes, just “[t]wo sectors of the UCSC community were still concerned with the role of the colleges: a small section of the student body and some of the college provosts” (2004:320). At the same time, during Stevens’ and Pister’s tenures, undergraduate enrollment stagnated, averaging between 8,000 and 9,000 undergraduates each year between 1987 and 1997 (IRAPS 2019). Then, under Chancellor Greenwood, UCSC added two new colleges (College Nine and College Ten), expanded total student enrollment (undergraduate and graduate) by 54 percent, hired 250 new faculty members, and expanded its number of academic programs by 52 percent (Luquis

2004). Data from IRAPS show a 45 percent increase in undergraduate enrollment during Greenwood's tenure, from 9,158 in Fall 1996 to 13,294 in Winter 2005 (IRAPS 2019).

In the same year as College Ten's founding, 2002, the Committee on Educational Policy reviewed the Core course, which prompted a variety of responses and reforms from the colleges and the Writing Program (Council of Provosts 2016:25). The review showed that Core was successful in "writing instruction for underprepared students, and providing a sense of belonging to a college community," but "was not doing as well at engaging the most highly prepared students" (Council of Provosts 2016:25). In 2005, the Academic Senate passed reforms proposed by the Council of Provosts and the Writing Program that split the earlier Composition requirement for undergraduates into two, Composition 1 and Composition 2, that would be fulfilled through the Core course (UC Santa Cruz 2016a:5).<sup>6</sup> The Composition requirement is one of three general education writing requirements for UCSC undergraduates; the others are the Entry Level Writing Requirement (ELWR), which is a prerequisite for the Composition requirement, and the Disciplinary Communication (called Writing-Intensive Requirement before 2009), which students take in courses offered by their major during their junior or senior year. Upon their arrival at UCSC, students are designated as either ELWR-satisfied or ELWR-required

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<sup>6</sup> Freeman, founding director of the UCSC Writing Program, saw this reform as a crucial moment in the history of Core at UCSC. With this reform, she states in her oral history, "for the first time in the whole history of the campus, the core courses satisfied a general education requirement. Without that, the core courses came within hairs' breadths of disappearing on numerous occasions... [after the Senate vote] suddenly the core courses were secure in a way that they had never been secure before" (Freeman and Rabkin 2013:118).

depending on their score on the Analytical Writing Placement Exam or equivalent coursework. With the 2005 reforms, most students fulfilled the new Composition 1 requirement through their Core class in Fall quarter, and then fulfilled the Composition 2 requirement through a class focused on research-based writing called Writing 2 in a later quarter; incoming first-year students with high scores on the Analytical Writing Placement Exam were placed into an honors Core course that fulfilled both Composition 1 and Composition 2 requirements. Core, with these reforms, became a one-quarter, thoroughly writing-centered class that fulfilled one or both of the new Composition requirements (Council of Provosts 2016:25).

After this reform in 2005, the Council of Provosts reports, “conditions rapidly changed” at UCSC (2016:25). They list a wide range of challenges related to undergraduate enrollment growth, changing student demographics, and program cuts:

“Changes included swift, unpredictable increases in the number of incoming frosh and swift hiring of new faculty at the colleges and in the Writing Program to teach them; sharp increases in the number of WR 20-series classes students needed to take to satisfy the ELWR after Core and an increase in the length of time and number of classes individual students needed to take to do so (more students persisting ELWR-required through a fourth quarter of enrollment); evidence of an increasing number of students who were, for tuition purposes, in-state students but still de facto English language learners; a steady decrease in the number of contact hours most ELWR-required students had with trained writing tutors; more pressure on the colleges to manage increasing frosh enrollments by filling every Core class to its limit and sometimes beyond; a sharp increase in enrollments by international students underprepared to read or write (and sometimes speak) effectively in standard English.” (Council of Provosts 2016:26)

Data from IRAPS shows a marked growth in undergraduate enrollment between Fall 2006 and Fall 2008, from 13,941 to 15,125; this growth trend has persisted, though at a slower rate, to the present day (See Figure 2; IRAPS 2019). These data also show a



shift in student demographics beginning in the 2006-07 academic year – particularly, a growth in the number and proportion of Hispanic/Latino undergraduates. This population grew from 2,111 undergraduates in 2006-07 (15.6 percent of undergraduate enrollment) to 4,516 undergraduates in 2018-19 (26.6 percent of undergraduate enrollment) (IRAPS 2019b).

While the number and proportion of Hispanic/Latino undergraduates grew steadily beginning in 2007-07, the number and proportion of international undergraduate students enrolled at UCSC actually decreased steadily during this same period. In 2006-07, there were 98 international undergraduates enrolled at UCSC (0.7 percent of undergraduate enrollment); this number dropped to 48 international undergraduates (0.3 percent of undergraduate enrollment) in 2012-13 (See Figure 3; IRAPS 2019b). The “sharp increase” the Council of Provosts describes most likely refers to the rapid growth in international undergraduate enrollment beginning with the 2013-14 academic year, from 155 undergraduates ) in 2013-14 (1 percent of undergraduate enrollment to 1,310 undergraduates in 2018-19 (7.7 percent of undergraduate enrollment) (IRAPS 2019b). Figures 2 and 3, on the following page, show the changes in the three-quarter average international undergraduate student enrollment and total undergraduate enrollment from 1995-96 to 2018-19.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> UCSC began collecting student demographic during 1995-96.

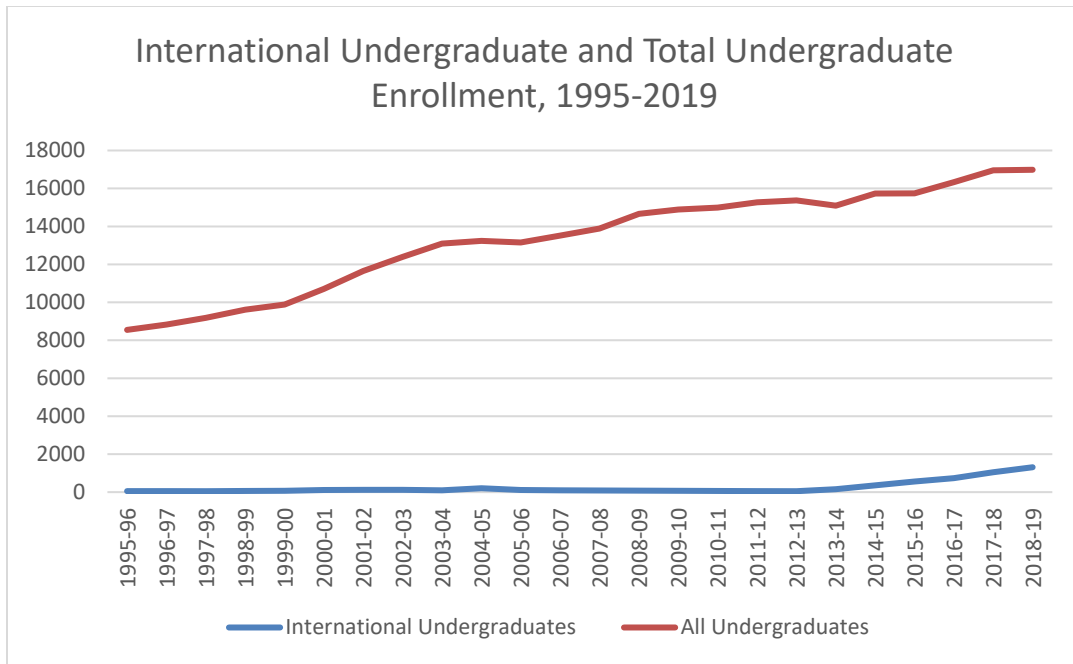


Figure 2: Changes in the three-quarter average enrollment of international undergraduate students as compared to all undergraduate students at UCSC, 1995-96 to 2018-19 (IRAPS 2019b).

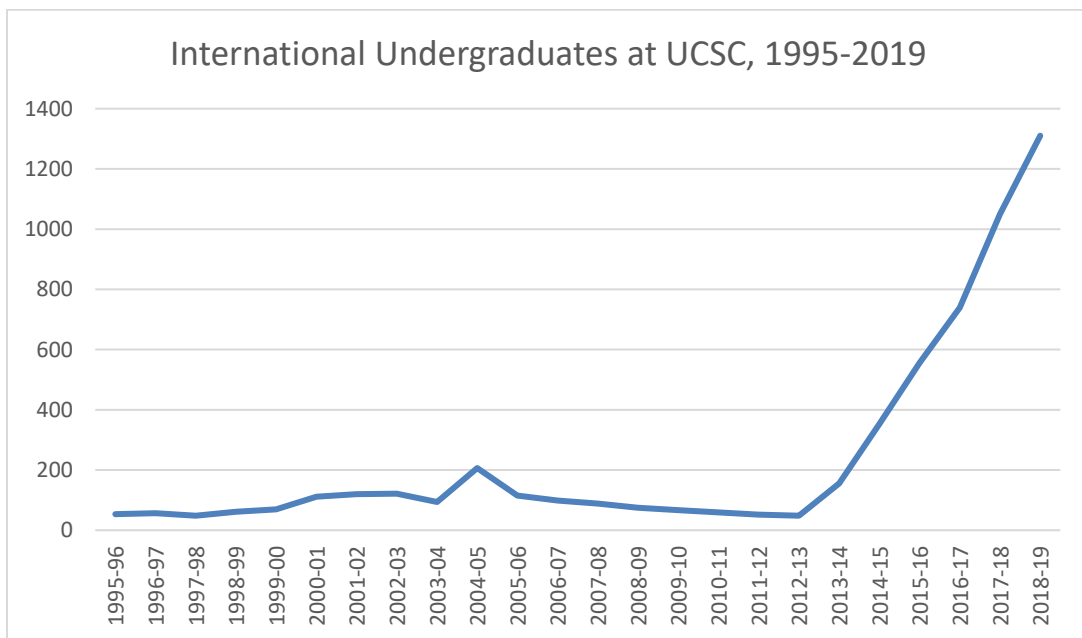


Figure 3: Changes in the three-quarter average enrollment of international undergraduate students at UCSC, 1995-96 to 2018-19 (IRAPS 2019b).

These changing demographics and enrollment growth created new impetus to again reform the Core course. This time, individual colleges took the lead. College Eight introduced a one-quarter Core curriculum, required of all first-year students at the college, that consisted of a 5-unit Core class and a 3-unit “plenary” in 2005 – a model now referred to as “jumbo” Core (Council of Provosts 2016:26). In 2009, Colleges Nine and Ten implemented a two-quarter version of Core called “Stretch” to better serve the needs of their high population of ELWR-required international students. This version of Core “meticulously scaffolds reading and writing assignments that other students complete in one quarter” and is modeled after a similar Stretch course developed at Arizona State University (Council of Provosts 2016:14).<sup>8</sup> The Stretch model of Core was then adopted by College Eight, Oakes College, Kresge College, and Porter College for students who scored between a 2 and 5 points out of 12 on the UC-wide Analytical Writing Placement Exam, and persisted until the adoption of College 1 in Fall 2018 (Council of Provosts 2016:26).

In 2014, Crown College moved their 5-unit Core course to the Winter quarter of students’ freshman year and created a 2-unit “gateway-to-Core” course for Fall quarter. All first-year Crown students took the “gateway-to-Core” course in Fall, though ELWR-required students additionally took Writing 20, a remedial writing class taught by Writing Program faculty, in Fall (Council of Provosts 2016:26). An evaluation of the first year of Crown’s approach, conducted by representatives from

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<sup>8</sup> The “stretch” course developed at Arizona State University is documented and assessed in Greg Glau’s article, “Stretch at 10: A Progress Report on Arizona State University’s Stretch Program” (2007).

the Writing Program and from the Council of Provosts, showed that students who entered UCSC as ELWR-required satisfied the ELWR sooner in Crown than in the rest of the university (Council of Provosts 2016:26).

Another reform, carried out independently of the colleges, was the Writing Program's development of the Multilingual Curriculum in 2015 to serve international students with F1 visas (visas for students who wish to study in but not immigrate to the US) who arrived to UCSC underprepared to read, write, and speak in academic English. This curriculum consist of a series of courses – the last of which, Writing 27, satisfies the ELWR requirement (Council of Provosts 2016:27). Many students in the Multilingual Curriculum, depending on college affiliation, were required to satisfy the ELWR before they were permitted to enroll in a Core course, and so did not take Core until at least their second year at UCSC (UC Santa Cruz 2016a:5).

In 2016, the Council of Provosts cited each of these reforms in their early draft of a proposal for new reforms Core. The authors of the proposal describe “Stretch” Core, Crown Core, and the Multilingual Curriculum as examples of “high impact practices” that increase student engagement, sense of belonging, and academic achievement. Their proposed reform, they argue, would expand students’ access to “high impact practices” across the campus, regardless of college affiliation (Council of Provosts 2016:12). The 2016 proposal calls for a two-quarter Core course series, beginning with an “untracked” Core course (now to be called College 1) that did not place students into sections based on their writing abilities and that all freshmen would take in Fall, followed by College 2/3/4 courses in Winter that would be

differentiated according to students' writing abilities (Council of Provosts 2016:1). In the next section, I describe the development of these proposed reforms between 2016 and 2018.

### ***Development of the Academic Literacy Curriculum, 2016-2018***

This new set of reforms to Core, which would later be named the “Academic Literacy Curriculum” (ALC), first took shape in January 2016 as a “pre-proposal” for revising the Core course. The pre-proposal emerged out of communications between the Committee on Educational Policy and the Council of Provosts; the former group was interested in changing the Core course to better prepare students to write at the college level and called upon the Provosts to renovate the curriculum. The Council of Provosts submitted their pre-proposal to two committees of the Academic Senate: the Committee on Educational Policy and the Committee on Planning and Budget (Council of Provosts 2016:1). Soon after – though independent of the “pre-proposal” – Committee on Educational Policy Chair John Tamkun reported on “significant concerns” arising from a recent review of the Writing Program at the February 12, 2016 meeting of the UCSC Academic Senate. These concerns included: the complexity and number of pathways for ELWR satisfaction (up to seven courses for Multilingual Curriculum students), inconsistency of these pathways across colleges, the length of time it takes some students to satisfy their Core course requirement (up to a year), and, most alarmingly, the loophole in some colleges that “[s]tudents are allowed to attempt and pass their [Composition 1] course before satisfying ELWR” (UC Santa Cruz 2016a:5). To address these concerns, Chair Tamkun recommended

that ELWR satisfaction become a “formal prerequisite” for Composition 1 courses (UC Santa Cruz 2016a:6). This recommendation was put forth as a formal amendment to campus policy at the next Senate meeting, on May 18, 2016. Several faculty members raised questions about this amendment, including Cowell Provost Faye Crosby. Crosby asked “if ELWR could be interpreted to include reading as well as writing, as some of the issues students have with writing are also issues with reading,” and if Core courses would separate ELWR-satisfied and ELWR-required students (UC Santa Cruz 2016b:x). Chair Tamkun responded that “[s]tudents could enroll in Core classes in their first term, but not [Composition 1] courses unless ELWR is satisfied;” and at the same time, Core courses could include both ELWR-satisfied and ELWR-required students (UC Santa Cruz 2016b:x). While the amendment passed, Crosby’s comments drew the Senate’s attention to the more significant reforms to Core that the Council of Provosts had proposed to Senate committees just two weeks earlier.

Elizabeth Abrams, former Director of the Writing Program, Provost of Merrill College, and a faculty member closely involved with the development of the ALC, explained the problems with Core that the Council of Provosts aimed to address with its proposal, which both included and went beyond those articulated at the Senate meetings: 1) the stratification of Core classes by writing ability, which inadvertently resulted in stratification by students’ race and socioeconomic status, and thus undermined the course’s ability to develop students’ “sense of belonging” in their college; 2) the lack of formal learning outcomes for Core; 3) inconsistency of how

Composition outcomes informed the Core curricula across the colleges; and 4) the excessive number of stated and unstated goals of the Core curriculum, which included writing instruction, reading instruction, introduction to university life, research skills, “cohort building,” engaging with a “substantive body of literature,” and, in some classes, preparing students to pass the ELWR.<sup>9</sup>

On May 3, 2016, the Provosts put forth a formal proposal, directed to Richard Hughey, Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education, and Herbie Lee, Vice Provost of Academic Affairs, to create a sequence of Core courses, renamed College 1, 2, 3, and 4, that aimed to serve the “changing needs of our current student demographic while ensuring an introduction to UC Santa Cruz and academic life that is consistent across the campus” (Council of Provosts 2016:1). The 2016 proposal draws from research literature highlighting the relationships among sense of belonging, retention, and academic success, particularly for underrepresented students, and the importance of the first-year experience in Core courses for facilitating a sense of belonging. From this, they outline a two-quarter Core curriculum consisting of College 1, a reading-centered, untracked course offered in the Fall, and College 2/3/4, writing-centered courses offered in Winter that track students on the basis of writing ability (Council of Provosts 2016:2-4). The first course in this sequence, College 1, was to be untracked so that it could “engage students across the usual dividing lines,” and class sizes “should be as small as we can afford” in order to facilitate the development of community in the classroom

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<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Abrams, interview with author, February 15, 2019.

(Council of Provosts 2016:2). The proposal's authors identify four objectives for the new College 1 course, to: 1) "teach ways and kinds of reading;" 2) "teach an awareness of reading processes;" 3) "facilitate the development of academic ethos;" and 4) "contribute to the development of intellectual community" (Council of Provosts 2016:2-3). The latter two objectives would serve the proposal's larger purpose of increasing first-year students' sense of belonging by giving students "meaningful practice in academic dialogue" with their classmates and by encouraging them to reflect on their own identities and how those identities "intersect with those of their communities of learning" (Council of Provosts 2016:3).

The Provosts write with urgency about the importance of keeping College 1 a 5-unit course. The Council of Provosts writes:

"[G]iven the student population at UCSC, a 5-unit Core course is needed for building a sense of an academic community. The research is clear: cohort-building has been shown to improve students' sense of belonging; strengthen their social connection to and support by their peers and teachers; increase motivation; and promote a culture of collaborative active learning. These effects promote deeper, more transferable learning and increased persistence." (Council of Provosts 2016:5-6).

In their responses to this proposal, Senate committee members and administrators repeatedly debate the Provosts' call for a 5-unit Core course and offer recommendations for a 2-unit course.

This 2016 proposal from the Council of Provosts put into motion a lengthy and complex process of revisions and debates about the future of Core.

Overwhelmingly, the deliberations that followed the original proposal centered on budgetary issues: how to cut the cost of the new curriculum by increasing class size,



reducing the number of units the class held, and eliminating the Winter sections of College 2/3/4. In February 2017, the Council of Provosts presented a revised proposal that came out of responses from the Committee on Educational Policy and from “provisional agreements” made during summer of 2016 in meetings that included Hughey and representatives from the Council of Provosts and from the Writing Program (Council of Provosts 2017:3). According to Hughey, the changes made during these meetings moved the proposal from fiscal “impossibility to feasibility” (2017:1). The February 2017 proposal made two key changes to the 2016 proposal: it increased the proposed size of College 1 classes from 28 to 30, and it made the Winter quarter courses (now “College-themed” Composition 1 and Composition 2 courses rather than College 2/3/4) optional for students (Council of Provosts 2017:3). Under this proposal, College 1 maintained its focus on ways and kinds of reading and fostering an “academic ethos” and “habits of mind,” as articulated in the 2016 proposal (Council of Provosts 2017:4). The optional Composition 1 and Composition 2 courses tied to each college’s theme would, like the proposed College 2/3/4 courses, fulfill either the Composition 1 or Composition 2 requirements, and would be “25 students, 5-unit winter courses on writing keyed to themes or materials raised in College 1” (Council of Provosts 2017:3). These revisions, the proposal states, allow “greater choice for students and [make] fewer demands of the Writing Program,” while still – like the 2016 proposal – satisfying a mandate from the Academic Senate

to separate ELWR and Composition 1 instruction<sup>10</sup>, addressing the “de facto segregation in Core courses caused by the tracking of students by their writing levels,” and creating more “curricular consistency” across all ten colleges (Council of Provosts 2017:3; UC Santa Cruz 2017c:8).

Abrams elaborated on the impetus for reforming Core in a March 2017 presentation to the Academic Senate. This presentation drew from peer-reviewed scholarship and UCSC-specific studies on undergraduates’ preparedness for college-level reading and on the relationship among undergraduates’ sense of belonging, class size, retention, and academic success (Abrams 2017). Her presentation emphasized the importance of a Core course centered on teaching academic reading skills and fostering students’ “sense of belonging,” through “learning communities, small class sizes, engagement with big intellectual questions and movements, [and] group projects,” in order to increase the retention and academic preparedness of first-generation students, students of color, and students with “high credit-load majors” (e.g., STEM majors) (Abrams 2017:9, 12). Senate members raised questions about the implications of these reforms for students’ writing and general education requirements; one faculty asked why Core would not carry the “textual analysis”

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<sup>10</sup> Beginning in 2006, when Core courses became linked to the Composition 1 and 2 outcomes, first-year students who entered UCSC as ELWR-required enrolled in a Fall Core course limited to ELWR-required students. Near week 7 of Fall quarter, students in ELWR-required Core would take an exam or, in later years, submit a portfolio of writing to attempt to satisfy ELWR; this exam and portfolio were assessed by instructors other than the student’s Core course instructor. If a student passed their Core course and satisfied ELWR through this week 7 attempt, they would receive Composition 1 credit through the Core course. If a student passed their Core course and did not satisfy ELWR through the week 7 attempt, however, they would not receive Composition 1 credit for Core and were required to enroll in further writing classes until they satisfied ELWR. Upon satisfying ELWR, Composition 1 credit would retroactively be assigned to the Core course the student took their first quarter.

education requirement, while another noted support for the separation of ELWR and Composition 1 requirements (UC Santa Cruz 2017:14).

Behind the scenes of Council of Provosts' proposals and communications with the Academic Senate, significant discrepancies and tensions developed between the Council of Provosts' and the Writing Program's visions for how to reform Core. Initially, the Writing Program chose to not collaborate with the Council of Provosts on its proposal for reforming Core and instead chose to develop its own proposal. The Writing Program submitted a proposal for an "undergraduate writing curriculum pegged to the needs of different student cohorts based on academic preparation levels" (Abrams et al. 2017:1). This proposal advocated for maintain the independence of this is new writing curriculum from the colleges, as it has different goals than Core and is not limited to students' first year at UCSC (Shearer 2017). The Council of Provosts' proposals, in contrast, called for a first-year curriculum focused on "habits of mind for university success, critical thinking about intellectual topics, and sense of belonging through the exploration of a college theme" (Abrams et al. 2017:1). The Writing Program argued that to serve its function within UCSC, it must be an "independent Writing Program;" asking Writing Program instructors to teach courses designed by the colleges and which were not consistently informed by Writing Studies scholarship and pedagogy compromised this independence.<sup>11</sup> Abrams explained, "it was quite a blow to hear that the Writing Program didn't want to have anything to do with [the Council of Provosts' proposal]." It took reports from the

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<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Abrams, interview with author, February 15, 2019.

Academic Senate calling for College 1 to be reduced to a 2-unit course – in part because, as Abrams recalled, the Writing Program and Council of Provosts, “can't get [their] acts together to work together” – to persuade Writing Program and Council of Provosts to collaborate on a proposal.<sup>12</sup>

Following these recommendations to reduce Core to two units, the Writing Program and the Council of Provosts rushed to create a single proposal that could preserve Core's status as a 5-unit course. Abrams explains:

“The ALC as it currently exists was born in two weeks and it came after that moment... in which the Senate had made devastating recommendations. I mean absolutely devastating recommendations because it would have changed the colleges as we know them and it would have cut the feet right out from under the Writing Program. It would have been profoundly awful. At a Writing Program meeting the faculty said loud and clear, ‘Do whatever you can to get 5-unit classes back’ and the colleges were like, ‘Oh my God. If we make these into 2-unit classes, we will lose the colleges. The colleges will die.’”<sup>13</sup>

According to Abrams, one of the reasons the Council of Provosts feared that “the colleges will die” was the risk of losing the support of UCSC alumni, some of whom are “attached to Core” and may rescind their donations to the colleges should Core be reduced to 2-unit course. The Writing Program and the colleges agreed that Core needed to be preserved as a 5-unit course, and agreed on a “unified curriculum” in which the colleges would be responsible for teaching reading in College 1, and the Writing Program would be responsible for teaching writing in the following quarters through the Writing 1 and Writing 2 courses.

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<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Abrams, interview with author, February 15, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

In October 2017, the Council of Provosts and Writing Program submitted a joint proposal for what they called the “Academic Literacy Curriculum.” The authors of the joint proposal positioned their new proposal as a compromise between the Writing Program’s and Council of Provosts’ earlier proposals that serves a common goal of preparing first-year students for success in their future coursework. In the cover letter to the ALC proposal, they write:

“The program of study described in this document departs from the earlier proposals in that it jettisons aspects of both to unite the efforts of the colleges and the Writing Program in pursuit of a common goal: helping students to develop academic proficiencies (reading, writing, critical thinking) that will enable them to engage as full participants in university and civic life.”  
(Abrams et al. 2017:i)

The ALC proposal articulates, for the first time, what it calls a “recursive structure” in which students revisit and “deepen” their learning in “several domains” over multiple quarters of coursework; in this structure, “students will receive repeated exposure to and practice with foundational outcomes related to reading, writing, and critical thinking” (Abrams et al. 2017:1). The authors further claim that, in each domain, “expectations for performance will be raised” as students move through the curriculum (Abrams et al. 2017:1).

The ALC proposal also differs from the Council of Provosts’ earlier proposals in dropping the college-themed Winter Composition 1 and Composition 2 courses, replacing these with Writing 1 and Writing 2 courses that map, respectively, onto the Composition 1 and Composition 2 outcomes (Abrams et al. 2017:1). This change was driven both by pressure for the Academic Senate to reduce the cost of the curriculum and by the Writing Program’s need to address the charges put forth by

their recent external review (enumerated at the February 2016 Academic Senate meeting). While these Writing 1 and Writing 2 courses build on the learning outcomes shared across College 1 courses, they are not linked to the colleges and do not build on the college themes explored in the Fall College 1 courses. Additionally, the ALC proposal ties ELWR satisfaction to successful completion of Writing 1, removing the need for students to submit portfolios of work for evaluation independently of their courses to satisfy ELWR (Abrams et al. 2017:4). Figure 4, below, is presented in the ALC proposal and illustrates the five possible pathways for Composition 1, Composition 2, and ELWR satisfaction for first-year students.

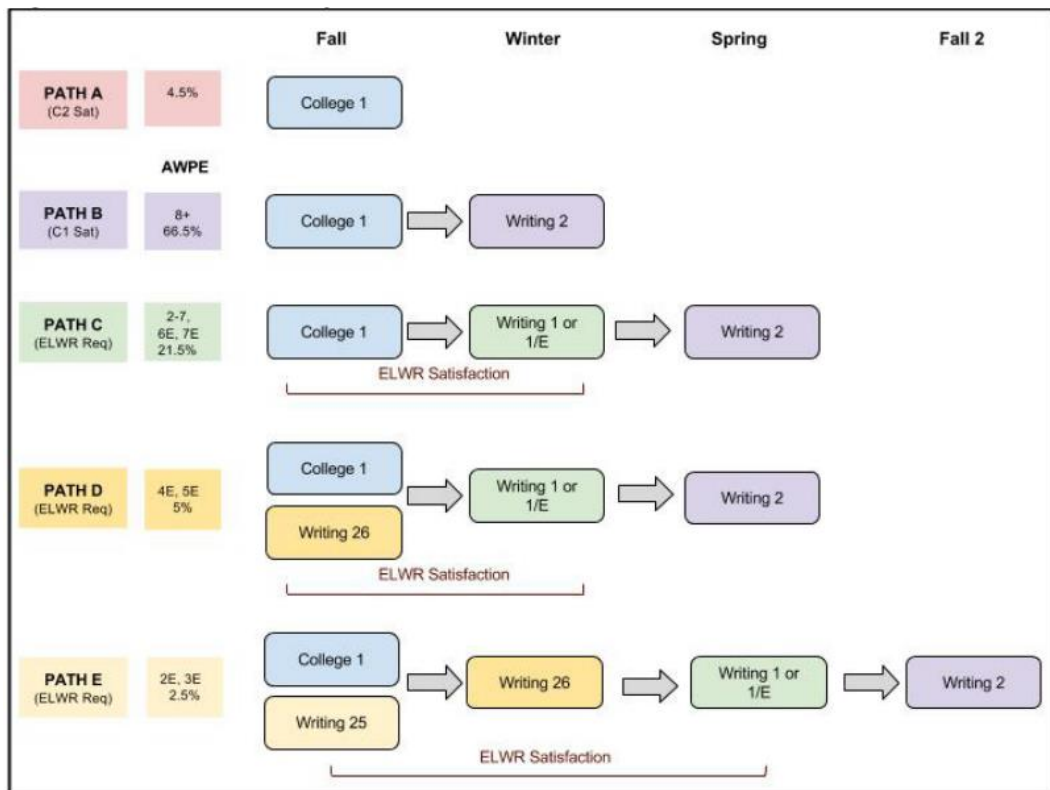


Figure 4: Pathways for Composition 1, Composition 2, and ELWR satisfaction under the Academic Literacy Curriculum (Abrams et al. 2017:5)

Under the ALC proposal, College 1 closely resembles the Council of Provosts' description of this course in their February 2017 proposal. College 1 in the ALC proposal centers on developing students' reading proficiencies in a range of academic genres, includes readings related to a specific college theme, and aims to improve students' "critical habits of mind:" metacognition, self-efficacy, and engagement across differences (Abrams et al. 2017:1). The authors describe the foci of College 1 with a new acronym, "ACMES:" analysis, critical thinking, metacognition, engagement across differences, and self-efficacy (Abrams et al. 2017:5). College 1 classes would be 5 units and capped at 30 students, and classes would be "untracked" – that is, not differentiated by writing ability (Abrams et al. 2017:6).

The ALC proposal provides a detailed plan for College 1, including a sample bibliography of readings about reading and about the ACMES to assign in College 1 classes, a sample College 1 syllabus, and a "framework" for the course that outlines the principles that will inform the course across the colleges. The "framework" appendix highlights the characteristics that all College 1 classes, which will be "responsive to the intellectual traditions of individual colleges," must share: learning outcomes, a set of "framework readings," and eight "principles" for the course (Abrams et al. 2017:30). These "principles" are: 1) "The conceptual knowledge or content of College 1 is university discourse itself;" 2) "Thematic materials include a variety of kinds of reading;" 3) "The structure of College 1 is recursive;" 4) "Metacognitive work is consistent and recurrent because [it is] critical to transfer;" 5)

“Procedural knowledge is taught via ‘write-to-learn’ and similar practices;” 6)  
“Opportunities to engage actively with others are built in throughout the quarter;” 7)  
“Students may draw on experience and existing knowledge to respond to  
assignments;” and 8) “All College 1 courses share an ‘anchor’ activity to facilitate  
assessment” (Abrams et al. 2017:30-33). The ALC proposal’s vision for College 1 is,  
essentially, for a consistent curriculum across the colleges – including many shared  
readings, at least one shared assignment, shared learning outcomes, and similar  
pedagogy – with only minor variations according to each college’s theme.

The ALC proposal goes into less detail about the Writing 1 and Writing 2  
courses that follow College 1 in the curriculum. Writing 1 would offer two tracks:  
Writing 1 and Writing 1E. The latter course would be tailored to Multilingual  
Curriculum students and “taught by a faculty member with expertise in Writing  
Studies and language acquisition, which means that the day-to-day class sessions will  
be designed with language learner needs in mind” (Abrams et al. 2017:12). However,  
even as the proposal does not give a detailed description of these writing classes, it  
articulates in more detail than earlier proposals the specific learning outcomes for  
each course in the ALC. The proposal includes two tables that articulate the learning  
outcomes for each course: one that shows the “vertical integration” of learning  
outcomes across College 1, Writing 1, and Writing 2, while another indicates which  
elements of the ACMES are addressed by each of the College 1 learning outcomes.  
These learning outcomes, which inform both the content of College 1 and the



assessment created to evaluate the course, are the focus of chapter five of this dissertation.

In addition to articulating the vision and learning outcomes for College 1, Writing 1, and Writing 2, the ALC proposal details a plan for assessing the curriculum (particularly College 1) through rubric-based assessments of student learning, a funding model for the curriculum that includes projected pass rates for each course, and responses to specific questions raised by the Committee on Educational Policy. The latter section, questions from Committee on Educational Policy, highlights some of the central tensions that shaped negotiations among the Committee on Educational Policy, Council of Provosts, and Writing Program. The Committee on Educational Policy's questions include why College 1 is 5 units as opposed to the recommended 2 units, why College 1 does not carry a GE designation, how College 1 can "dovetail" to both Writing 1 and Writing 2 classes, how the learning outcomes for Writing 1 compare to ELWR standards, how to ensure that students who pass Writing 1 are adequately prepared in writing, how College 1 will engage and challenge the "top tier of reading/writing capable students" in an untracked class, and how Senate oversight of the curriculum will be ensured (Abrams et al. 2017:20–26). These questions suggest skepticism, also voiced earlier by Senate faculty and campus administrators in response to Council of Provosts proposals, about the value and rigor of the Core course.

The ALC proposal was brought up for a vote as an amendment to Committee on Educational Policy regulations during the December 1, 2017 meeting of the

Academic Senate. By this time, the Committee on Educational Policy had a new Chair, Onuttom Narayan. In the Senate discussion of this amendment, former Committee on Educational Policy Chair Tamkun noted that the proposal appeared to reduce the number of writing courses required of students and “asked how this will help students to become more effective writers” (UC Santa Cruz 2017a:10). Chair Narayan responded that the proposal was “more of a rearrangement of topics between the two courses rather than a reduction in writing instruction” (UC Santa Cruz 2017a:10). Cowell Provost Crosby reiterated this point and emphasized the importance of reading instruction in Core, while Abrams responded to a suggestion to cut costs by increasing class sizes by defending the practical and pedagogical necessities of capping College 1 sections at 30 students. The proposal, set to go into effect in Fall 2018, passed the Senate by a show of hands. The implementation of the new course at each college then moved into the hands of each college’s Provost.

### ***The Academic Literacy Curriculum in Historical Perspective***

The Academic Literacy Curriculum represents a significant shift in the delivery, pedagogy, and structure of Core, but its reforms to Core are not without precedent. Situating the ALC in the history of the Core course illuminates which elements of these reforms have been attempted before and which are novel developments.

Noreña and Dizikes’ accounts of the decline of the power of the colleges and rise of power granted to “Boards of Study” (now called Departments) shows how present-day Provosts’ fear that “the colleges will die” has been shared by many

faculty members and students throughout the history of UCSC (Abrams 2019). Dizikes, for example, feared that Sinsheimer's removal of the colleges' hiring power represented the "death knell of the colleges" (Dizikes and Vanderscoff 2012:82). Historical accounts also highlight the fact that, since the early years of UCSC, some faculty and administrators have been skeptical of the value of Core course. In the early 1970s, for instance, some administrators saw Core classes as superfluous and did not want to provide faculty financial incentives to teach them (Noreña 2004:190). Due in part to administrators' skepticism, Core courses were reduced from a multi-year sequence, to a two-quarter sequence, and eventually to a one-quarter course during the first decade after UCSC's founding. Present-day Senate members gave recommendations to reduce Core to a 2-unit course and to tie it to an existing GE designation during deliberations around the ALC, which supporters of Core and the colleges understood as a threat to the college system.

Another common thread in the history of reforms to the Core course is a persistent concern with the quality of students' writing.<sup>14</sup> This concern became most apparent at UCSC with the hiring of a writing instructor at Oakes College in the 1970s; soon after, writing instruction became integrated into the teaching of Core courses (Council of Provosts 2016:25). The ties between Core and writing instruction became formalized in 2005, when the Academic Senate voted for all Core courses became officially recognized as writing courses tied to the new Composition 1 and, in

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<sup>14</sup> This concern extends beyond UCSC to higher education more generally, and can be traced back as far as Harvard University's proclamations about the "illiteracy of American youth" in the late 1800s (Wardle 2019).

some cases, Composition 2 requirements (Council of Provosts 2016:25-26). Later reforms to Core introduced by individual colleges also centered on writing instruction. “Jumbo” Core at College Eight, “Stretch” Core developed by Colleges Nine and Ten, and Winter Core at Crown College were each intended to provide more intensive writing instruction to a growing population of ELWR-required first-year students at UCSC (Council of Provosts 2016:26). The ALC proposal, then, is a new variation on decades-old concerns about the role of writing instruction in Core courses which, like some earlier reforms, places the satisfaction of Composition and ELWR requirements at the forefront of its approach.

Lastly, the ALC’s vision for an untracked Core has precedent in earlier versions of Core. Core was “untracked” for most of its early history, beginning with UCSC’s founding in 1964 to the formalization of the Writing Program’s relationship with the Core courses more than a decade later. “Tracking” first appeared in the early 1980s, when “humanities foundation seminars,” taught by Writing Program faculty, replaced the Core course at many colleges. Incoming first-years students were placed into different sections of the Core course or humanities foundation seminar (depending on their college) based on whether or not they had satisfied UC’s entry-level writing requirement, “Subject A” (now ELWR) (Freeman and Rabkin 2013:47–48). Tracking then became further entrenched with the 2005 reforms that tied Core to the new Composition 1 and Composition 2 requirements. Abrams explains:

“One thing that had happened is that in transforming Core into writing an official [general education] bearing writing class in 2006 or so, we essentially inadvertently stratified the classes. We knew we were stratifying the classes

by writing competency – what was the inadvertent result of that was stratifying it by race and class and ethnicity.”<sup>15</sup>

Transforming Core into a writing-centered course, tailored to meet the needs of students depending on their level of writing preparedness, had the unintended consequence of undermining the community-building goals of Core. The effects of tracking were particularly pronounced since, in 2006, the demographics of undergraduates at UCSC were much more diverse than they were in 1965. At UCSC’s founding, the undergraduate population was predominantly White and “upper-middle class” (Noreña 2004:68). By Fall quarter 2006, the racial demographics of first-year undergraduates were 50 percent White, 22 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 17 percent Chicano/Latino, 2 percent African American, 1 percent American Indian, and 7 percent unknown or other; additionally, first-generation college students now comprised 36 percent of first-year undergraduates (The Regents of the University of California 2019). The tracked version of Core that was implemented in 2006 resulted in stratification of first-year students by race, class, and first-generation status – effects that would have been much less noticeable in a less diverse undergraduate population. Thus, while the ALC’s call for untracking Core in 2016 was not without precedent, the conditions under which this untracking would take place – a more diverse undergraduate population with a higher-than-ever number of international students – differed significantly from the last time UCSC undertook an untracked approach to Core.

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<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Abrams, interview with author, February 15, 2019.

Viewed in the context of over five decades of reforms to Core, several elements of the ALC stand out as unique: its focus on explicit reading instruction, its articulation of the “ACMES” outcomes, and the centrality of formal learning outcomes in its design. First, previous reforms consistently pushed Core in the direction of including *more* direct writing instruction. The ALC, in contrast, is the first reform to Core that calls for developing students’ writing preparedness through *less* writing instruction and through a focus, instead, on reading instruction that makes use of informal writing assignments. College 1 instructors have also described this shift as “writing to learn” rather than “learning to write.” Previous reforms to Core rested on the assumption that the way to improve students’ writing skills and help them progress through the Composition and ELWR requirements was through consistent instruction in writing beginning in Core; the ALC, in contrast, argues that before students can become better writers, they need to become more adept readers of college-level texts (Abrams et al. 2017:3).

Second, College 1 stands out from other reforms to Core by centering “ACMES” (analysis, critical thinking, metacognition, engagement across difference, and self-efficacy) as the content of the course. Earlier versions of Core included goals that were similar to several dimensions of the ACMES – particularly analysis, critical thinking, and engagement across difference – but these goals were secondary to the primary purpose of Core: prior to 2006, introduction to the theme of the college, or after 2006, writing instruction. The ALC proposal emphasizes the ACMES as the primary content of College 1; the authors of the proposal write, “In considering the

course on its own terms, it is useful to consider ACMES as the *content* of the course, and the thematic readings tied to the intellectual traditions of each colleges as the *vehicle* for exploring this content” (Abrams et al. 2017:5, emphasis in original). Under the ALC, then, the theme of the college becomes secondary to the ACMES content shared across all College 1 courses.

A third unique feature of College 1 and the ALC as a whole is its articulation of formal learning outcomes as the foundation of the curriculum. This feature reflects a broader trend toward learning outcomes in the field of higher education; scholarship in this area points to a rise in the use of learning outcomes to drive curricular planning and assessment over the past two decades (Allan 1996; Kuh and Ewell 2010; Schoepp 2019). A key impetus for the ALC, Abrams notes, was Committee on Educational Policy’s observation in 2016 that “[t]here were no formal official outcomes for Core classes,” and the extent to which Core classes were fulfilling the Composition 1 or Composition 2 outcomes was “uncertain” (2019). The final version of the ALC makes continual reference to “outcomes” (a total of 93 references in the document) – including, for example, a “Course Outcome Articulation” section that describes: 1) how the learning outcomes for College 1, Writing 1, and Writing 2 build on each other; 2) a description of how outcomes will be used to assess the course; and 3) an appendix called “College 1 Outcomes as Expressing ACMES Values and Consistent with C1/C2 [Composition 1/Composition 2] Key Concepts” (Abrams et al. 2017). The centrality of learning outcomes to the ALC proposal suggests that the articulation

of outcomes is a key component of how the proposal authors establish legitimacy and exigence for the ALC.

Considered alongside the history of reforms to the Core course, the changes to this course introduced by the ALC appear as both similar to and distinct from earlier reforms. First, the process of developing College 1 parallels earlier reforms in its efforts to highlight the importance of Core and of the colleges in response to criticism from faculty and administrators. Second, like earlier reforms, ALC authors frame the exigence for College 1s in terms of a need to improve first-year undergraduates' writing skills. And third, College 1 resembles earlier versions of Core in its untracked approach – an approach that characterized all Core courses prior to 2006. At the same time, three features of College 1 stand out from earlier reforms. College 1 is the first reform to Core to move away from explicit writing instruction in favor of explicit reading instruction. It is also the first reform to establish ACMES, rather than writing or the college theme, as the primary content of the course. Lastly, College 1 grounds its exigence and legitimacy in the logic of learning outcomes, which are the foundation of both the curriculum and assessment plan for the course. These insights provide important context for interpreting College 1 instructors' understandings of and responses to the College 1 curriculum. Many of these instructors have experienced multiple reforms to and variations of the Core course over years of teaching the course at multiple colleges – and, in some cases, as UCSC alumni who took Core in their first year. These experiences inevitably shape how instructors make sense of and make decisions about teaching College 1.



## CHAPTER 3: THEORY

### *Introduction*

This case study of changes to one college course, while narrow in scope, offers insights into much larger empirical and theoretical scholarly debates. Beyond providing recommendations for improving the delivery of College 1 in the future, this study contributes uniquely to current scholarship within Sociology and Education. Empirically, this study offers new findings about how university instructors make sense of and enact curricular changes; these have implications not only for understanding similar curricular changes at other universities, but also, more broadly, for illuminating the processes through which curricular change happens at universities. This study also offers theoretical contributions, which I introduce in this chapter, to cross-disciplinary scholarship on how and why institutions change (or don't change): institutional theory.

In this chapter, I apply institutional theory to understand the case of College 1 and suggest ways that my case can, in turn, advance institutional theory. I begin by reviewing historical developments in institutional theory from its roots in early Sociology, to the beginnings of Education scholars' engagement with institutional theory in the 1970s, to recent scholarship that centers on how institutions are "inhabited" by people who actively make sense of and negotiate their environments (Hallett and Ventresca 2006). I locate my own study at the latter end of this timeline by drawing from an "inhabited institutions" approach and sensemaking theory to frame my analysis of College 1.

First, in the section that follows, I briefly review early approaches to institutional theory, including but not limited to those of Max Weber. I then examine the shift from “old” institutional theory to “new” institutional theory, also known as New Institutionalism. Next, I explore the range of “coupling” arguments made in institutional analyses of education that examine the relationship between external pressures and organizational practices – for example, the relationship between accountability policies and teachers’ classroom practices. I then turn to recent scholarship on “inhabited institutions” and “sensemaking theory,” both of which are branches of institutional theory that pay close attention to the thinking and behaviors of individuals within an organization, and how Sociologists and Education scholars have taken up these approaches. Lastly, I highlight the relevance of institutional theory – and especially “inhabited institutions” and sensemaking theory – to my research questions about College 1.

### ***Institutional theory in education scholarship***

Institutional theory, an area of interest in both academic and applied fields, is broadly concerned with the “rules,” both formal and informal, shaping organizations’ and individuals’ behaviors.<sup>16</sup> Institutional theory offers a useful framework through which to analyze my case for several reasons: it provides insights into how formal changes at the institutional and organizational levels play out in everyday practice; it pays particular attention to *educational* institutions and their unique logic; and recent

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<sup>16</sup> By “institution,” I draw from Jepperson (1991) to mean an “organized, established, procedure” that maintains itself through “relatively self-activating social processes;” in other words, conventions that have achieved a degree of stability and routineness (143-5). By “organization,” I mean the specific associations made up of individuals; organizations exist within institutional fields.

scholarship in the field bridges macro-, meso-, and micro-levels of analysis by highlighting the role of individuals' sensemaking in shaping institutional change.

W. Richard Scott (2014) examines the 19<sup>th</sup> century roots of institutional theory in the fields of Political Science, Economics, and Sociology. He identifies the origins of the approach to studying institutions in Sociology (which he finds to be “more constant” than the other two disciplines) in a range of scholars who are now considered the canon of sociological theory: Herbert Spencer, William Graham Sumner, early Chicago School sociologists, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Talcott Parsons, Pierre Bourdieu, and others (Scott 2014:10). Scott claims that among these, Weber has had the most direct and lasting influence on 20<sup>th</sup> century institutional theory (2014:14). Weber's theoretical approach to understanding institutions (and, especially, bureaucracies) was complex and, at times, contradictory; he argued both for a macro-scale, historical comparative approach to understanding social structures and behaviors, and for an “interpretive” approach – *verstehen* – to understanding individuals' behaviors (Scott 2014:14–15). This *verstehen* approach made the social sciences unique from the natural sciences, as only the former could offer an “subjective understanding of the action of the component individuals” in any social phenomena (Weber 1968:15). Even as Weber undertook macro-level studies of social change (the rise of bureaucratization, for example), his commitment to *verstehen* placed individuals and the meanings they make at the forefront of his studies of institutions. Weber's legacy, Scott argues, inspired recent institutional theory that “emphasiz[es] the extent to which all sectors and their constituent

organizations contain multiple, competing conceptions of rational behavior – competing logics” (2014:16). Early scholars of institutional theory varied in their accounts of how institutions form, reproduce themselves, and change, but they shared several key features: they generally examined shared social norms and large-scale social structures (like language, kinship structures, and religions). However, early scholars generally paid little attention to *organizations* – the “particular collectivities” that exist within institutional structures (Scott 2014:19).

Recent institutional theory has been shaped most profoundly by John Meyer and Brian Rowan’s work on how institutions and organizations function, change, and proliferate. Meyer and Rowan situate the rise of formal organizations in larger societal changes – particularly, the “increasing rationalization of cultural rules” shaping an institutional environment (Scott 2014:50). Their influential 1977 article uses the case of public schools in the US to argue that many organizations structure themselves according to prevailing “myths” about how organizations should work rather than according to the particular “demands” of their own organization (Meyer and Rowan 1977:341). Whereas earlier institutional theory tended to argue that organizations were structured to maximize efficiency and rationality and assumed organizational actors consistently follow the organization’s formal rules and procedures, Meyer and Rowan contend that organizational behavior is more often oriented toward maintaining “legitimacy” by following the “myths,” the shared beliefs and “ceremonial rules” of their institutional field, than it is toward operating efficiently; this leads to organizations within an institutional field becoming more and

more similar to each other, or “isomorphism” (1977:342). A consequence of this, they find, is the “decoupling” of elements within an organization, in which different parts of the organization have relative autonomy in their behaviors. To illustrate, they give the example of hiring a “Nobel prize winner” faculty member in higher education, which brings “great ceremonial benefits” to the university, and possibly more research grants. However, “from the point of view of immediate outcomes, the expenditure lowers the instructional return per dollar expended and lowers the university's ability to solve immediate logistical problems” (Meyer and Rowan 1977:355) That is, universities sometimes act in ways that are inefficient, but “decoupling” the structure and rules of the university from its daily practices obscures this inefficiency and allows the organization to maintain the appearance that it functions well. As Meyer and Rowan put it, “decoupling enables organizations to maintain standardized, legitimating, formal structures while their activities vary in response to practical considerations” (Meyer and Rowan 1977:357). Decoupling thus allows for conflicting logics – such as efficiency and prestige – to coexist within an organization.

This work paved the way for the emergence of New Institutionalism (NI) in the 1980s, which DiMaggio and Powell (1991), in their edited volume, *New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, characterize as “a rejection of rational-actor models, an interest in institutions as independent variables, a turn toward cognitive and cultural explanations, and an interest in properties of supraindividual units of analysis that cannot be reduced to aggregations or direct consequences of

individuals' attributes or motives" (8). They contrast this to the "old" institutionalism, which drew from the work of Weberian sociologist Philip Selznick and centered on "conflicts of interest, power processes, informal structure, values, norms, and social commitments, and saw institutionalism as a process occurring within an organization" (Scott 2014:51). In other words, NI pays greater attention to cultural scripts and to the contexts in which organizations operate, while the "old" institutionalism is more concerned with organizational actors' interests and pays less attention to context.

Meyer and Rowan further advance NI in the context of educational research in a recent volume, *The New Institutionalism in Education* (2006). Here, they argue that institutional analyses of education need to "catch up with some of the significant new developments occurring in education;" most notable, for them, are the increase in diversity of educational providers, tighter "coupling" between external pressures and school practices, and the expansion of the role of education in society (Meyer and Rowan 2006:2-3). This tighter "coupling" is driven largely by the increase in accountability policies, aimed at holding schools and teachers "accountable" to producing measurable gains in student achievement, which are mainstream in K-12 education and are now expanding to higher education, as well. An NI approach is best-suited to understanding these changes, the authors argue, because it allows for a more "expansive view" of the diverse organizations that comprise the K-12 education sector, highlights the roles of these varied organizations in shaping the governance of education, and helps contextualize the simultaneous pressures for both "technical efficiencies" and "political conformity" in US schools (Meyer and Rowan 2006:17).

Applied to educational research, NI helps illuminate the broader social and political contexts in which the institution of education operates.

***Decoupling, loose coupling, and recoupling in educational organizations***

Among the most influential concepts from NI shaping education scholarship is the concept of “coupling.” Coupling refers to the interconnectedness of different elements of an organization, as well as between formal policies and practices. “Decoupling” and “loose coupling,” then, refer to “gaps” between policy and practice and between the logics (such as the “logic of efficiency”) of different parts of an organization (Meyer and Rowan 1977:341, 355). Meyer and Rowan’s (1977) analysis of “decoupling” informed many influential studies of educational organizations that followed: first, those that argued that educational institutions are characterized by high levels of “decoupling” or “loose coupling” among their structural elements (Firestone 1985; Meyer and Rowan 1978), and later, responses that argued that educational institutions were becoming “recoupled” in various ways (Coburn 2004; Hallett 2010).

Writing contemporaneously with Meyer and Rowan (1978), Weick (1976) draws from Glassman to argue for viewing educational organizations as “loosely coupled” structures, which has both strengths and “dysfunctions” for an organization that should be researched further (6).<sup>17</sup> On the one hand, loose coupling allows

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<sup>17</sup> The concept of “loose coupling” to describe organizational structure first emerged with the publication of Robert Glassman’s (1973) “Persistence and Loose Coupling in Living Systems.” In this article, Glassman applies the logic of living organisms to more complex organizational “systems” to argue that loose coupling among elements of the system promotes the stability of the system (Glassman 1973:83).

organizations to more easily respond to change without needing to wholly re-structure itself, which makes loosely coupled systems more adaptable and responsive to changing environments. Weick also notes that teachers have “more room available for self-determination” in loosely-coupled schools (Weick 1976:7). On the other hand, loose coupling slows down the process of formal institutional change, so “novel solutions” that develop in one part of the organization may not “diffuse” to other parts of the organization that could benefit from them (Weick 1976:7). Meyer and Rowan (1978) similarly argue that educational organizations “decouple” two key elements of their structure – what schools do and how schools evaluate their outcomes – in order to serve conflicting external pressures while still maintaining an appearance of legitimacy and effectiveness. Overall, this 1970s scholarship on “decoupling” and “loose coupling” in educational organizations takes the stance that schools function by allowing some elements of their structure (for instance, principals and teachers) relative autonomy in their daily work, and that the autonomy of these parts allows schools to manage competing logics and external pressures while maintaining an appearance of legitimacy.

More recently, scholars have critiqued this “decoupling” and “loose coupling” literature by noting how educational organizations have become “recoupled” (Coburn 2004; Davies and Quirke 2007; Hallett 2010; Sauder and Espeland 2009). Coburn (2004) challenges the “decoupling” argument through her longitudinal study of reading instruction in California elementary schools between 1983 and 1999. While she doesn’t use the term “recoupling,” her analysis highlights the ways in which



external pressures shape classroom practices and are mediated through teachers' beliefs about pedagogy. Institutional theory, she argues, is inadequate for understanding how organizational actors challenge decoupling, and so should be supplemented by "sensemaking theory" (Coburn 2004:213), which I revisit later in this chapter.

Examining a case similar to Coburn's, Hallett (2010) argues that new accountability policies affecting US schools have led to a "recoupling" of everyday practices in schools to their evaluation practices. Drawing from his ethnographic study of a US elementary school, Hallett finds that the "conditions of accountability" forced the school to "recouple" its classroom practices with outcome-oriented practices, which in turn created "turmoil" for teachers (Hallett 2010:69). Further, Hallett uses this case to argue against the assumptions of NI, including examples of the "decoupling" or "loose coupling" argument, and in favor of an alternative "inhabited institutions" theoretical approach (2010:53). For Hallett, NI takes an oversimplified view of Meyer and Rowan's analysis of "myth" in organizations, which leads NI proponents to overestimate the extent of isomorphism among organizations in an institutional field and to limit their focus to a "macro" level approach to examining organizations (2010:54–55). In contrast, an "inhabited institutions" approach allows for empirical observation of how decoupling and recoupling happen in organizations, how "myths" are actually linked to organizational practices, and how organizational actors make sense of "coupling" in the organization (Hallett 2010:56).

### ***“Inhabited institutions” and educational organizations***

A number of scholars have taken up Hallett’s call to employ an “inhabited institutions” approach – both in education literature and in studies of other kinds of organizations (Alvehus, Eklund, and Kastberg 2019; Binder 2007, 2018; Cobb 2017; Everitt 2012, 2013; Fine and Hallett 2014; Gray and Silbey 2014; Haedicke and Hallett 2016; Hallett and Gougherty 2018; Hallett and Meanwell 2016). Hallett and Ventresca (2006) introduce this approach in their *Theory and Society* article that re-examines Gouldner’s *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy* with a closer look at how Gouldner’s field work provides an exemplary case of micro-level analysis of individuals’ interactions and sensemaking. They borrow the term, “inhabited institutions,” from Scully and Creed (1997), who argue for bringing people back into the study of institutions. The inhabited institutions approach, according to Hallett and Ventresca (2006), brings together institutional theory with Symbolic Interactionism<sup>18</sup> to center on “(1) local and extra-local embeddedness, (2) local and extra-local meaning, and (3) a skeptical, inquiring attitude” to examine organizations (214). That is, an “inhabited” institutionalism attends to both the local organizational context and the broader social and historical contexts in which people act and make meaning, and approaches its inquiry by using empirical data to interrogate “ideal” conceptions of organizations (Hallett and Ventresca 2006:227–28). With this approach, scholars of organizations can better understand the linkages between micro-level interactions and

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<sup>18</sup> Symbolic Interactionism (SI) is a theoretical framework in Sociology that argues that meaning arises out of social interaction, which takes the form of communication through significant “symbols,” and that people act in accordance with the meanings they have constructed in the process of interaction (Blumer 1969).

macro-level structures – or, in other words, reconciling tensions between analytic approaches focused on “structure” or “agency” (Hallett 2010:231).

Haedicke and Hallett ( 2016), in a chapter for the *Handbook of Qualitative Organizational Research*, review the “methodological choices and analytic stances” made by researchers taking an inhabited institutions approach and highlight how this approach differs from an NI approach (99). They contend that inhabited institutions derives from an “interactionist” approach to studying organizations, which used ethnography to examine social interactions and group dynamics within organizations (Haedicke and Hallett 2016:101). In contrast, NI researchers, they claim, tend to use quantitative data with large sample sizes to examine macro-level changes across organizations. Inhabited institutions draws from the insights of both of these approaches by using an interactionist sensibility to critique and build on the insights of NI; as Haedicke and Hallett put it, “[b]y extending NI’s cultural analysis to also include local dynamics of meaning, [inhabited institutions] expands NI’s important critique of overly utilitarian, rationalist models of action” ( 2016:104). Further, inhabited institutions differs from both interactionist approaches and NI in its analytic approach. While interactionist scholars tend to use inductive reasoning and NI scholars tend to use deductive reasoning, inhabited institutions scholars, Haedicke and Hallett argue, go back and forth between both approaches and “reject the opposition” of these logics (2016:105). This unique analytics approach allows inhabited institutions researchers to begin with “quasi-deductive” theoretical

frameworks while also remaining open to unexpected findings during the course of their research (Haedicke and Hallett 2016:100).

Among the inhabited institutions studies that Haedicke and Hallett cite is Everitt's (2012) study of how high school teachers' experience in the field shapes their understanding of institutional goals. Everitt argues that teachers' decision-making about institutional goals varies predictably according to their stage in their teaching career, and that their decisions are filtered through what he terms "arsenals of teaching practice" that develop over the course of a teaching career (Everitt 2012:204). Ultimately, he frames his contribution as an extension of the inhabited institutions approach to organizational theory by drawing from Symbolic Interactionism's attention to sensemaking to link macro-level insights from NI to micro-level everyday practices and beliefs.

Scholars who take an "inhabited institutions" approach bring *people* into institutions, but ultimately, the arguments they make are about *institutions* and institutional change. These scholars shed light on the processes through which institutional change happens by focusing on how individuals interpret and enact change. Everitt (2012), for instance, illuminates the process through which teachers make sense of institutional goals, "filter" them through the lens of their experiences, and then act accordingly; similarly, Alvehus, Eklund, and Kastberg (2019) show the process through which a new classification system for teachers in Sweden is understood and, later, granted legitimacy by teachers. An inhabited institutions approach allows these scholars to focus on the people who make up institutions while

still speaking to meso- and macro-level questions about how institutions function and change.

### *Sensemaking theory in education scholarship*

Everitt's (2012) study of teachers' sense-making in relation to the schools in which they work bridges two approaches to institutional theory that inform my study of College 1: inhabited institutions and sensemaking theory. This latter field, sensemaking theory, refers to a body of scholarship that takes a micro-level analytical approach to understanding institutional actors' beliefs and decision-making (Weick 1995). Sensemaking theory is not just an analytical approach that centers on individuals' beliefs, behaviors, decision-making, and interactions; it also makes specific *claims* about how individuals make sense of their environments and how this matters for organizational and institutional change. Weick and his collaborators (2005) argue that sensemaking is the process through which people create meaning out of their circumstances and, in turn, act according to the meaning they have constructed:

“Sensemaking involves the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing. Viewed as a significant process of organizing, sensemaking unfolds as a sequence in which people concerned with identity in the social context of other actors engage ongoing circumstances from which they extract cues and make plausible sense retrospectively, while enacting more or less order into those ongoing circumstances.” (Weick et al. 2005:409)

In other words, individuals create “stories” about what is going on around them and then act in response to these “stories” (Weick et al. 2005:410). Sensemaking, then, serves as a bridge between organizational and institutional *environments* and people's *behavior* within those environments. Sensemaking theory contends that, in order to

understand why individuals act and make the decisions that they do, researchers must look more closely at how individuals are interpreting and making meaning out of the situations in which they find themselves.

This “sensemaking” approach to institutional theory emerged in the mid-1990s with the publication of two books: Weick’s *Sensemaking in Organizations* (1995) and Vaughan’s *The Challenger Launch Decision* (1996). Weick presents an argument for the uniqueness and significance of a “sensemaking” approach to studying organizations, which he contrasts to a “rational” model for organizational research that assumes that people behave rationally, predictably, and strategically in organizational settings; in contrast, a sensemaking approach to organizational research highlights the “complexity and ambiguity” of organizations and of people’s behavior within them (1995:91). Vaughan then further develops this approach with her influential study of how managers and engineers made sense of the decisions leading up to the disastrous *Challenger* launch. Since then, scholars of diverse organization types have employed sensemaking theory to develop micro-level analyses of individuals’ beliefs and behaviors within organizations.

Scholars of education from primary school through postsecondary institutions employ sensemaking theory to examine the thinking and behaviors of students, instructors, and administrators. Recent scholarship in this area addresses, for instance: students’ understanding of school programs and policies (Haganeh, Colley, and Thompson 2018; Perez 2016), instructors’ decision-making in the classroom (Chase 2016; Coburn 2004, 2005; Snodgrass Rangel, Bell, and Monroy 2019), instructor

identity (Degn 2015, 2018; O'Meara, Louder, and Campbell 2014; Rom and Eyal 2019), faculty members' interpretations of institutional changes and goals (Fairchild, Meiners, and Violette 2016; Gonzales 2013; Gonzales and Rincones 2011; Kezar 2013; Patrick and Joshi 2019), and administrators' decision-making and sensemaking around institutional change (Abreu Pederzini 2018; Kezar and Eckel 2002; Li, Lin, and Lai 2016). Coburn (2004, 2005) – who also engages with the “decoupling” argument in institutional theory – uses a sensemaking approach to analyze elementary school teachers' understandings of and decision-making around changing reading instruction, and the factors shaping their sensemaking. For instance, she has argued that school principals play a key role in mediating teachers' knowledge and enactment of new policy around reading instruction (Coburn 2005:477). For Coburn, sensemaking theory allows for an in-depth investigation of how people interpret and implement policies while also allowing scholars to attend to structural and other external factors shaping individuals' beliefs and behaviors.

Several scholars use a sensemaking approach to study issues related to *higher education* faculty, specifically. These studies generally address faculty members' academic identities and how faculty members respond to changing research agendas and shifts in institutional missions. Degn (2018), for example, analyzes how university administrators' “translations” of institutional changes influence faculty members' sensemaking about those changes and their sense of academic identity. Similarly, Gonzales (2013) explores faculty members' sensemaking around their university's efforts to become a “Tier One” research university rather than a teaching-

centered one. However, while many studies of K-12 teachers examine sensemaking around classroom practices, few *higher education* studies address faculty members' sensemaking about their teaching. This may be due, in part, to the fact that few faculty members receive formal training in teaching or pedagogy, unlike K-12 teachers. Gonzales and Rincones (2011), in examining faculty members' use and negotiation of "organizational scripts" to make sense of changes in their university's mission, briefly discuss faculty members' identities as *teachers* and how they balance their teaching and research roles, but provide little analysis of faculty members' sensemaking around their teaching practices. One study that directly addresses faculty members' sensemaking about teaching is Coulter's (2016) dissertation on adjunct faculty at a community college. Her study explores adjuncts' sensemaking about a "student success" initiative at their college and how the sense they make of this initiative shapes their classroom practices. Ultimately, she finds that how adjuncts make sense of institutional changes, and whether or not they shift their teaching practices to align with these changes, is shaped by "the degree of respect he or she perceives his or her teacher's identity is being shown by change agents" (Coulter 2016:11). Adjunct faculty members develop a "story" about the institutional changes they are experiencing which, in Coulter's account, centers around their perceptions of the respect they are accorded. This "story" about respect allows Coulter to link micro-level sensemaking among individual faculty members to macro-level questions about how institutional change happens (or does not happen).



In all of these cases, sensemaking theory not only influences scholars' research methods; it also informs the types of claims they make about how organizational and insitutional environments shape and are shaped by the people who inhabit them. Scholars who adopt a framework of sensemaking theory overwhelmingly use interview and observation-based methods to examine their participants' thinking and behaviors. Additionally, sensemaking theory draws scholars' attention to moments of "uncertainty" that require their participants to engage in sensemaking (Weick et al. 2005:414). By studying changes in higher education through the frame of sensemaking theory, we gain insights into the *meanings* that faculty make of these changes, *how* they make meaning, and how their processes of meaning-making shapes their *responses* to change.

***Examining College 1 through "inhabited institutions" and sensemaking theory***

Institutional theory provides a range of conceptual tools through which to analyze changes to College 1. At its core, this approach is concerned with how formal changes in institutions and organizations play out in everyday practice. Further, institutional theory pays particular attention to *educational* institutions and their unique logic, as shown in the range of studies on "coupling" processes in schools. Lastly, recent developments in the field – inhabited institutions and sensemaking theory – bridge macro-, meso-, and micro-levels of analysis by highlighting the role that *people* play in shaping institutional change.

These latter developments in institutional theory, "inhabited institutions" and sensemaking theory, highlight the significance of micro-level interactions, meaning-

making, and individuals' behaviors toward understanding larger organizational and insitutional changes. These two theoretical approaches offer a compelling framework through which to examine College 1 in the early stages of its implementation for several reasons. First, the case of College 1 speaks to the "coupling" debate among education scholars who use an institutional theory approach. My study provides an empirical analysis of how external pressures (in the case of College 1, pressures to reinvent UCSC's approach to teaching the "Core" classes) shape or do not shape instructors' classroom practices – in other words, the "coupling" between external pressures and classroom practices. While early institutional theorists argued that educational institutions were "decoupled" or "loosely coupled" systems (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Weick 1976), more recent studies – many of which employ sensemaking theory – find that the elements within educational institutions have become "recoupled" in varying ways (Coburn 2004; Hallett 2010). My study of College 1 provides a new site through which to examine the ways in which external pressures and formal institutional changes impact (or do not impact) everyday classroom practices.

Second, my study is well-suited to examine institutional change through, specifically, a sensemaking approach. This research site represents what, in their article defining sensemaking, Weick and his collaborators call a state of "uncertainty" in which individuals are trying to discern whether reality is the "same or different" from their expectations (Weick et al. 2005:414). They list three types of situations in which the question of "same or different" is likely to be relevant:

“...situations involving the dramatic loss of sense [e.g., Lanir 1989], situations where the loss of sense is more mundane but no less troublesome [e.g., Westley 1990], and unfamiliar contexts where sense is elusive [e.g., Orton 2000].” (Weick et al. 2005:415)

The changes to College 1 produce an “unfamiliar context” for instructors who teach the course, who must then make sense of the ways in which the course is the “same or different” from the *Core* class they taught in the past. By interviewing instructors about how they make sense of these changes, I invite them to share their “stories,” as Weick and his collaborators put it, about what the changes mean – for students, for the university, and for their own professional identity – and how they should be implemented (2005:410). Sensemaking theory and an “inhabited institutions” approach draw my attention to instructors’ “stories” as a lens through which to consider how this curricular change played out the way it did.

Lastly, both “inhabited institutions” and sensemaking theory provide a conceptual framework through which I can link the beliefs and classroom practices of College 1 instructors to larger questions about how curricular change happens in universities. While an “inhabited institutions” approach examines *institutions* by way of the people who inhabit them, “sensemaking theory,” I find, examines *individuals* by situating them in the context of the institutions and organizations in which they find themselves. Bringing these complementary approaches together allows me to ask questions about institutional change at UCSC *and* about the College 1 instructors who give life to this change.

The lenses of “inhabited institutions” and sensemaking theory are uniquely well-suited to framing my findings in relation to my research questions. I will briefly review these questions and their connections to institutional theory.

RQ1: How do College 1 instructors teach the College 1 Learning Outcomes centered on the “ACMES” in their classrooms?

RQ2: How do they make decisions about teaching practices related to the Learning Outcomes?

RQ3: How do they navigate teaching-related dilemmas that arise in the implementation of the College 1 curriculum?

Each of these three questions speaks to a larger question posed by institutional theory: how do institutional changes play out in practice? More specifically, each question centers *sensemaking* about institutional changes as a lens for examining the implementation of these changes. RQ1 asks both how instructors *make sense* of the changes to “Core” and how they put these into *practice* in their teaching. RQ2 engages with sensemaking in the particular case of *decision making*, which requires me to look closely at the meanings and “stories” College 1 instructors craft about the changes to “Core” and about their own approach to teaching. RQ3 draws my attention to the “uncertainty,” as Weick and his colleagues put it, that instructors feel about how to teach College 1: how they make sense of the “dilemmas” and challenges they face, and how the sense they make of these “dilemmas” influences their teaching practices (2005:414). Together, these research questions offer a means for rich analysis of instructors’ sensemaking processes in the context of significant

institutional change. “Inhabited institutions” and sensemaking theory allow me to draw connections from my micro-level analysis of instructors’ beliefs, meaning-making, and practices to macro-level processes of university-wide changes and the broader social context of transformations in higher education beyond UCSC.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODS

### *Introduction*

This study is an examination of how institutional change happens, and the theoretical frameworks of “inhabited institutions” and sensemaking theory suggest that the best way to approach this question is through a focus on *people*: how they make sense of, negotiate, and enact institutional change. Haedicke and Hallett (2016) note that inhabited institutions scholars uses a range of methods – but especially qualitative methods – to examine the “recursive relationship between institutions and social interaction” and to “assess how organizational structure and behavior result from negotiations among organizational members” (99); in other words, inhabited institutions research looks at both how people “negotiate” organizational structures and how these structures are, in turn, shaped by the people who work within them.

In the case of UCSC’s changes to College 1, the people most directly involved with making sense of, negotiating, and enacting these curricular changes are the instructors who teach this course. My research methods, then, center on interviews with and classroom observations of the first cohort of College 1 instructors. I supplement these qualitative data – the heart of my project – with a survey of College 1 instructors and with interviews with several faculty members who were involved with the design of the College 1 curriculum. In this chapter, I describe my research methods for this study: data collection, including sampling, recruitment, and response rates, limitations of the study, and data analysis.

### *Data Collection*

Most data collection for this study took place in Fall of 2018, when UCSC implemented the new College 1 curriculum. Survey data collection and interviews with faculty members involved in the development of College 1 extended into early 2019. Data collection consisted of:

- Observations of ten College 1 classrooms, taught by ten participating College 1 instructors, across six colleges. Each classroom was observed twice (a total of 20 observations).
- Two interviews with each participating College 1 instructor (a total of 20 instructor interviews).
- Interviews with two key faculty members involved in the development and administration of the Academic Literacy Curriculum (ALC).
- End-of-quarter, online survey distributed to all Fall 2018 College 1 instructors.

The sections below describe the sampling, recruitment, data collection process, and response rates.

#### *Sampling*

In Fall 2018, when the College 1 curriculum first took effect, 89 instructors taught a total of 138 sections of College 1 across the ten colleges that make up UCSC. Each of these colleges has a distinct college “theme;” this theme shaped the earlier Core course curriculum at each college and continues to shape the curriculum of College 1 at each college, even as the College 1 establishes a common set of learning outcomes for all sections of the course (Abrams et al. 2017:30). Given that the

curriculum of College 1 varies across the ten colleges, the sampling strategy for interviews and observations was centered on including instructors from as many of the ten colleges as possible – ideally, one per college. To distinguish this sample from the sample of survey respondents, I refer to the sample of instructors I interviewed and observed as the “qualitative sample.” I limited the qualitative sample to instructors who had previously taught at least one section of Core at UCSC before teaching College 1, since new instructors would have limited awareness of the changes to the course. I also aimed to sample both women and men instructors and instructors of different racial backgrounds. I thus aimed to recruit a qualitative sample of instructors that was representative of the population of College 1 instructors along the lines of college affiliation, gender, and race.

The selection of two faculty members involved in the development and administration of College 1 was purposive rather than representative. These two interviews serve to provide background on and context for understanding the changes to Core. These faculty members were identified during interviews with College 1 instructors as influential stakeholders in the implementation of College 1.

The online survey was distributed to the entire population of Fall 2018 College 1 instructors (n=79). I refer to instructors who responded to the survey as the “survey sample.”

### *Recruitment*

To recruit participants for the qualitative sample, I emailed each instructor assigned to teach a section of College 1 with a brief description of my study to ask if



they would be interested in being interviewed and observed for my study; this email included an attached document with a more detailed study description (See Appendix A). I identified Fall instructors through the UCSC online Schedule of Classes, which provided an incomplete list of instructors, and through the Writing Program's College 1 liaisons for each of the colleges. For practical and scheduling reasons, I limited the qualitative sample to ten instructors. I accepted participants on a first-come, first-serve basis, accepting up to three participants per college to allow for the representation of as many colleges as possible.

The two faculty members involved in the planning and administration of College 1 were identified during interviews with College 1 instructors and then recruited individually, via email, in Fall 2018.

I recruited respondents for the online survey via email to each College 1 instructor during Week 10 of the Fall 2018 quarter (See Appendix A). To improve response rates, I re-sent this email twice during the Spring 2019 quarter. The director of the Writing Program also re-sent a link to the survey to all WP faculty teaching College 1, at my request, at the beginning of the Spring 2019 quarter.

#### *Data collection process*

After the ten instructor participants had been selected, I arranged to observe a section of each instructor's College 1 class once during the first 5 weeks of Fall quarter and once during the last 5 weeks of quarter. During classroom observations, I took detailed notes on classroom activities, student engagement, how instructors described and introduced material, interactions among students, and instructors' and

students' tone when speaking. The first classroom observation was followed by an interview, which took place within a week of the first observation. Interview topics for the first interview centered on the instructors' teaching experience prior to College 1, their knowledge about and involvement with the changes to College 1, their overall approach to teaching the course, their perception of the class meeting I observed, challenges they are facing, and their perception of the course learning outcomes (See Appendix B for interview protocols). The second interview took place during Week 10 or Finals Week of Fall quarter, regardless of the week in which the second observation took place. Whereas the first interview was focused mainly on the class I had recently observed, the second interview asked instructors to reflect on the quarter as a whole and their overall experience teaching College 1.

Interviews with two faculty members involved in the development of College 1 took place in Winter quarter 2019 at UCSC. During the first of these, I took detailed notes during the interview but did not record; the second interview was recorded and transcribed. Additionally, the first interview was unstructured, while the second interview followed a detailed protocol (See Appendix B).

#### *Response rates*

I sent 84 emails sent to College 1 instructors to recruit for the qualitative sample,<sup>19</sup> and received responses from 20 instructors; of these, 15 expressed interest in participating in the study. I declined participation from one instructor who was the

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<sup>19</sup> Five emails were sent to instructors who did not end up teaching College 1 but were identified as College 1 instructors in Summer 2018.

fourth from their college to express interest in the study and from another who had not previously taught Core at UCSC. Three others were unable to participate due to scheduling challenges.

The qualitative sample is comprised of 50 percent women and 50 percent men instructors; the racial demographics of the sample are 30 percent Latinx and 70 percent White. Figure 5, below, shows the college affiliations of the ten instructor participants<sup>20</sup> that comprise the qualitative sample:

<i>College</i>	Carson	College 9	College 10	Cowell	Crown
<i>Number of participants</i>	1	0	2	3	1
<i>College</i>	Kresge	Merrill	Oakes	Porter	Stevenson
<i>Number of participants</i>	0	0	0	2	1

*Figure 5: College affiliations of participants in qualitative sample*

The table above shows one college affiliation for each instructor in the qualitative sample, even though several instructor participants taught College 1 at two colleges. Although some instructors taught multiple sections of College 1, sometimes in multiple colleges, I conducted observations of each instructor in the same class at two different points in the quarter. My interviews with instructors following each observation focused on the class that I observed.<sup>21</sup> The counts in the table above indicate the colleges in which I observed instructors' classrooms.

<sup>20</sup> To protect instructor confidentiality, I do not identify college affiliation in my presentation of interview, observation, or survey data from participants.

<sup>21</sup> In a few cases, an instructor volunteered information about their College 1 class(es) taught at a different college during our interviews. To protect instructor confidentiality, I do not name these colleges in the analysis.

The online survey was distributed via email to all Fall 2018 College 1 instructors (n=79).<sup>22</sup> The survey received 29 responses – a response rate of 36.7 percent. The gender demographics of the survey sample were 65.5 percent female (19 respondents), 27.5 percent male (8 respondents), 3.4 percent non-binary (1 respondent), and 3.4 percent who did not indicate a gender identity (1 respondent). The racial demographics of the survey sample were 75.8 percent White (22 respondents), 10.3 percent Latinx or Hispanic (3 respondents), 6.9 percent multi-racial or multi-ethnic (2 respondents), 3.4 percent African, Black, and/or Caribbean (1 respondent), and 3.4 percent who did not indicate a racial or ethnic identity (1 respondent). Figure 6, below, shows the college affiliations of the survey sample.<sup>23</sup>

<i>College</i>	Carson	College 9	College 10	Cowell	Crown
<i>Number of respondents</i>	2	0	5	4	1
<i>College</i>	Kresge	Merrill	Oakes	Porter	Stevenson
<i>Number of respondents</i>	3	7	3	2	0

*Figure 6: College affiliations of survey respondents*

### ***Limitations***

My choices about sampling and recruitment, as well as the response rates for data collection, are each accompanied by their own set of limitations for my analysis.

In this section, I describe several key limitations of the study’s methods:

<sup>22</sup> The survey was distributed to all College 1 instructors, including the 10 instructors who I interviewed and observed for this study.

<sup>23</sup> Some respondents taught College 1 at more than one College; two listed more than one College affiliation. Additionally, four respondents did not list a College affiliation. As a result, this table does not total 29 responses.

representativeness of the sample and participation bias, survey response rate, exclusion of students and administrators from the study, and generalizability of the case.

*Representativeness and participation bias*

I aimed for both the qualitative sample and survey sample to reflect the gender and racial demographics of the population of College 1 instructors and to represent each of the ten colleges at UCSC. The table below compares the gender and racial demographics of the qualitative sample and survey sample to those of the population of lecturers employed by UCSC in Fall 2018 (n=300) (Office of Institutional Research, Assessment 2018). Demographic data for the study population, Fall 2018 College 1 instructors, are not publicly available; therefore, I instead include the demographic data for all UCSC lecturers, of which College 1 instructors comprise a significant proportion. Figure 7, below, compares the demographics of this study’s qualitative and survey samples to the demographics of UCSC lecturers as a whole.

	<i>Qualitative sample</i>	<i>Survey sample</i>	<i>UCSC lecturers</i>
<i>Percent women</i>	50%	65.5%	55%
<i>Percent non-binary</i>	0%	3.4%	Data not available
<i>Percent Latinx</i>	30%	10.3%	8.3%
<i>Percent African/Black / and/or Caribbean</i>	0%	3.4%	3.3%
<i>Percent multi-racial or multi-ethnic</i>	0%	6.9%	Data not available

*Figure 7: Demographics of study samples as compared to UCSC lecturers*

The population of College 1 instructors is roughly equally distributed across the ten colleges; each college offered between 12 and 15 sections of College 1 in Fall 2018. Due to disparities in college affiliation among respondents to my recruitment email, my qualitative sample covers only six colleges; Cowell College is overrepresented, with three instructor participants, and College 9, Kresge, Merrill, and Oakes Colleges are not represented in the qualitative sample. The absence of instructor participants from these four colleges is partially mitigated by the survey sample, which includes three respondents from Kresge College, seven respondents from Merrill College, and three respondents from Oakes College. However, instructors from College 9 are not represented in either sample.

Participation in both the interviews and observations and in the online survey was voluntary and uncompensated. As such, instructors who chose to participate in either component of data collection may not be representative of the population of College 1 instructors as a whole. The samples likely overrepresent instructors who have an especially positive or an especially negative view of the changes to College 1, as these instructors would be more motivated to discuss College 1 in interviews. The samples may also overrepresent instructors who are most familiar with the College 1 learning outcomes. My recruitment email described the interview topics as “[fo]stering students’ sense of self-efficacy, encouraging engagement across difference, teaching metacognition, and your views on the implementation of College 1;” instructors comfortable with terms like “self-efficacy” and “metacognition” may have been more likely to express interest in the study. Lastly, participation in this

study is almost certainly biased toward instructors who check their UCSC email regularly, including in the summer.

*Survey response rate*

The online survey of College 1 instructors had a response rate of 36.7%, which is higher than that of most online surveys distributed via email according to a recent study (Petrovčič, Petrič, and Lozar Manfreda 2016:328). Given the small size of the study population, however, this response rate resulted in a small sample of survey respondents (n=29). A sample size of 29 limits the kinds of statistical analyses that can be done with these data. For example, regression analysis, which can identify causal relationships among variables, is beyond the scope of this study due to the small size of the survey sample.

*Exclusion of students and administrators*

This study examines the implementation of College 1 from the perspective of the first cohort of instructors who taught this new curriculum. The study does not include the perspectives or voices of students who took College 1 or administrators, both of whom are also important stakeholders in the course's implementation. I limit my focus to instructors for theoretical and methodological reasons. This narrowing of focus allows me to examine instructor participants' sensemaking in greater depth than I could in a study that included comparable numbers of student and administrator participants; instructors' sensemaking is the focus of the research questions and the analysis. This choice to focus on instructors is also a deliberate effort to provide a counternarrative to more common institutional narratives about College 1, which tend

to provide a high-level description of the curriculum from the perspective of administrators or focus on student data – for example, from the assessment administered to College 1 students measuring their achievement of the course learning outcomes.

Excluding students and administrators from this study comes at a cost, however. This study does not speak to the impact of the new College 1 curriculum on students, examine student data on their achievement of the College 1 learning outcomes, or compare instructors' perspectives of their classrooms with those of their students. By excluding non-faculty administrators, this study does not provide an in-depth examination of the development of the College 1 curriculum behind the scenes or analyze the logistical and practical considerations that shaped the implementation of College 1. The interviews with two faculty members involved in the development and administration of College 1 help inform an overview of the development of College 1, but instructors' perceptions of these changes remain the focus of the analysis. Future research on the UCSC College 1 curriculum might extend the scope of this study by comparing the perspectives of instructors, students, and administrators.

#### *Generalizability of the case*

A final limitation of this study is the generalizability of the case of College 1 to other colleges and universities that may implement similar reforms to their first-year curricula. As described in the "History of Core" chapter, the design of UC Santa Cruz as a system of small colleges is unique within the UC system, and shared by few



public or private institutions in the US (one example is the private Claremont Colleges in Southern California) (Jarrell 1988:15). UCSC's collegiate system played a central role in both the impetus for the ALC and its implementation. The Academic Senate's call for a Core course that is more "consistent" across the colleges informed the design of the ALC (Abrams et al. 2017:15); at the same time, the differences among the colleges (such as theme) and the decentralized administration of the Core courses presented challenges for implementing the ALC's reforms consistently across the colleges. These challenges may not be shared by more traditionally-structured colleges and universities that follow, as Kerr described it, a research-centered "German model" (Jarrell 1988:7). Future research could illuminate the impact of UCSC's collegiate system on the implementation of College 1 by comparing this case with the implementation of a similar curricular reform at a differently-structured college or university.

### *Data analysis*

This study makes use of mixed methods: 1) qualitative analysis, which consists of thematic coding of interviews, observations, and open-ended survey responses, and 2) quantitative analysis of responses to closed-ended survey questions.

#### *Qualitative analysis*

The qualitative analysis in this study consists of semi-open coding of interview transcripts, detailed observation notes, and open-ended responses to a Google Forms survey. By "semi-open," I draw from Haedicke and Hallett's recommendation for inhabited institutions research to take an analytic approach that

is both deductive and inductive; this approach begins with a “quasi-deductive moment” of developing research questions and preliminary codes based on existing scholarship in the field, and takes an inductive turn by remaining open to unexpected findings and surprising directions in the research process (Haedicke and Hallett 2016:100). The coding process began with writing memos in response to qualitative data sources in order to identify preliminary themes emerging from the data and note connections to existing scholarship (Birks, Chapman, and Francis 2008). Memos addressed a range of emerging themes and findings: approaches to teaching reading strategies and academic literacy, implications of the changes to Core for instructors’ workload, implicit and explicit approaches to teaching the learning outcomes, approaches to developing students’ self-efficacy, fostering community in the classroom, instructors’ sense of autonomy over their course, teaching metacognition, and the effects of untracking. I developed a codebook with more detailed descriptions of codes; these included both themes described in my memos and themes articulated in the research questions. The codebook is included below, in Figure 8.

**1. Class or classroom characteristics:** This set of codes applies to interviews, observations, and open-ended survey responses. They are used to classify instructors’ descriptions and observations of classroom activities, different types of student engagement in the classroom, and features of the class or classroom itself.

The codes within this category are: Class size; Classroom community; Desks; Small groups; Student engagement; Student presentations; Student workload; Vulnerability; Whole-class discussion

**2. Instructor perspective:** This set of codes applies primarily to interviews and open-ended survey responses, but may apply to some observations as well. They are used to classify instructors’ descriptions of the challenges they face in their College 1 classes, their view of the changes to Core, the impacts of these changes

on their workload, their approach to teaching College 1, and the degree of autonomy they feel over their syllabus.

The codes within this category are: Assignments; Autonomy and role in curriculum development; Challenges; Favorable view of changes; Grading; Ideal course; Implicit approach; Instructor lectures and presentations; Instructor tone and values; Negative view of changes; Neoliberalism and utilitarianism in curriculum; Positive view of changes; Workload and pay

**3. Learning outcomes:** This set of codes applies to interviews, observations, and open-ended survey responses. They are used to classify instructors' descriptions of their views of and approaches to teaching the College 1 learning outcomes, as well as observations of classroom activities, discussion, and materials related to the learning outcomes.

The codes within this category are: Academic literacy and reading strategies; Connections among texts; Connections between texts and students' lives; Critical thinking; Engagement across difference; Metacognition; Recursion; Self-efficacy; Thematic readings; Untracking

**4. Student characteristics:** This set of codes applies primarily to interviews and open-ended survey responses, but may apply to some observations as well. They are used to classify instructors' descriptions of their students' preparedness or readiness for college and of the demographics of their students.

The codes within this category are: College preparedness; International students; Student identity; Student socioeconomic status

*Figure 8: Codes and sub-codes used for qualitative analysis*

The coding process involved three rounds of coding for each data source. In the first round, I coded using the preliminary codes developed from my memos and research questions, while also generating new codes as they arose. In the second round of coding, I grouped together and consolidated similar codes, added in new codes that emerged part-way through the first round of coding, and then re-coded all of the data with the updated codebook. I created 4 major categories of codes between the first and second rounds of coding: student characteristics, class and classroom characteristics, learning outcomes, and instructor perspective. The latter category

captured instructors' perspectives on dimensions of the course not captured by the other 3 categories, such as grading, workload, their pedagogy, and overall assessment of the changes. In the third round of coding, I re-read through all of the data and re-coded for any codes missed in earlier rounds of coding – for instance, codes for student assignments and for challenging situations that emerged during the second round. Alongside the coding, I wrote memos in which I began to analyze emerging themes based on prominent codes and planned next steps for analysis.

#### *Quantitative analysis*

The small sample size of survey respondents (n=29) limits the kinds of analysis I can do with these data. The quantitative analysis therefore consists of descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics allow me to describe the demographics of the sample and to provide an overall description of how the survey respondents prioritized the College 1 learning outcomes in their courses, as well as how successful they feel they were in teaching these. Given the richness and quantity of the qualitative data as compared to the quantitative data, this study's findings are grounded primarily in qualitative analysis.

## CHAPTER 5: Explicit, Implicit, and Oppositional Approaches to Teaching the College 1 Learning Outcomes

### ***Introduction***

The Academic Literacy Curriculum (ALC) defines two types of learning outcomes for College 1: outcomes related to reading and interpreting texts, and outcomes related to what ALC authors call the “ACMES:” analysis, critical thinking, metacognition, engagement across difference, and self-efficacy. The ACMES outcomes, as described in the ALC proposal, are the foundation of College 1; they are meant to serve as the “content of the course” across all UCSC colleges (Abrams et al. 2017:5).<sup>24</sup> This chapter examines how instructors made sense of this latter set of outcomes and how these outcomes shaped (or did not shape) their teaching. Through this, I develop an answer to this study’s first research question: How do College 1 instructors teach the College 1 learning outcomes centered on the “ACMES” in their classrooms?

Through interviewing instructors about their approaches to teaching the ACMES outcomes, I find that instructors’ perceptions of the College 1 learning outcomes often engaged with the *concept* of learning outcomes rather than the particular *content* of the outcomes. Rather than address what it might mean to measure a student’s “metacognition,” for instance, instructors were more broadly concerned with how learning outcomes *of any kind* should inform teaching, the

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<sup>24</sup> See Table 1 of Appendix A, the Academic Literacy Curriculum Proposal, for the College 1 learning outcomes.

validity of learning outcomes, and what the existence of learning outcomes suggests about higher education in the US today.

College 1 instructors' views on learning outcomes both speak to and extend an existing debate within higher education and writing studies scholarship. This debate, simply put, asks: are learning outcomes good for college students' learning? Scholars' contributions to this debate range from highly supportive, to cautiously optimistic, to deeply critical views of the value of learning outcomes. College 1 instructors articulated three distinct approaches to teaching the ACMES outcomes that sometimes parallel and sometimes depart from scholars' stances in this debate. The first of these approaches is an "explicit" approach to teaching the College 1 learning outcomes, in which instructors voiced support for both learning outcomes as a whole and the specific ACMES outcomes. These instructors believed these learning outcomes are best taught by using the vocabulary of the outcomes in the classroom. The second is an "implicit" approach. These instructors who take this approach voiced support for the ACMES outcomes but believed they are best taught by developing class materials informed by these concepts, rather than by using the vocabulary of the outcomes with students. The third approach is an "oppositional" approach and mirrors the stances taken by scholars critical of learning outcomes altogether. Instructors who took an "oppositional" approach to teaching the ACMES outcomes found learning outcomes to be antithetical to student learning, regardless of their content, and did not use the vocabulary of the ACMES outcomes with their students.

In this chapter, I begin by reviewing the scholarship on learning outcomes in higher education: first, the history of the use of learning outcomes in higher education, and then, the scholarly debate on the value of learning outcomes for college students' learning. Next, I present my study's three main findings on College 1 instructors' understandings of and approaches to teaching the ACMES outcomes: the explicit approach, the implicit approach, and the oppositional stance. I conclude the chapter by situating these three approaches in the context of the learning outcomes debate in higher education.

### ***History of learning outcomes in higher education***

While learning outcomes have long been used in K-12 education, their influence in higher education is a more recent development. Scholars trace the origins of learning outcomes in higher education to the late 1990s, with the Bologna education reforms in Europe that came about following a meeting of representatives from the European Union member states' Ministry of Education in 1999 (Adam 2006; Kennedy 2006; Sin 2014). This meeting established a European Higher Education Area with the aim "to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of higher education in Europe;" it also initiated a larger series of policies and communiqués that established the centrality of learning outcomes in European institutions of higher education (Kennedy 2006:13). The European Higher Education Area and Bologna reforms emphasized standardization of educational qualifications and transparency around degree programs, both of which would be communicated through learning outcomes (Kennedy 2006:13-15). Learning outcomes would establish a common vocabulary

among educational programs, make expectations for students clearer, enable degree credits to transfer more easily across institutions, and facilitate the assessment of “quality assurance” of institutions and degree programs (Kennedy 2006:16).

Conceptually, learning outcomes can be traced back even further to 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century scholars in the “behavioral school” of psychology, which included Ivan Pavlov, JB Watson, and BF Skinner (Adam 2006:2; Murtonen, Gruber, and Lehtinen 2017). In defining the knowledge or skills that should result from education, learning outcomes mirror the logic of behaviorism, which posits that external factors shape human behavior (Adam 2006:2). Like Adam, Kennedy also notes the “behavioral” roots of learning outcomes but identifies their origins in the “behavioral objectives movement” in the US in the 1960s and 70s – most notably, Robert Mager’s 1975 call for teachers’ use of clearly-stated “instructional objectives” that defined what students would learn and how their performance would be assessed at the end of an instructional period (Kennedy 2006:19). Examining the history of “outcomes” from the field of writing studies, Yancey (2005) similarly finds “objectives,” which dominated educational reforms in the 1970s, to be the precursors to “outcomes,” which emerged in the 1990s (18). Whereas objectives defined “very specific statements of achievement,” Yancey finds, outcomes help specify the content of education without defining “how well” students achieve these outcomes (21).

In a critical account of the philosophical underpinnings of the Learning Outcome Movement in US higher education, Stoller (2015) traces its origins to the influence of Frederick Winslow Taylor’s “scientific management principles” (317).



Just as Taylor reorganized industrial factories to more efficiently reach production goals, so too, Stoller argues, “the landscape of post-secondary education in the American public school system is being reconstructed around the learning outcome” to more efficiently reach educational goals (319). Stoller finds that E.L. Thorndike, an early 20<sup>th</sup>-century behaviorist scholar, played a crucial role in bringing Taylorism into the field of education by advocating for the use of scientific methods to measure teachers’ effectiveness and theorizing students’ learning as “the accumulation of stimulus-response associations” (319). Thorndike’s behaviorist scholarship and today’s Learning Outcome Movement share several key assumptions, Stoller argues; these are: viewing mind and body as separate, understanding all human behaviors as simple responses to stimuli, finding emotions to be irrelevant to learning, and seeing knowledge as independent from the learner (2006:320). On the basis of this philosophical foundation, Stoller defines learning outcomes as “skills, knowledges or abilities that are defined and articulated *prior to and apart from* any actual instance of learning and *against which* a learning process is ultimately evaluated” (2006:320). Further, Stoller finds, learning outcomes are necessarily “teleological rather than emergent;” that is, they prescribe the goals of learning ahead of time (2006:320).

These accounts of the origins of learning outcomes in higher education largely agree with each other in tracing learning outcomes to behaviorist scholarship, which focuses on how external factors (for instance, the curriculum) shape individuals’ behavior (such as learning). These accounts also converge in their definition of learning outcomes, most broadly, as statements of the end goals of learning. Their

analyses of the *value* of learning outcomes for student learning, however, vary significantly. I explore these differences in the next section.

### ***Debate on learning outcomes in higher education***

The scholarly conversation on learning outcomes in higher education comprises what appears, at first glance, a wide variety of approaches to examining this topic. Scholars in this area focus their analyses on the origins of learning outcomes in higher education, the challenges of implementing learning outcomes, the use of learning outcomes for curricular planning and assessment, and practical recommendations for teaching using learning outcomes. Underlying this apparent diversity of approaches, however, is a shared concern with one central question: “are learning outcomes good for students’ learning?” Even scholars who examine the origins of learning outcomes or the practicalities of using them in the classroom, for example, frame their contribution in terms of a debate on the value of learning outcomes. Scholars’ stances on this question range from universally supportive of using learning outcomes in higher education, to supportive only under certain conditions, to opposed to the basic premises of learning outcomes. I review scholars’ contributions to this debate on a continuum of most to least supportive of learning outcomes.

Scholarly arguments strongly in favor of learning outcomes share several key features. First, proponents generally find learning outcomes to be “student-centered,” that is, centered on what students learn and what skills students gain rather than on what instructors teach (Adam 2002, 2006:4; Allan 1996:104; Dobbins et al. 2016;

Hargreaves and Moore 2000:29; Harrington et al. 2005; Kennedy 2006:18; Maher 2004:47; Tam 2014:159). Additionally, proponents argue that learning outcomes make the purpose and goals of education more transparent (Adam 2002, 2006; Allan 1996; Barman, Bolander-Laksov, and Silén 2014; Dobbins et al. 2016; Hargreaves and Moore 2000; Harrington et al. 2005; Kennedy 2006; Maher 2004; McMahon and Thakore 2006; Sweetman 2017; Tam 2014; Yancey 2005), are useful for establishing common standards across the university or across a discipline (Adam 2006:16; Harrington et al. 2005; Kennedy 2006:15; McMahon and Thakore 2006:17; Tam 2014:164), and facilitate the assessment of student learning (Adam 2006:16; Yancey 2005:22).

Compared to scholars who critique learning outcomes, scholars who advocate for learning outcomes often give more detailed definitions of what a “learning outcome” is and how it differs from a learning “objective.” For example, Yancey argues for the value of learning outcomes by emphasizing their distinction from “objectives” and “standards,” which, unlike outcomes, are more limiting and prescriptive about “how well” students achieve the learning goals (2005:21).

Kennedy (2006) finds that the many definitions of learning outcomes, though they differ in some ways, all converge in their agreement that learning outcomes “focus on what the student has achieved rather than merely focusing on the content of what has been taught” and that they “focus on what the student can demonstrate at the end of a learning activity” (Kennedy 2006:21). Learning outcomes proponents, in other words, tend to define learning outcomes as fundamentally student-centered.

In addition to highlighting the student-centered nature of learning outcomes, the primary professional organization of the writing studies field, the Council of Writing Program Administrators, notes the value of learning outcomes for curricular consistency and assessment. The Council formalized its support for the use of learning outcomes in college composition classrooms with the publication of the “WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition” in 1999. With this document, the Council aimed both to describe the goals of and “to regularize what can be expected to be taught in first-year composition” (Harrington et al. 2005). While the authors state that the “primary intent” of the Outcomes Statement is to shape composition curricula, they also note that it “would be entirely within the intent of the document” to use the Outcomes Statement for purposes of “assessment,” “accreditation,” and “accountability” (Harrington et al. 2001:323). Each of the outcomes the authors list begins with the statement, “By the end of first year composition, students should...” or “Faculty in all programs and departments can build on this preparation by helping students learn...” (Harrington et al. 2005). With this statement, the Council articulates a set of student-centered learning outcomes that should be used to “regularize” college composition curricula across the US and may also be used to support “accountability” efforts at higher education institutions. This statement captures the primary arguments that scholars advance in favor of using learning outcomes in higher education: learning outcomes encourage student-centered learning, learning outcomes help create curricular consistency, and learning outcomes facilitate both individual- and program-level assessment.

Scholarly arguments that are critical of learning outcomes tend to be one of three types: 1) arguments about the “practical/technical” difficulties of using learning outcomes (Adam 2006:14), 2) arguments about the “managerial” uses of learning outcomes (Erikson and Erikson 2018:4), or 3) arguments about the “conceptual/philosophical” (Adam 2006:14), or “epistemological” (Erikson and Erikson 2018:4), bases of learning outcomes.

Scholars who examine the “practical” or “technical” challenges of using learning outcomes, as Adam (2006) puts it, tend to see learning outcomes as valuable if used correctly; compared to other scholars who are critical of learning outcomes, these scholars are the most hopeful about the potential of learning outcomes to support student learning. Scholars who examine the “practical” and “technical” challenges of learning outcomes further stand out from other scholars who write on the value of learning outcomes by offering recommendations on *how* learning outcomes should inform teaching in higher education. For Adam (2006), for instance, the “practical” challenges of learning outcomes arise in their implementation (the difficulty of enacting curricular change and gaining instructor buy-in), while “technical” challenges emerge in creating learning outcomes that are neither “over-described” nor “under-described” and that do not overburden students (15). Hadjianastasis (2017) elaborates on several of these practical and technical challenges in his study of how early-career university instructors in the UK understand and enact learning outcomes in their classrooms. He finds that instructors find learning outcomes to be useful as “guidance” for planning their lessons, but often conflate

learning outcomes with the syllabus or curriculum and are uncertain about how learning outcomes should inform student assessment (Hadjianastasis 2017:2258–59).

Other scholars point to different challenges with learning outcomes that can also be described as practical or technical, but which are more difficult to overcome than those Adam describes (Berlach 2004; Brooks et al. 2014; Caspersen, Frølich, and Muller 2017; Jorre de St Jorre and Oliver 2018; Kuh and Ewell 2010; Kumpas-Lenk, Eisenschmidt, and Veispak 2018; Lassnigg 2012; Schoepp 2019; Sin 2014; Sweetman 2019). Kumpas-Lenk, Eisenschmidt, and Veispak (2018), for instance, examine how the design of learning outcomes influences university students' perceptions of these outcomes. Classifying learning outcome design according to the levels of Bloom's taxonomy of learning, these scholars find that few learning outcomes require the highest levels of "cognitive demand;" however, outcomes that do so have the greatest impact on "students' satisfaction, motivation, engagement with their studies and achievement of the learning outcomes" (Kumpas-Lenk et al. 2018:180, 185).

While Kumpas-Lenk et al. consider the challenges students face in using learning outcomes, Caspersen, Frølich, and Muller (2017) and Sweetman (2019) focus on how higher education policymakers, administrators, and instructors interpret learning outcomes. Caspersen et al. argue that learning outcomes in higher education function as "ambiguous" tools for curricular design and management, by which they mean that different policy actors differently interpret learning outcomes depending on context (2017:12). The result of this is that the design of learning outcomes for a

diverse range of contexts tends to produce outcomes with “generic definitions” (Caspersen et al. 2017:16). Sweetman similarly finds that learning outcomes function as “ambiguous policy objects” in higher education settings (2019:141). While policymakers present learning outcomes as “flexible” teaching tools adaptable to diverse interpretations, instructors often experience learning outcomes as external pressure to produce measurable results in their classrooms (Sweetman 2019:152–53). Unlike Caspersen et al., who see this ambiguity as relatively innocuous, Sweetman argues that this tension between “process” and “product” interpretations of learning outcomes limits the potential of outcomes to be implemented successfully (2019:154).

Scholars who critique the practical and technical challenges of learning outcomes tend to agree that learning outcomes can be beneficial for student learning if used correctly, even as they voice different degrees of skepticism about this possibility. Further, these scholars provide practical recommendations for how best to implement learning outcomes in higher education classrooms: avoiding learning outcomes that are “over-described” (too specific) and “under-described” or “generic” (Adam 2002:15; Caspersen et al. 2017:16); creating learning outcomes that engage students in higher-order thinking (Kumpas-Lenk et al. 2018); and clarifying the purpose of learning outcomes for instructors to avoid “ambiguity” or misunderstandings (Hadjianastasis 2017; Sweetman 2019). Compared to scholars who offer types of critiques of learning outcomes, these scholars offer the most direct

insight into how instructors use learning outcomes in college classrooms and the challenges they face in doing so.

The second type of critique, managerial arguments, highlights the ways learning outcomes are used to “police,” as one scholar puts it, instructors’ teaching and students’ learning (Avis 2000:48; Bennett and Brady 2012; Havnes and Prøitz 2016; Hussey and Smith 2002). These critiques are cautiously optimistic about the potential of learning outcomes, finding them to be beneficial to student learning if used to support teaching rather than evaluate or discipline instructors and students. Avis (2000) explores the links between learning outcomes and what he calls “managerialism,” which, in higher education, subjects both teachers and students to a “management gaze” (48). This “gaze” positions teachers as technicians to be “audited” in their work and students as “consumers of marketized educational provision,” which, paradoxically, “encourages student passivity” by limiting students’ possibilities for truly critical or creative thinking (Avis 2000:50–51). The solution to this, Avis argues, is for students and teachers to collaboratively develop their own outcomes that recognize “the open ended nature of learning and the need for flexibility” (Avis 2000:54)

Hussey and Smith (2003) similarly argue that learning outcomes should be distanced from “administrative and regulatory” uses, which place too much emphasis on what they called “predicted outcomes” (357). “Predicted outcomes,” they claim, “pre-specify” learning goals ahead of time, are “insensitive” to different educational contexts, are often interpreted as “hurdles” rather than learning goals by students, and



put learning outcomes in the service of administration (Hussey and Smith 2003:358). To better serve students' learning, teaching should put greater emphasis on "emergent outcomes" – learning outcomes that are more flexible and responsive to students' interests, and which the instructor needs to monitor to ensure alignment with their broader, intended learning outcomes (Hussey and Smith 2003:364). Thus, both for Avis and for Hussey and Smith, learning outcomes are problematic when used for administrative or managerial purposes, but effective when revised to center on students' learning.

The third type of critique – conceptual, philosophical, and epistemological arguments – calls into question the basic assumptions of learning outcomes and outcome-based education. Scholars that make this type of critique argue that learning outcomes create "ceilings" for student learning (Erikson and Erikson 2018:8; Hussey and Smith 2002:357–58; Stoller 2015:329), fail to capture the complexity of learning (Batten 2012:16; Erikson and Erikson 2018; Gallagher 2012; Hussey and Smith 2002, 2003, 2008), may not really be "student-centered" (Allais 2012; Bagnall 1994; Elbow 2005:187; Sweetman 2017:53), and, in the boldest arguments, undermine student agency and democracy (Bennett and Brady 2012; Smyth and Dow 1998; Stoller 2015). Erikson and Erikson (2018) review both "managerial" and "epistemological" critiques of learning outcomes to offer their own analysis of "critical thinking" learning outcomes. In their analysis, learning outcomes centered on "critical thinking" illuminate three dimensions of an epistemological problem: 1) they are difficult for both students and teachers to interpret, as they necessarily oversimplify the idea of

“critical thinking;” 2) some goals of education (for example, those related to students’ “dispositions”) cannot be translated into a learning outcome, and 3) learning outcomes risk establishing a “ceiling” for students’ inquiry (Erikson and Erikson 2018:6–8). They conclude that learning outcomes may effectively be used “as a tool for planning and reviewing courses, programmes, and particular lectures or seminars,” as well as for “quality assurance,” so long as instructors and administrators are not “naïve” in their use of them and recognize their “risks” (Erikson and Erikson 2018:8–9).

The boldest critiques of learning outcomes are concerned less with the particularities of how learning outcomes are defined or interpreted in practice, and instead focus on the political uses and implications of outcome-based education. For instance, like Stoller (2015), Bennett and Brady (2012) argue that the Learning Outcomes Assessment movement can be traced to Taylor’s “theories of scientific management” (35). They find that the Taylorist logic of the Learning Outcomes Assessment movement facilitates its “profoundly undemocratic ends:” to enable administrators and bureaucrats to “disciplin[e]” teachers and students (Bennett and Brady 2012:39). Bennett and Brady find that, far from being “benign” tools that facilitate curricular development, learning outcomes are used by “college administrations, government entities, and accrediting agencies” to hold instructors who teach vastly different populations of students the same standards for achievement, which punishes instructors who serve disadvantaged populations by redirecting those instructors’ attention to those standards (Bennett and Brady

2012:39). In other words, instructors who teach low-income students are forced to “teach to the test.” Instead of teaching students using learning outcomes, Bennett and Brady argue, instructors should have the freedom to teach their students “how to think critically, including thinking critically about their own educations” (Bennett and Brady 2012:42).

Stoller (2015) similarly argues that the logic of learning outcomes in US higher education mirrors that of Taylor’s scientific management (317). He contrasts this model to John Dewey’s pedagogical philosophy and finds that, ultimately, learning outcomes are “antithetical to the development of deep learning and democratic forms of education” (318). Because they define the “ends” of learning from the outset, Stoller argues, learning outcomes necessarily take a “teleological” view of education, limit the means by which these may be achieved, and, ultimately, “dehumanize[e]” participants in the educational system (2015:318). Stoller thus extends arguments made by Hussey and Smith (2003) and others that claim that learning outcomes risk establishing a ceiling for student learning and creativity; he goes beyond this to argue that outcome-based education always assumes and privileges the interests of an “outside, expert class” who decides what students will learn and what teachers will teach (Stoller 2015:328). Stoller, along with Bennett and Brady, sees learning outcomes as fundamentally irredeemable. At their core, these scholars argue, learning outcomes are grounded in the logics of Taylorism, capitalism, and neoliberalism and thus oppose the democratic potential of education.

To review: in this section, I have described the common arguments made by higher education and writing studies scholars in conversation about learning outcomes in higher education. I find that this conversation appears, at the surface, to address a variety of questions about the origins, value, and uses of learning outcomes in higher education; in reality, however, scholars in this area converge in framing their findings in terms of an answer to one question: “are learning outcomes good for students’ learning?” On one side of this debate, scholars see learning outcomes as valuable both for student learning and for assessment purposes. These scholars find that learning outcomes make educational goals more transparent to students and create more consistency among curricula within and across higher education institutions. At the other extreme of this debate, scholars argue that learning outcomes impede student learning and are fundamentally anti-democratic by delegating responsibility for educational goals to an elite group of “experts” who design curricula. In between these stances, many scholars take a cautiously optimistic view of learning outcomes, warning against their use for “managerial” purposes, potential “practical” and “technical” difficulties in their use, and the risk of their misinterpretation by both instructors and students.

Whether they focus on the uses, origins, values, or practicalities of learning outcomes in higher education, scholars converge in framing their argument in terms of a central debate on the *value* of learning outcomes for college students. The variation in the debate centers on if, when, and for what purposes higher education institutions and instructors should make use of learning outcomes. This study’s

findings, described below, shed light on a dimension of this debate that few scholars have addressed: *how* instructors should teach using learning outcomes.

***Findings: Teaching Learning Outcomes through Explicit, Implicit, and Oppositional Approaches***

In my interviews with and surveys of College 1 instructors, I found that instructors take diverse stances on learning outcomes that in some ways mirror and in some ways depart from the scholarly debate. While most expressed support for the College 1 learning outcomes, some instructors echoed the most critical scholars who argue against learning outcomes. The former group of instructors primarily voiced concerns about *how* learning outcomes should shape pedagogy, while the latter group critiqued the concept of “learning outcomes” altogether. In the sections below, I describe the three main stances on learning outcomes that College 1 instructors articulated in my study: in favor of teaching outcomes explicitly, in favor of teaching outcomes implicitly, and wholly opposed to the use of learning outcomes.

*Explicit approach to teaching the ACMES outcomes*

Several College 1 instructors expressed during our interviews that explicitly naming, discussing, and assigning readings related to the ACMES learning outcomes was important to the success of the course. These instructors believed that students do not just learn by doing, but also by reading and reflecting on the concepts of metacognition, self-efficacy, and engagement across difference. One survey respondent took this view in response to my survey question about whether the College 1 learning outcomes were an instructor’s “preferred goals” for the course;

they commented that it is “good to make critical habits of mind explicit to students.”

In my interviews, Elizabeth Abrams, who taught College 1 in Fall 2018 in addition to being a primary author of the curriculum, articulated this position most strongly.

MEGAN: You teach explicit readings about the ACMES. This was something that came up often in my interviews. Many instructors felt that these are things that students should learn by doing rather than by reading about it... Why do you have students read about it?

ABRAMS: ...Because they don't know how to do it. Because our century's long experiment of having them learn by osmosis is not working anymore. Because our students come from an extraordinarily mixed range of experiences and we need to even the playing field and because even the top students have a lot to learn when they think about metacognition.

MEGAN: I think some [instructors] were a little in between. Not that the ACMES don't matter, but that you could just teach [students] the skills and explain the skills, but without having them read about it. So, why explicitly – why learning through reading about the ACMES as the way to learn them?

ABRAMS: Yeah. Okay, good question. I think because actually in some ways, having readings about them gives them greater authority as not just folk remedies and not just or what my teacher says or what my teacher makes me do. But oh, there's a field backing this up. There's a theory that indicates that this is the case. I think a fair number of colleges did do this, I had my students maintaining a list of vocabulary in their commonplace books and thinking about applications for a terminology. By the end of the quarter, everyone in my class would have been able to tell you what metacognition meant and positionality and ideology.

ABRAMS: It's a mixed, varied list of vocabulary, but they all would've been able to say something about what those things mean and how you could apply them in different settings, subjectivity, bias and so on, all of these things. They got it partly because they were reading about it and not just because I was lecturing at them. They were reading about it and they were writing about it. Why not have them read? This is a class in reading and that's some of the reading that they're going to be faced with.

From Abrams' perspective, teaching the ACMES explicitly was important to the course's ability to help “even the playing field” among students from diverse

backgrounds and levels of college preparedness. Assigning readings related to the ACMES served to legitimate them as research-based strategies for learning.

Given Abrams' role as a primary author of the ALC proposal, I find it unsurprising that the proposal itself also articulates an explicit approach to teaching the ACMES in its description of the course. The "Framework for College 1" appendix of the ALC proposal lists eight "principles" that should shape all sections of College 1; the first of these states, "The conceptual knowledge or content of College 1 is university discourse itself." The proposal authors then further specify that this "principle" means that all colleges must teach materials that explicitly address the ACMES. They write:

"All colleges assign 'framing' readings: readings about reading, metacognition, rhetorical moves, discourse communities, and so on. These readings make visible to novice readers of academic writing a kind of pragmatic knowledge about how to view texts and how to participate in an academic community that its expert members take for granted. By surfacing this assumed knowledge, these readings foster analytical habits of mind and introduce a portable critical vocabulary--that is, vocabulary that helps students 'transfer' knowledge from one setting (or course) to another. The colleges will maintain a shared collection of framing readings that they may choose from for their courses. Thematic course material will serve as the vehicle for exploring main course content (ACMES)." (Abrams et al. 2017:30)

Teaching materials specifically focusing on the ACMES, the ALC proposal authors argue, is important for transparency about knowledge that may otherwise be "take[n] for granted," facilitating students' ability to "transfer" knowledge and skills from College 1 to future classes, and for creating curricular consistency across the colleges.

Samuel, a College 1 lecturer who helped design the course's curriculum for his college, was among the few instructors I interviewed who expressed enthusiasm

for teaching the ACMES outcomes explicitly. He said that the ACMES were the focus of his College 1 class and had always been important teaching goals for him. He had emphasized “critical habits of mind” like metacognition, self-efficacy, and engagement across difference in his Core classes, but this had been his own choice rather than a mandate of the curriculum. College 1, in contrast, explicitly states these habits of mind as learning outcomes for the class.

SAMUEL: I really like teaching the College 1 course, because ... [critical habits of mind are] right in the outcomes. “Oh yeah, all that stuff that you thought was really important that you kept doing in your Writing 2 classroom and you didn’t really care so much whether or not [students] got their citation italics correctly? Now you’re supposed to do it.” That’s really good for me.

Samuel also believes that the “critical habits of mind” should be taught explicitly. I asked in our interview, “Do you think it’s useful to teach explicitly things like genre, reading strategy, explicit reading strategies, like explicit metacognitive strategies? Are these things useful to name and teach about and have students read about?” Samuel responded affirmatively, elaborating on the value of teaching genre.

SAMUEL: Yes, I think so. I do think so. [Teaching genre is] not writing instruction. That’s something different and that’s like understanding how the world of literature and journalism, whatever works. How people write in different genres – you’re pointing that out and giving them vocabulary to talk about it and think about it and experiment with it. So if you wanna teach genre...you give them a lot of different genres to read and then you have them talk about how they’re different. So yeah, I think that it’s valuable. It is important.

Samuel agreed that an “explicit” approach to teaching the learning outcomes was valuable, though he elaborated only on the literacy concept of genre. Like Abrams, Samuel highlighted the importance of “giving [students] vocabulary” to discuss key



concepts from the course. However, as I describe in the next section, when Samuel provided a more detailed description of his approach to teaching the learning outcomes, he appeared to take an “implicit” approach to teaching the ACMES in his College 1 classes. Still, Samuel agreed with Abrams and the ALC proposal that – at least in theory – the vocabulary of the ACMES outcomes should be taught explicitly to students.

*Implicit approach to teaching the ACMES outcomes*

The majority of instructor participants I interviewed articulated that they valued the ACMES learning outcomes, but they did not endorse teaching these outcomes explicitly to students through lecturing or assigning readings on the ACMES. I call this perspective an “implicit approach” to teaching the ACMES outcomes, which is comprised of three related arguments that College 1 instructors articulated in our interviews. The first of these arguments was that ACMES outcomes have always informed the Core class and are not new to College 1. The second argument instructors made is that they successfully taught the ACMES outcomes in their College 1 classes without naming, lecturing on, or assigning readings on the ACMES concepts; instead, they used the ACMES concepts to inform the activities and assignments they designed. The third argument instructors made is that teaching the ACMES outcomes explicitly was or would have been “counterproductive,” as one instructor put it, to the goals of College 1. Some instructors who made this argument had attempted, to varying degrees, to teach the ACMES outcomes explicitly, while others chose to take an implicit approach from the outset of the course. Instructors

who advocated for an “implicit approach” voiced one or more of these arguments in our interviews.

First, several instructors expressed in our interviews that the ACMES outcomes were values that had informed the Core class and their teaching before the implementation of College 1. Michelle, a College 1 instructor with many years of experience teaching Core, said that she felt the ACMES has always been the “implicit curriculum” of Core, even if they were not stated as formal learning outcomes.

MEGAN: [If] you continued teaching Core, do you think you would’ve ended up teaching metacognition, self-efficacy, [and] engaging across difference... anyways?

MICHELLE: I always taught that. So, it was no big deal. [College 1 has] more focus on it in terms of I guess really naming it and bringing it out into the open. That’s what we were teaching but it was always the implicit curriculum before.

For Michelle, College 1 named and made explicit the ACMES outcomes, but did not uniquely introduce them into the curriculum. Michael similarly felt that the ACMES learning outcomes were goals he had already emphasized while teaching Core. He said about the ACMES, “I just didn’t focus on them in terms of the terminology [in Core]. But it’s basically what I’ve always asked [of] students.”

Janet echoed this sentiment in describing the new College 1 learning outcomes as skills that students have always gained “in the process” of getting an education; College 1’s approach to teaching these outcomes was unique only in that it “point [these outcomes] out to students from the very beginning” of their college education.

Thomas, in our first interview near the beginning of the Fall 2018 quarter, seemed optimistic about the College 1 learning outcomes, even as he felt they did not differ significantly from the former Core curriculum.

THOMAS: In some ways, the course goals are useful in that they make you aware of specific outcomes that will help the students in the future. It's not really anything new, because it's what we've really been doing. We're just naming it, I think, more than anything.

Michelle, Michael, Janet, and Thomas stated that they previously taught the ACMES outcomes in Core, just without "naming" them or using the "terminology." While these instructors found some of the changes put into effect by the shift to College 1 to be impactful on their teaching (such as the untracking of students' placement in sections and the shift to a focus on reading) they did not see the ACMES outcomes as a significant departure from the Core course.

Most of the instructors who expressed that the ACMES outcomes were not new to College 1 also said that they taught the ACMES outcomes in their College 1 classes by designing their assignments and activities around these outcomes without lecturing or assigning readings on them; this was the second argument made by instructors who argue for the value of an implicit approach. Thomas, who felt that the outcomes are "not really anything new" in College 1, found it intuitive to teach the ACMES outcomes in his College 1 classes. He preferred to teach these outcomes through the class activities he designed.

THOMAS: I haven't really drawn [the outcomes] to [students'] attention... in terms of as metacognition. But to be fair, I don't actually think a lot about the learning outcomes as such when I'm teaching. I think that the way I teach naturally involves those learning outcomes. I don't like the way they're written. I do think they are fairly natural elements of

teaching reading or composition in any college classroom. I don't feel like I have to struggle or strain to meet [the outcomes].

Thomas made the conscious choice not to name the ACMES outcomes with students – both because he found them to “naturally” be a part of how he teaches and because he was opposed to “the way they’re written,” which includes too much jargon, in his view.

Jake and Janet similarly expressed that the ACMES outcomes were already embedded in their approach to teaching and did not need to be explicitly stated. Jake found it “natural” to incorporate the ACMES outcomes into his teaching and made few changes to his Core curriculum to meet the new outcomes. He explained, in response to my question about his approach to teaching the new College 1 learning outcomes, “I just kind of feel like, I'm already doing what [the students] need.” Janet, like other instructors, saw the ACMES outcomes as “nothing new.” She responded to my question about how she felt about the learning outcomes with a tone of skepticism.

JANET: Call me old-fashioned, but this is the kind of stuff... we've learned just in the process of becoming... like an in [a] humanist-based, Freirean kind of education. Just in the process of becoming, these were the things that we were cultivating and then when you get to grad school, you look back on it and you're like, “Oh yeah, I know all that kind of stuff because this is just what happened along the way.”

Like Jake and Janet, Karl did not feel he need to make major changes to his teaching to meet the new College 1 learning outcomes. At his college, he felt, “the curriculum itself has remained relatively the same even though the course learning outcomes have changed.” When I asked Karl about his approach to teaching the

ACMES outcomes specifically, he described an assignment that asked students to engage in a metacognitive task.

**KARL:** I do assignments on metacognition. So I have students think about their own thinking. I have this paper that they're writing right now called the difficulty response paper. They pick a section of the text and instead of them understanding it, they pick a section that they didn't understand, that they had trouble figuring out.

Rather than lecture or assign students readings on metacognition, Karl developed an assignment in which students "think about their own thinking." Throughout our interviews, he expressed little resistance to or frustration with the ACMES outcomes; instead, he perceived these as minor changes to the former Core curriculum that required him to make few changes to his teaching.

Samuel, in the same interview that articulated support for teaching the ACMES outcomes explicitly, described an implicit approach to teaching these outcomes in his own classroom. He described how the final project for several of his College 1 classes, a "collaborative project" in which students worked together in small groups to write a paper and give a presentation, engaged with the ACMES outcomes.

**SAMUEL:** The collaborative project is a really good way to teach them those three outcomes that I forget exactly what they were that you were talking about – self-efficacy and ... What were they?

**MEGAN:** Metacognition [and] engagement across difference.

**SAMUEL:** Right, right. Yeah. Yeah. Metacognition [and] engagement across difference, we talked about that. That's definitely part of the group project, and the metacognition, we're doing that a lot... a lot of the prompts that we give them for the low-stakes writing assignments are metacognitive prompts. Then we do things like ... in [one of my classes] now, I'm doing mindfulness. We did a mindfulness exercise.

We read some of the research on mindfulness, which is about as metacognitive as you can get, which is just what's actually going on in your head all the time... Also, we do a lot of metacognition in a lot of reading, like, "what are you actually doing when you're reading?"

To teach metacognition in this project, Samuel asked students to engage in metacognitive reflection as a "part of" larger projects the students are working on. While his "mindfulness" exercises included readings about the "research on mindfulness" as a way to introduce metacognitive thinking, he did not explicitly assign readings on the concept of metacognition. Instead, he described activities in which students are "doing" metacognition and engagement across difference while researching other topics.

Thomas, Jake, Janet, and Karl, particularly in their first interviews, voiced support for the ACMES outcomes and the changes to Core more generally, and felt as though adapting their teaching to the new outcomes required them to make few changes to their pedagogy. Samuel expressed more enthusiasm for the ACMES outcomes than the other three, but, like them, he described an approach to teaching these outcomes without lecturing or assigning readings directly on the ACMES concepts. All of these instructors saw the ACMES outcomes as already embedded in their approach to teaching Core and felt they do not need to significantly alter their pedagogy in teaching College 1.

A third argument made by instructors who favored an implicit approach states that not only is an explicit approach ineffective, but it can be "counterproductive" to the goals of College 1. Both instructors who did and did not attempt to take an

“explicit” approach to teaching the ACMES in their College 1 classes made this argument. In response to my survey question about whether the College 1 learning outcomes were their “preferred goals” for the course, several instructors expressed frustration with the ACMES outcome of “metacognition.” Respondents wrote that “metacognition was overdone,” that it was “not useful to teach metacognition” because “student will learn this through reading strategies,” and that “metacognition could be a minor rather than major course goal.” These responses indicate that some instructors felt metacognition was overemphasized as a course goal in College 1 and could more effectively have been taught implicitly, through metacognitive activities, rather than explicitly.

Several instructors articulated how their teaching had changed to adapt to the new College 1 curriculum and expressed frustration about the mandate, in their view, to lecture and assign readings on the ACMES outcomes. Joanna, for instance, assigned “one metacognitive and two or three... readings that are thematic” for each class meeting throughout the quarter. She also assigned metacognitive activities in class – including one I observed, in which she asked students to name the steps they take in reading an academic text. Joanna explained that she plans extra activities for each class session in case she has extra time. She said, “if I end up having an extra 15 minutes and the conversation isn't flowing smoothly, then I'll pull out a metacognitive thing to do, depending on how the course is moving that day.”

Still, even as she assigned “metacognitive” activities throughout the quarter, Joanna found it especially difficult to teach texts about metacognition to her students, who did not seem to “buy in” to the concept.

JOANNA: I think that the meta part was really hard for students to grasp, and also they’re already not as engaged. There was something about this course that I felt like ... I don’t really know what it is... but I just had the feeling that they were not as engaged as previous years. I don’t know if that’s just buy-in. You know, it feels like a glorified study skills class the way that it was set up this Fall. I just don’t know what it is, but there was something about their buy-in. I don’t know. They just didn’t want to be there as much as they have in the past. I’ll just leave it at that.

Further, Joanna noted that some of her students did not complete assigned readings outside of class, making assigning readings on metacognition even less effective.

College 1 instructors, she believed, should recognize that many students will not read outside of class and adjust their teaching to adapt to this reality.

JOANNA: I did feel like even with a little more professional development, [College 1 instructors] could all be really good at teaching those [ACMES] strategies without having [students] read, and it might be more effective because I think I probably had maybe one-sixth of my students not really reading. They were just BS’ing their way through completely. I don’t know if that’s helpful [to students].

In Joanna’s view, a better way to teach metacognition than assigning readings on the concept is by having students do metacognitive activities. She said, “I think if metacognition is a goal, I’m not sure that we need the actual text distinct from content. I think that it would be super useful to teach those strategies through content.”

When reflecting on College 1 at the end of the quarter, Margaret, an instructor who was initially enthusiastic about the ACMES outcomes, similarly believed that



students could learn about these concepts through “doing” rather than reading about them. She felt that the goals of “metacognition” and “self-efficacy” were too heavily emphasized in the College 1 curriculum.

MARGARET: The metacognition kind of, it was ... I think emphasizing it so much kind of was counterproductive. I think maybe [we should] make it a minor thing instead of a major thing... Also, the word “self-efficacy” doesn’t say exactly what we really want. We really want them to feel power, the power that they have with their own ideas and their own writing, and to just feel... like they have a place here at UCSC, that they have a role to play, or something like that. That’s what I would like.

Margaret considered assigning the readings on metacognition included in her college’s curriculum for College 1, but ultimately decided not to because she read them and “didn’t like them.”

Thomas decided early in the quarter not to lecture on or emphasize the concept of “metacognition” because he thought it would be uninteresting for students.

THOMAS: If I get too literal about [the outcomes], I’ll be really boring I’m afraid. [If I said,] “Now you’re learning metacognition.” They’ll all be like, “What?” I would too if I were their age. I would be like, “What are you talking about, metacognition? I want to talk about this poem.”

While instructors like Thomas and Jake felt that they already taught the ACMES outcomes and did not need to change their teaching significantly to meet these outcomes, Joanna and Margaret felt obligated to teach these outcomes explicitly and did so to varying degrees in their College 1 classes. This sense of obligation to assign readings on, most notably, metacognition, was frustrating for Joanna and Margaret because they felt it made the course less effective or was even “counterproductive” to the goals of College 1.

College 1 instructors articulated several arguments for using an implicit approach to teach the ACMES outcomes: that these outcomes are not new to College 1, that they successfully teach these outcomes implicitly through assignments and activities, and that an explicit approach is ineffective. These instructors were generally supportive of learning outcomes, as a whole, and of the specific content of the ACMES outcomes; they found it important to teach their students the skills of analysis, critical thinking, metacognition, engagement across difference, and self-efficacy in their classes. Unlike instructors who advocated for an explicit approach to teaching the ACMES outcomes, however, they did not find it necessary to lecture or assign readings on these concepts in order to develop students' skills in these areas.

*Oppositional view of learning outcomes*

Even as they disagreed on whether the ACMES learning outcomes should be taught through an implicit or an explicit approach, most instructors I spoke with saw the ACMES learning outcomes as valuable for students' learning. This was not the case for two instructors who voiced what I call an "oppositional" approach to learning outcomes. These instructors, when asked about their approach to teaching the ACMES learning outcomes, focused their response on criticism of learning outcomes in general. These instructors saw learning outcomes as one piece of a larger trend in higher education toward teaching students marketable, business-oriented skills rather than providing them a values-driven, humanistic education. Learning outcomes, in their view, attempt to quantify learning in a way that is antithetical to deeper learning experiences.

Janet articulated this position repeatedly in both of our interviews. In her view, the shift from Core to College 1 aligned with what she called the “neoliberalization of the university:” a move toward training students to be skilled contributors to a capitalist economy rather than critical or radical thinkers. She described the articulation of learning outcomes for College 1 as a hindrance to students’ learning.

JANET: I think [stating learning outcomes] dissects their education and takes away from, I think, the context of just engaging the flow of learning and becoming with your materials. [Instead, it’s] like “Oh, wait. Is this rhetorical knowledge? Is this that?” It’s like you know, these [outcomes] are all important things but... I mean, this is just like typical neoliberalization of education in the university where everything has deliverables in boxed tables, whereas before it was sort of like what we’re teaching at [this] college: everything is connected... and then with all [the learning outcomes] just kind of just placed, imposed on top of it.

For Janet, the goals of metacognition, engagement across difference, and self-efficacy were not the problem; the problem was teaching these by way of formal learning outcomes. These learning outcomes are at odds with, for example, Marxist approaches to pedagogy espoused by some faculty.

JANET: [Y]ou have, in UC Santa Cruz, radical Marxist ways of being in the world and yet, the whole education has become this product-driven sort of, “What are the outcomes? What are the products?” It’s like, well, if we were really that radical, we wouldn’t be thinking about outcomes and products. We would just be... engaging in holistic, integral education and [students would be] coming out as holistic integral contributors to the world.

Instead, Janet felt that UCSC was now oriented toward preparing students to be workers in the technology industry, and that the move toward “outcome-driven education” served to “extract” and “compartmentalize” different dimensions of

learning and turn them into “take-home products” that students could market to future employers.

JANET: [T]his extraction of take-home products is I think something that ... I personally do think it is a process of neoliberalization... it’s also just like a Western cultural approach, where it’s touted to be the correct approach, the universally correct approach. Where, it’s like, “Well, if you were really respecting cultural difference, then maybe you wouldn’t be from the top-down imposing this very Western, outcome-driven approach...” I think it’s especially, like in California... [the] very economicization [sic] of life here on the West coast, I think. Not the West coast, but California. So I think it’s a very cultural, specific thing to California. But then, it also is across the United States. But this whole purpose/outcome/procedure or whatever is ... I don’t know.

Here, Janet articulated a critique that suggests that learning outcomes not only advance the “neoliberalization” of the university, but that they also undermine the goals they profess to advance – particularly, engagement across differences. In her view, learning outcomes represent a “Western” approach to learning that serves neoliberalism and capitalism.

Michael voiced a similar critique of learning outcomes that centered on broader shifts in the purpose of higher education. He defined this shift, both at UCSC and beyond, as a move from “utopia university” to “utility university.” Like Janet, who saw learning outcomes as an example of “deliverables in boxed tables,” Michael understood learning outcomes as an example of a larger cultural shift toward prioritizing the economic “bottom line” above all other goals. He described these cultural shifts in our first interview.

MICHAEL: [S]ometimes standardizing things in my point of view is not the best thing in the world. I think that a hundred years from now, when sociologists and historians study our culture, they’re going to realize that there were two major changes in the 70s, early 80s that changed

our culture profoundly. One of them was People Magazine because it turned us into a country of gossipers. We are obsessed with gossip as a people. The other one was the spreadsheet because it taught us to think “bottom line.” We never had that term before. We never thought about the bottom line before... [it was] not done so precisely, and you can see what happens when you move a decimal point here, or whatever. Now, you immediately spot it. Yeah, it’s true, you plan better. But at the same time, you make these cold decisions that affect people in profound ways just based on bottom lines. I think that it’s made us a little bit cruel as a society.

While spreadsheets and an orientation toward profitability have made society more efficient, Michael found, they have also made it “a little bit cruel.” Here, Michael echoed Janet’s concern that the “neoliberal” or “utilitarian” shift in higher education detracts from the humanistic values of education.

As Janet and Michael articulated their critical view of learning outcomes, they made little reference to how this view shaped their own teaching in College 1. Instead, their discussion of learning outcomes was more abstract and philosophical – a representation of their vision for higher education under different political and economic conditions rather than an indication of how they actually taught the ACMES outcomes in their classrooms. When I pressed them to describe their approaches to teaching the ACMES outcomes, both of these instructors articulated an implicit approach to teaching the learning outcomes, stating that these outcomes had always informed their teaching and did not need to be stated explicitly to students. Unlike other instructors who articulated an implicit approach to teaching the ACMES outcomes, however, Janet and Michael voiced concerns about the use of learning outcomes *in any form* in higher education.

*Understanding the explicit, implicit, and oppositional approaches in the context of the learning outcomes debate*

Instructors' articulation of explicit, implicit, and oppositional approaches to teaching the ACMES outcomes speaks to and extends existing debates about learning outcomes in higher education. Many claims made by instructors who support an explicit approach to teaching learning outcomes and those made by instructors who oppose learning outcomes altogether mirror the respective extremes of the scholarly debate on the value of learning outcomes. At the same time, other claims made both by instructors who support explicit and implicit approaches to teaching learning outcomes extend the practical recommendations made by scholars who articulate practical or technical critiques of learning outcomes. I conclude this chapter by elaborating on the ways in which College 1 instructors' understandings and uses of learning outcomes both engages with and complicates the scholarly debate on the value of learning outcomes in higher education.

The explicit approach to teaching learning outcomes, articulated by Elizabeth Abrams, Samuel, and the ALC proposal, shares many of the same arguments made by scholars who see learning outcomes as valuable for student learning and assessment purposes. First, scholars who argue in favor of learning outcomes see outcomes as "student-centered" and useful for making the purpose of education more transparent (Adam 2002, 2006; Allan 1996; Barman et al. 2014; Dobbins et al. 2016; Hargreaves and Moore 2000; Harrington et al. 2005; Kennedy 2006; Maher 2004; McMahon and Thakore 2006; Sweetman 2017; Tam 2014; Yancey 2005). Elizabeth Abrams, a

primary author of the ALC, echoed these beliefs in stating that learning outcomes need to be taught explicitly because “our century’s long experiment of having [students] learn by osmosis is not working anymore.” Stating learning outcomes – and naming them explicitly – is important because it makes the goals of learning more transparent and accessible to students of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. Both Abrams and Samuel found that using the “vocabulary” of the learning outcomes in their classrooms allowed students to write about and discuss course concepts with each other. The value of teaching ACME outcomes explicitly resembles the value of learning outcomes altogether: both are understood as useful tools to make learning more “student-centered” and its aims more transparent.

In a similar way, instructors who articulated an oppositional view of learning outcomes mirror the boldest arguments made by scholars who argue against the use of learning outcomes in higher education. Both of these groups find that learning outcomes represent the “neoliberalization” of higher education institutions, as Janet put it, and undermine rather than enhance students’ learning. Janet and Michael described a shift in higher education that increasingly positions students as future workers and consumers than as learners engaged in critical inquiry; this perspective is echoed in Avis’ (2000) critique of the links between learning outcomes and “managerialism” that positions students as consumers, and in Stoller’s claim that “learning outcomes should properly be understood as the symbolic heart of neoliberal corporate reform efforts” (2015:320–21). Rather than understanding learning outcomes as tools to make educational goals more transparent to students, as many

learning outcome proponents argue, Janet and Michael took a macro-level view of the significance of learning outcomes: as indicators of widespread transformations in higher education aligned with the logic of neoliberalism. Their interpretations of the College 1 learning outcomes parallel the arguments made by scholars who express the boldest criticisms of the use of learning outcomes in higher education, which find learning outcomes to be fundamentally antithetical to students' learning and to the democratic potential of education.

Both instructors who articulate the value of explicit and implicit approaches to teaching learning outcomes, in contrast, offer a new perspective not yet addressed in the scholarly debate on learning outcomes. Some scholars take a cautiously optimistic view of the uses of learning outcomes in higher education settings, finding that the problems with doing so are mainly practical and technical. These scholars describe, for example, the difficulty of gaining instructor buy-in to the outcomes and the under- or over-specification of outcomes, which can make outcomes difficult for instructors to interpret and unengaging for students (Adam 2006; Caspersen et al. 2017; Hadjianastasis 2017; Hargreaves and Moore 2000; Kumpas-Lenk et al. 2018; Sweetman 2019). College 1 instructors Margaret, Joanna, and Thomas articulated similar practical challenges in attempting to teach the course learning outcomes to their students. They did not fully “buy in” to the new curriculum, and they found that teaching the learning outcomes explicitly in their classrooms – using the vocabulary of the outcomes – often came across as “boring” or obtuse to students.



The solutions that College 1 instructors offer for the practical and technical challenges of using learning outcomes build on those that scholars advance, as well. Kennedy (2006) and Hadjianastasis (2017), for example, provide recommendations for writing learning outcomes following Bloom’s taxonomy of learning levels in order to engage students more effectively in higher-order thinking. Erikson and Erikson (2018), on the other hand, express concern for the “freedom” instructors have to adapt learning outcomes to their own classrooms. They find that instructors can use learning outcomes effectively in their teaching only if they are “given the academic freedom needed to formulate learning outcomes and to interpret already formulated learning outcomes” (Erikson and Erikson 2018:8). College 1 instructors’ articulation of explicit and implicit approaches to teaching the course learning outcomes demonstrates the varied ways that instructors can adapt “already formulated learning outcomes,” as Erikson and Erikson put it, to suit their own teaching styles.

The solutions that College 1 instructors suggest for the challenges they faced in teaching learning outcomes, I find, is much more specific than those offered by scholars who weigh in on the learning outcomes debate. These instructors’ arguments for explicit and implicit approaches complicate the learning outcomes debate by raising a new question: to what extent do students need to know about and use the language of the learning outcomes informing their education? College 1 instructors’ varying answers to this question highlights how learning outcomes play out in instructors’ classroom practices – an often-overlooked area of scholarly inquiry about learning outcomes in higher education – by providing *practical, classroom-level*

solutions for adapting learning outcomes to each instructor's own teaching style and priorities.

On the one hand, several instructors argued that not only should instructors use learning outcomes to inform their pedagogy, but that they should communicate these outcomes explicitly to their students. These instructors used the term “vocabulary” to describe the value of an explicit approach; teaching learning outcomes explicitly gives students the vocabulary to discuss and write about key course concepts. On the other hand, instructors who advocated for an implicit approach to teaching the learning outcomes found that this “vocabulary” is often too vague, too reliant on jargon, and difficult for students to understand. In this view, instructors should use learning outcomes to inform course activities and assignments, and students should engage with them by practicing the *skills*, rather than the vocabulary, described in the learning outcomes. Both of these groups of instructors share a concern for clearly communicating the goals, activities, and assignments of College 1 to their students. They disagree, however, on the question of whether using the language of the course learning outcomes in their teaching advances or hinders this goal.

College 1 instructors' nuanced discussion of the challenges of teaching using learning outcomes suggests new ways college-level instructors might negotiate the risks and limitations of learning outcomes in their teaching practice. Instructors might ask themselves, for instance: how important is it that I teach the vocabulary of the learning outcomes to my students? If the vocabulary matters, how can I teach them in

a way that is engaging for and comprehensible to students? Regardless of where instructors locate themselves in the scholarly debate on the value learning outcomes, instructors who are required to teach using learning outcomes could be well-served by reflecting on these questions. In the next chapter, I consider how instructors' varying perceptions of freedom to teach the College 1 learning outcomes as they best saw fit shaped their classroom practices.

## CHAPTER 6: The Impact of Sense of Autonomy on Classroom Practices

### ***Introduction***

*“[College 1] ended up not being my course... I was ending up teaching somebody else's course.” – Margaret, College 1 instructor*

College 1 instructors' varied approaches to teaching the course learning outcomes are situated within a larger context of how these instructors understood and adapted to *all* the changes introduced by the Academic Literacy Curriculum (ALC), beyond just the learning outcomes. Instructors expressed concern not only about whether to teach the College 1 learning outcomes implicitly or explicitly, but also about larger issues relating to their freedom, control, and ownership over the changes to the Core course: I refer to this set of concerns as “sense of autonomy” over their teaching. Through interviews with and observations of ten College 1 instructors, I found that instructors held a wide range of senses of autonomy over their teaching – from highly autonomous to feeling “micro-managed” – that corresponded in unexpected ways with their classroom practices. While instructors who expressed high and moderate senses of autonomy over their College 1 classes adapted the new curriculum to suit their own teaching styles and priorities to varying degrees, instructors who voiced low senses of autonomy responded to the new curriculum in more diverse, less predictable ways. Instructors with a low sense of autonomy over their classes responded, outwardly, by adhering to the curricula developed at their colleges. However, this “adherence” took a variety of forms in classroom practice; these included subversion, reluctant compliance, confusion, and hostility.

These findings can be understood as analogous to the metaphor of the “spirit” and the “letter” of the law. The “letter” of the law refers to the most literal interpretation of the text of the law, while the “spirit” of the law reflects the original intent of the law. In this chapter, I argue that College 1 instructors who felt a high sense of autonomy over their teaching often taught by the “spirit,” if not always the “letter,” of the new curriculum; conversely, instructors with a low sense of autonomy over their College 1 classes tended to teach by the “letter,” but not the “spirit,” of the curriculum.

Interviews with and observations of College 1 instructors suggest a relationship between each instructor’s sense of autonomy and their classroom practices. However, these data do not reveal clear patterns that would illuminate the *causes* of instructors’ varied senses of autonomy. Years of experience teaching Core at UCSC, for instance, did not map onto high, moderate, or low senses of autonomy over the College 1 course; neither did age, gender<sup>25</sup>, or college affiliation. Instructors at the same college, for instance, expressed widely varying senses of autonomy over their teaching, which suggests that how instructors *perceive* their autonomy differs from the *actual* autonomy they are granted by their Provost. Rather than uncover the causes of variation in instructors’ sense of autonomy, then, this chapter explores the relationship between two factors that appear, in the data, more closely intertwined: sense of autonomy and classroom practices.

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<sup>25</sup> There is one possible exception to this; both instructors categorized as having a “high” sense of autonomy are men.

In this chapter, I examine the relationship between College 1 instructors' sense of autonomy and their classroom practices by putting these findings into conversation with scholarship from higher education and writing studies on instructor autonomy, identity, and responses to change. In doing so, I develop an answer to this study's second research question: How do College 1 instructors make decisions about teaching practices related to the learning outcomes? This chapter contends that College 1 instructors' perceptions of their autonomy over their courses profoundly shapes their decision-making around their teaching. I begin the chapter by reviewing scholarship that highlights the centrality of sense of autonomy to faculty members' sense of professional identity and job satisfaction, the decline in faculty sense of autonomy, particularly among contingent faculty, and how sense of autonomy influences instructors' responses to institutional change. I then present findings on College 1 instructors' senses of autonomy and classroom practices from my interview and observation data, differentiating instructors by a high, medium, and low sense of autonomy. Finally, I analyze these findings in relation to existing scholarly arguments that describe the relationships among sense of autonomy, identity, and responses to change. This study uniquely contributes to existing scholarship by illuminating the complexity of the relationship between faculty members' sense of autonomy and how they implement curricular change.

***Faculty members' sense of autonomy, identity, and responses to change***

Feeling a sense of freedom to research and teach what interests you is a central draw of academic work. A 1999 survey of faculty carried out by the US

Department of Education found that the job factor most closely associated with job satisfaction was “authority to decide course content,” followed closely by two other factors related to academic autonomy: “freedom to do outside consulting” and “authority to decide courses taught” (Clery 2002:3). Since then, scholars have considered a diverse range of questions about academic autonomy, including: is faculty members’ autonomy in decline? How do part-time and full-time, as well as contingent and tenure-track, faculty members differ in their perceptions of their autonomy? How do faculty members respond to challenges to their autonomy over their research or teaching?

Across these studies, scholars are generally in agreement with the premise that academic work is traditionally defined by a high level of autonomy over both teaching and research activities. At the same time, some recent studies illustrate how this autonomy may be declining for faculty members, as well as how the impacts of reduced autonomy are unequally distributed between part-time versus full-time instructors and between two-year and four-year institutions. These studies on academic autonomy and identity offer context for understanding yet another set of studies that examine faculty members’ responses to one, specific challenge to their autonomy: top-down changes at the institutions in which they work. I elaborate below on each of these areas of scholarship.

First, scholars who write on the professional identity and job satisfaction of faculty members working at higher education institutions identify autonomy over research and teaching priorities as a central feature and reward of academic work

(Antony and Valadez 2002; Clery 2002; Giroux 2006; Griffiths 2015; Hargreaves 2000; Henkel 2005; Kim, Twombly, and Wolf-Wendel 2008; Tagg 2012; Wermke, Olason Rick, and Salokangas 2019). Henkel (2000, 2005, 2007), a prominent higher education scholar, writes on the shifting policy context of higher education in the UK and its impact on faculty members' "academic identity" beginning in the 1980s. She finds that, in spite of broader institutional and political changes, "academic autonomy" remains a core value among faculty members (Henkel 2005:173). This autonomy to decide their own research and teaching agendas is seen by academics, she argues, as "necessary conditions" both for doing academic work and for their own sense of professional identity (Henkel 2005:170). While Henkel focuses on autonomy in relation to the *research* priorities of full-time faculty members, other scholars who examine academic autonomy in the context of *teaching* similarly find that autonomy is central to academic identity and job satisfaction. In a study of full-time and part-time faculty at both two-year and four-year institutions, Kim, Twombly, and Wolf-Wendel (2008) find that most faculty – regardless of employment status or institution type – are "satisfied" with their instructional autonomy (174). Whether or not they agree that faculty are satisfied with the autonomy they have over their research and teaching, scholars converge in finding that faculty members across types of employment and institutions highly value autonomy as a core dimension of their professional identity and job satisfaction.

Some scholars attribute faculty members' historically high degree of autonomy over their research and teaching to the "loose coupling" that, in their



analyses, characterizes higher education institutions (Degn 2015, 2018; Scott 2015; Tagg 2012; Weick 1976). “Loose coupling,” a term from institutional theory, refers to “gaps” between policy and practice in different parts of an organization – for instance, teachers and administrators (Meyer and Rowan 1977:341). Higher education scholars who employ this concept understand individual faculty members, academic departments, and administrative units as operating with relative independence within the college or university. In an influential early study examining the structure of educational institutions, Weick (1976) characterizes educational organizations of all types as “loosely coupled” organizations in which teachers or instructors enjoy “room for self-determination” and “control” over their teaching, which has both strengths and weaknesses for the functioning of the organization (7-8).

Other scholars have since contested the view that educational institutions, including higher education, are “loosely coupled” and find, instead, that these institutions and the faculty working within them are subject to a range of external pressures that reduce their autonomy (Akroyd, Bracken, and Chambers 2011; Doe et al. 2011; Henkel 2005, 2007; Penrose 2012; Schell and Stock 2001; Stromquist 2017; Winter 2009). Stromquist (2017) highlights two changes in US higher education that have resulted in the loss of professional autonomy and agency among faculty members: an elevation of research as the most important indicator of “academic productivity,” and the growing numbers of “contingent faculty” (non-tenure track and/or part-time faculty members) as a proportion of the faculty (133). Winter (2009) identifies a yet another factor contributing to “schisms” within academic identity and

to the demise of academic autonomy: the growing influence of the discourse of “corporate managerialism” in higher education (122). The rise of this discourse, Winter finds, encourages faculty members to either align themselves with these values (a position he calls the “academic manager”) or against these values (the “managed academic”); the “managed academics,” who often hold less prestigious faculty positions than “academic managers,” highly value academic autonomy but feel as though they have little influence over institutional decisions (Winter 2009:127). Penrose (2012), from the field of writing studies, similarly notes the emergence of tensions in how composition instructors define their professional identity in relation to the departments in which they teach. This rise of contingent employment in composition departments, she finds, has heightened tensions among faculty members and their departments, as well as within faculty members’ sense of identity, which comprises of “expertise, autonomy, [and] community” (Penrose 2012:110). Under the conditions of contingent employment, composition faculty have limited instructional autonomy, as they are increasingly pressured to follow the curricula and priorities established by the institution in which they work. Further, even when faculty have an opportunity to contribute to curricular planning, their work load and “limited exposure” to current research in their field limit their participation in these efforts (Penrose 2012:114–15). These scholars, together, identify a range of external pressures that reduce faculty members’ autonomy: funding models for higher education that incentivize research productivity over teaching, the rise of contingent

faculty as a proportion of the faculty, and global discourses of “corporate managerialism” that are re-shaping higher education institutions.

Studies that point to the decline of autonomy among higher education faculty members also hint at another feature of this reduced autonomy, which some studies address more directly: the uneven distribution of academic autonomy between part-time and full-time faculty, and between faculty at two-year and four-year institutions (Griffiths 2015; Kim et al. 2008; Lynch-Binieck 2017; Toth, Griffiths, and Thirolf 2013). Kim, Twombly, and Wolf-Wendel (2008), who conclude that faculty are generally satisfied with their instructional autonomy, also find that faculty at four-year institutions are slightly more satisfied with their instructional autonomy than those at two-year institutions (Kim et al. 2008:174). Lynch-Binieck (2017) considers contingent and permanent faculty members’ sense of autonomy through the case of their decision-making around textbook and assignment choices. She finds that even if, on paper, contingent faculty have the freedom to make their own choices about the curricular materials they use, these faculty are more likely than permanent faculty to defer to recommendations from colleagues or department administrators in making these decisions; permanent faculty, in contrast, tend to make decisions based on their own expertise in the field (Lynch-Binieck 2017:20–21). This discrepancy between faculty members, she finds, can be attributed to contingent faculty members’ greater concern for their job security and student approval, which compels them to make “safe” choices about textbooks and assignments (Lynch-Binieck 2017:28). Griffiths (2015), in a study of composition instructors at several community colleges, similarly

found that most instructors felt limited autonomy over their work and were not recognized as “experts” in their fields (28). Instead, many instructors positioned themselves as “independent contractors” who presented themselves to their colleagues and supervisors “as if they supported the department’s pedagogical alignment,” but quietly made their own choices about pedagogy in their classrooms (Griffiths 2015:146). Griffiths concludes that these community college faculty experienced autonomy in their work, but this autonomy was limited to their classroom-level decisions, which had minimal impact on their department or in their discipline (Griffiths 2015:28). These three studies highlighting variation in faculty members’ sense of autonomy illustrate three levels at which this variation occurs: at the level of institution type (two-year versus four-year), at the level of employment type (part-time and contingent versus full-time and permanent), and at the level of type of autonomy (classroom-level versus department- and discipline-level). As might be expected, these studies suggest that part-time and contingent faculty, as well as faculty working at community colleges, have a lower sense of autonomy than do full-time and permanent faculty and faculty working at four-year institutions.

Studies on the significance of autonomy for faculty members’ professional identity and job satisfaction, the recent decline of faculty members’ autonomy in research and teaching, and the uneven distribution of autonomy across types of employment and institutions establish necessary context for a third area of scholarship: faculty members’ responses to institutional changes. Institutional changes in higher education represent one of many possible challenges to faculty

members' autonomy in that they specify, to varying degrees, what and how faculty members should teach their courses (Lattuca and Pollard 2016). Scholars who examine faculty members' responses to change identify a range of responses that complicate a simplistic dichotomy of compliance or resistance; these responses include strategic ignorance, decoupling, defeatist compliance, pushing back on or "restraining" change, doubt, enthusiasm, and shifts in identity (Bahia et al. 2017; Barman et al. 2014; Danley-Scott and Scott 2014; Degn 2018; Kezar 2013; Lattuca and Pollard 2016; McNaughton and Billot 2016; Teelken 2012; Trzaska 2014; Venance, LaDonna, and Watling 2014; Ylijoki and Ursin 2013). Degn (2018) examines how academics responded to threats to their sense of professional identity and identification with their institution in light of major restructuring reforms in higher education institutions across Denmark. She finds that academics ranged from "continuing" to "altering" their earlier practices, to different degrees, in responding to these threats. Building on sensemaking theory, she categorizes these responses as: "ignorance" of new practices, which can be "pure," "strategic," or "cognitive;" "decoupling" of their practices from the official reforms; or "compliance" with the reforms, which can be "defiant," "defeatist," "strategic," or "optimistic" (Degn 2018:315). Her analysis of these varied responses highlights the complexity of motivations and sensemaking behind actions that, at the surface, appear as merely compliance or resistance; faculty members who display "compliance," for instance, may have genuine enthusiasm for the reform, but they might also be hostile towards it but resigned to adapt in spite of this (Degn 2018:316).

While Degn's analysis focuses on faculty members responses to institutional changes affecting their *research* priorities, other scholars describe faculty members' responses to *teaching*-centered curricular reforms. In a study of medical school faculty members' responses to a curricular change, Venance, LaDonna, and Watling (2014) describe three "critical tensions" that emerged during the planning of, implementation of, and reflection on the change (1001). The three "tensions" that emerged during these respective phases centered on individual versus institutional values, "drivers" versus "restrainers" of change, and perceptions of gains and losses resulting from the change (Venance et al. 2014:1001). Based on these findings, Venance et al. recommend that to gain buy-in from faculty members throughout the curriculum change process, faculty must understand the "rationale for change," find alignment between their own values and the change, and feel valued by their department (2014:1006). Barman, Bolander-Laksov, and Silén (2014) examine faculty members' responses to a curricular change of a much larger scale than that addressed by Venance et al.: the implementation of outcome-based education as part of the European Bologna reforms in higher education. In this study, the authors explore how teaching faculty at one Swedish university made sense of their university's outcome-based education policy and implemented it in their classrooms. They describe four categories of faculty "approaches:" "container," "technocratic," "pragmatic," and "ideological" (Barman et al. 2014:739). Faculty members act with autonomy in the ideological and container approaches; in the former approach, faculty take ownership of the policy and use it to create student learning-centered

reforms in their teaching, while in the latter, faculty view the policy as irrelevant to teaching and do not make changes in their classrooms (Barman et al. 2014:739–43). Faculty who take technocratic and pragmatic approaches, in contrast, understand the policy as limiting their autonomy as teachers, and interpret it either as rules to be followed mechanically (technocratic approach) or as “pedagogical tools” they must use (pragmatic approach) (Barman et al. 2014:743–44). Studies by Barman et al. and by Venance et al. suggest that faculty members’ sense of autonomy in their work shapes their responses to curricular change. In both studies, faculty members’ understandings of and buy-in to the change were crucial to the success of the curricular change’s implementation.

These studies on faculty members’ responses to institutional changes build on scholarship examining faculty autonomy, its recent decline, and variation in sense of autonomy among different kinds of faculty members. Scholars who examine how faculty members respond to institutional change – including changes in research priorities, curriculum, pedagogy, and learning outcomes – highlight “tensions,” as Venance et al. put it, between how faculty members understand themselves and how their department or institution views them (2014:1001). Faculty members value their autonomy over their research and teaching; institutional changes that do not provide faculty opportunities to engage with and take ownership over the design and implementation of these changes diminish their autonomy and, as might be expected, their perception of the changes. While faculty see themselves as autonomous instructors and researchers, institutions – in some cases – see faculty as employees

who are subject to top-down changes. As many scholars point out, this tension creates significant challenges to successfully implementing curricular changes in higher education.

Tension between how faculty members see themselves and how they are viewed by their institutions are central, too, in other scholars' accounts of academic autonomy. Faculty members in Winter's (2009) study, for instance, find themselves needing to choose whether to identify with the "management" discourses of the institution or, as most do, with an independent academic identity that is oppositional toward the institution. Penrose (2012) similarly finds that contingent faculty in composition departments experience tensions with their departments, which often undermine their sense of professional identity, expertise, and autonomy. When faculty members perceive their identities and values to be at odds with those of the institutions at which they work, as studies like Griffith's (2015) and Degn's (2018) show, they may respond with surface-level compliance with a top-down institutional change, but quietly subvert this change in practice. This body of scholarship on academic autonomy, considered as a whole, illustrates how academic autonomy is no longer a defining feature of all academic work – particularly for part-time and contingent faculty who have, in recent years, become the majority of higher education faculty. Still, academics who pursue faculty positions highly value academic autonomy, creating tensions between faculty and the institutions in which they work. These tensions are exacerbated by institutional changes that ask faculty to make changes in their research or teaching practices. Scholars in this area find that, unless



faculty members are closely involved during all phases of the change process, they likely feel hostile or – at best – skeptical about the changes they are being asked to implement. In the section below, I describe this study’s findings about how a specific group of faculty members, College 1 instructors, perceived their autonomy in the context of a campus-wide curricular change.

***Findings: Sense of autonomy and classroom practices***

In my interviews with College 1 instructors, a persistent theme emerged from instructors’ responses to questions about their decision-making about their classes: sense of autonomy over their teaching. Some instructors expressed that they enjoyed a high level of freedom and control over how they taught their classes; these instructors took “ownership,” as one instructor put it, of their College 1 classes, in spite of the fact that they did not design the learning outcomes that shaped the course. Other instructors felt as though they had limited autonomy over their teaching, to varying degrees. While several instructors perceived they had the freedom to make minor changes to the curriculum developed at their college, others described the course as totally “out of their hands” and felt compelled to present the appearance, at least, of teaching the curriculum as it was written.

Analysis of instructors’ comments about how they perceived their own autonomy, surprisingly, did not reveal clear relationships between sense of autonomy and experience teaching Core, gender, or college affiliation; thus, these findings do not address the causes of instructors’ varying senses of autonomy. When paired with their descriptions of how they taught College 1 and my observations of their

classrooms, however, the sense of autonomy that instructors described in interviews appears closely related to their teaching practices. This chapter provides a detailed analysis of College 1 instructors' thinking around the changes to Core, their sense of autonomy over the curriculum they were asked to adopt, and how their sense of autonomy (or lack of) showed up in their classroom practices.

In this section, I describe College 1 instructors' sense of autonomy and classroom practices, beginning with instructors who expressed the highest levels of autonomy over their teaching. I find that instructors who voiced high and moderate senses of autonomy over their College 1 classes responded to the new curriculum in distinct but fairly consistent ways. Instructors with a high sense of autonomy took the curriculum into their own hands, modifying it to best suit their teaching style and priorities. Instructors with a moderate sense of autonomy made some, but less significant, changes to the curriculum than did instructors with a high sense of autonomy. In contrast to both these groups, instructors with a low sense of autonomy over their classes responded in drastically different ways to the changes. These instructors, at face value, adhered to the curricula developed at their colleges; considered more closely, however, this "adherence" included subversion, reluctant compliance, confusion, and hostility in their classroom practices.

#### *High sense of autonomy*

Several College 1 instructors expressed feeling a high degree of autonomy to teach their classes as they best saw fit. These instructors responded to the new College 1 curriculum by making minor changes to the materials shared among

instructors at their college to suit their own teaching style and priorities. These instructors also, generally, had an overall positive assessment of the shift from Core to College 1 and were more involved in the planning of the College 1 curriculum at their college. Samuel, for example, helped design the College 1 curriculum at one of the colleges at which he taught and expressed being granted autonomy to teach his classes in his own style. In our first interview, Samuel described his approach to helping develop a College 1 curriculum in collaboration with a colleague. He recalled that this process involved, first, choosing readings for each course unit that were suitable for students with a “pretty wide range of reading abilities” and which addressed the college theme and course learning outcomes. These learning outcomes, he found, were “vague” and “open ended,” and could be interpreted in many ways.

Then, he and his colleague developed assignments:

**SAMUEL:** The assignments that we developed definitely drew on those three [ACMES] outcomes, more so than in Core or certainly Writing 2. Then from there, that kind of provided a framework or scaffolding for the course. Then we went in and talked about classroom activities week by week... With the assignments and the readings, that was sent out to the faculty as a whole for [our college]. We're not in charge of enforcing that everybody teaches those exact readings or uses those exact assignments. The Provost has the final authority over that, but [they] liked what we had done, and [they were] highly recommending that instructors more or less follow what we had sent them, especially because we have some new instructors. But undoubtedly, there are other instructors I know who have been doing this forever, and are really good at it – and they'll use a bunch of what we gave them, and they'll go off on their own tangents.

Here, Samuel expresses a high degree of autonomy not only in his role developing the College 1 curriculum for his college, but also as an instructor at UCSC. In his view,

many who teach College 1 will “go off on their own tangent” in adapting central course materials and curricula to their own classrooms.

Even as Samuel played a significant role in designing the College 1 curriculum at his college, he still adapted this curriculum to his own teaching approach in his classroom. In our second interview, Samuel described what he sees as the value of College 1: giving students an opportunity to feel successful at the university. He contrasted this to what he sees as the university’s priorities for College 1.

**SAMUEL:** So what we’re doing now with this new system is creating a place where people can in a sense be welcomed. I don’t know how much of this is written into the outcomes and how much of this is my notion of what College 1 should be but I just see this is really valuable. ‘Cause at the end of the quarter they come out and they feel like they’ve been welcomed into the university and they did it and they accomplished something and they got to know a professor and they got to know people from different backgrounds and they read a bunch of really cool stuff and wrote about it. That’s such an important thing in terms of long-term retention and success. So that even if the course lacks a certain what they would call academic rigor and it’s difficult to assess the results... the long-term result of the class I think is going to have a big impact, especially for low-income and minority students who struggle and feel lost at the university because they just don’t have the background to succeed in it.

In discussing the value of College 1, Samuel drew a distinction between the official outcomes of the course and his own “notion of what College 1 should be.” His “notion” centered on helping marginalized students feel “welcomed” and “accomplished.” The university, he implied, is more concerned with “academic rigor” and “results” that can be assessed at the end of a quarter – a reference to the rubric-based assessment conducted in week 8 of the first quarter of College 1. Samuel

distinguished himself from both the university and from other College 1 instructors by explicitly rejecting a focus on “rigor” in his teaching. Samuel’s approach to teaching College 1 was informed both by the vision articulated in the ALC, which he drew from in developing the syllabus for his college, and by his own vision for the course.

Samuel’s unique approach to teaching College 1 became apparent in my first classroom observation. This class centered on one activity: a debate about the merit of affirmative action in college admissions. Samuel began this class by showing a short news clip on a recent legal case related to affirmative action in university admissions, lecturing briefly on the historical context for this case, and then assigning students to small groups – each of which was given an identical handout listing common arguments for and against affirmative action. He then gave groups fifteen minutes to prepare their arguments for or against affirmative action. In facilitating the debate between two groups that followed, Samuel required each group member to speak at least once before any student was permitted to speak twice. After two rounds of debate, Samuel led a whole-class discussion by drawing names randomly from a stack of cards listing each student’s name; later in the discussion, students volunteered to speak and, near the end of class, two students engaged in a heated debate over the ethics of using race-based criteria in college admissions. These activities, I noted in my field notes, very clearly encouraged students to engage across difference – even sparking conflict among students at the end of class. At the same time, during the debates and discussion, Samuel made a continual effort to affirm

students' contributions. This class meeting reflected the priorities for the course that Samuel described in our interviews: allowing students to feel “welcomed” and “accomplished” in the class by reducing barriers to entering into the class conversation and, as a result, encouraging engagement across difference. Samuel’s high sense of autonomy over his class allowed him to draw from both the ACMES outcomes and his own goals for College 1 to teach the course as he best saw fit.

Karl, who had several years of experience teaching Core at his college, expressed a similarly high degree of autonomy over his College 1 course. He described taking “full ownership of the class” by adapting other instructors’ materials to fit his own style. While he did not start from scratch in designing his class, he found it necessary to “tailor” assignments developed by other instructors to fit his own “style.”

MEGAN: In general, how did you balance using established assignments and designing your own in the class?

KARL: I see what other people have done and see what works, and I also like to tailor my own assignments so I can take full ownership of the class... We as a faculty at [my college], everybody’s really generous and open to sharing their ideas, which is good... But I’ve made my own assignments as well and we have the time to do that. And I think that really works well for a teacher because if you aren’t assigning your own assignments then... it’s not really a class. So a little mix of both is good I think. You don’t want to break what’s not broken. But you also wanna give your own kind of unique style, teaching style, to the course.

Karl did not create all of his own assignments for College 1, but nor did he express feeling compelled to assign materials what others have designed. The most recent assignment in his class, for instance, came from another instructor at his college; he assigned it in his class not out of a sense of obligation to do so, but because it is an

assignment that he felt “work[ed].” For him, designing your own assignments and adapting others’ materials to fit your own approach was crucial to teaching; otherwise, he found, “it’s not really a class.” Good teaching, he suggested in this interview, requires an instructor to have a sense of autonomy over their class – “full ownership” – and an approach that both borrows wisely from others (so as not to “break what’s not broken”) while making changes to fit the teacher’s own style.

In my first observation of his class, Karl led the class through two activities: first, a quiz on the reading students were asked to complete before class, and second, an activity in which students worked in pairs to write an argument about a passage from the reading that they had selected before class. The quiz, Karl explained in our interview, was shared among all College 1 instructors at his college; they “all agreed as a collective to give the quizzes.” The second class activity I observed was one he designed himself. He designed this activity to allow students to practice building an argument based on a close reading of a course text, which they would then do more formally in an essay assignment that he had developed. Karl explained that instructors at his college had “autonomy” to teach class activities and develop assignments so long as they fit within the “overall curriculum” of the college:

**KARL:** Our assignments vary and I think that the approach to each text depending on the instructor, however they want to approach the text because there's so much you can talk about with each text, so whatever you think is best for students to learn or whatever ideas you think might be best to incorporate into your class. We have autonomy over what we want to teach within the overall curriculum.

Both Samuel and Karl expressed a high sense of sense of autonomy over their classes, and both voiced an overall positive opinion about the changes introduced by

College 1. These instructors demonstrated what Karl calls “ownership” of their classes by interpreting the course goals in ways that made sense to them, teaching in their own style, and developing assignments and activities that align with their own goals for the course. In doing so, Samuel and Karl did not depart significantly from the formal learning outcomes for College 1; their course materials and assignments engaged, in different ways, with critical thinking, critical reading, metacognition, engagement across difference, and self-efficacy. Their approach to teaching these outcomes, however, often departed significantly from the syllabus shared among instructors at their respective colleges, as they took their syllabi into their own hands and taught readings about which they felt confident and assignments they had developed themselves.

*Moderate sense of autonomy*

Samuel and Karl, in feeling a high sense of autonomy over their approach to teaching College 1, were in the minority of instructors I interviewed. These two instructors, as might be expected, responded to the changes introduced by the shift to College 1 by making significant changes to course readings, assignments, and classroom activities to suit their own teaching style – even as they held positive views about the new curriculum. Most instructors, in contrast, expressed feeling a limited sense of autonomy over their class to varying degrees. Instructors who articulated what I call a “moderate” sense of autonomy responded to the shift to College 1 by making more minor adjustments to the curriculum, and generally held more



pessimistic assessments of the changes, than did instructors with a high sense of autonomy.

Thomas, a longtime Core instructor, expressed an overall negative opinion of the College 1 curriculum – particularly its learning outcomes, which he saw as poorly worded and abstract. He also voiced what he called a “limited” sense of autonomy over his College 1 course. This “limited autonomy” gave him the freedom to “cut things out” from his college’s shared syllabus, as well as to add new materials.

MEGAN: To what extent do you have autonomy over designing your classes or choosing assignments?

THOMAS: We have some limited autonomy because there’s just too much reading, and that’s acknowledged. It’s perfectly permissible to cut things out. I tend to add things as well... I want to emphasize a couple texts in particular... I take extra days for those [texts], because I think those are really important texts, and very complicated for the students as well. Both of them have language that the students find very strange. So with this new creative angle, what I’m hoping is that they’re going to be okay with the strangeness instead of feeling like they have to master it for an academic essay kind of thing. Maybe they can be a little bit more playful with it, and work their way into it that way.

Thomas found that this freedom to add and take out readings from the syllabus was a long-standing feature of Core at his college. The shift from Core to College 1, in his view, involved only minor changes to his college’s curriculum, and did not diminish his autonomy to make changes to assigned readings as he best saw fit.

MEGAN: I’m trying to get a better sense of... if and how you were involved in designing your syllabus... Did you just sort of inherit it from the Core people at [your college] and then adapt it? Or how did it go?

THOMAS: Right. We basically follow the sequence of readings, everybody. The difference comes in what we choose to emphasize or not, different texts, other people have different responses to. Some people like one text so they emphasize it and you know [another instructor] really likes [one scholar] for example and I loathe [that scholar] ‘cause I’ve never

had students grapple with it in a way that's interesting. Which is probably because I don't like it. So why teach it?

Thomas's deep concern for which readings he chose to teach his College 1 students was apparent in the way he taught his class. Both classes that I observed centered almost entirely on close reading of the assigned texts, with students working together in small groups and then sharing their interpretations with the whole class.

In both the readings he assigned and the activities he used in his class, Thomas tailored the College 1 curriculum to his own background and interest in close reading and analysis of literature. He described feeling "limited autonomy" to teach the class as he best saw fit and mostly followed the "sequence of readings" described in his college's syllabus; at the same time, he changed some readings from this syllabus and, as I describe in the previous chapter, chose not to use the language of the course learning outcomes with his students. Thomas made minor adjustments to his college's curriculum by emphasizing an area with which he was most knowledgeable and experienced (in his case, literary analysis), but without making major changes to it. Unlike the instructors who felt a high sense of autonomy over the course, however, Thomas was skeptical of the College 1 learning outcomes and felt little ownership over the changes he was compelled to make to his Core class in order to comply with the new outcomes.

Joanna, an instructor with experience teaching several versions of Core, collaborated with colleagues to help create the syllabus and reader shared among College 1 instructors at her college. In our second interview, she described working with a colleague to revise the sample syllabus included in the ALC proposal, as well

as making further changes to her own classes during the quarter, such as cutting and changing some readings on her syllabus.

- MEGAN: Did you feel like you had to teach the readings, all the metacognitive readings that your college came up with, or did you feel like you could have changed the syllabus and the curriculum a little bit in your class?
- JOANNA: ... We worked together to put the syllabus together, and we did take off a lot of the readings from the original syllabus that Erica Halk put together. Either they just didn't fit well within the context or the sequence, or we felt like they were just not accessible enough...
- MEGAN: So you cut out some readings-
- JOANNA: And changed them, and actually in the quarter as well towards the very end, I dropped a bunch of readings. Just cut it down to two for the past couple weeks. Two per class.

Reflecting on her approach to teaching College 1 at the end of the quarter, Joanna noted that she mostly tried to follow her college's curriculum, though, as she describes above, she also made some changes to her class later in the quarter. Her reasoning for making few changes was to give the curriculum "its due" – to see if the curriculum, as written, could work for students.

- JOANNA: Sometimes it's easier to stick with something as it's written the first time you do it. When you're first teaching something, even if you inherit a syllabus, it's easier to do it the way it's done and then tailor it maybe if you get to teach it a second time. I didn't [tailor it]. Part of my processing of it is that it happens any time you teach something, you change it hopefully. You learn from it and you make it better, and polish it, and that is true of this course, as well – not because of any of the large problems that are inherent in the goals of the course, but also just because it's the first time it's been taught. It's going to need to be revised a little bit. Does that make sense?
- MEGAN: Yeah. You don't want to change it too drastically.
- JOANNA: No. I wanted to give it its due, like let's try it and see what happens and then try to make it better. When all's said and done, I actually think it's an admirable course.

Compared to most College 1 instructors, Joanna had more control over designing her syllabus, readings, and assignments for her course because she played a significant

role in developing these materials for her college. Even still, she felt obligated to teach the course “as it’s written” since this was the first iteration of College 1. She described making minor changes to her syllabus during the quarter, such as cutting out and changing some readings, but overall, she felt it was important to “try it and see what happens” before making significant changes to the curriculum.

Lucy, who had taught Core once before, voiced a perspective similar to Joanna’s. When I asked her how she balanced the different goals of the course in her own classroom, she responded that she had chosen “to teach the syllabus straight as it is.” As she elaborated on her response, however, she described making minor changes to her college’s syllabus, such as bringing in supplementary materials and emphasizing some readings more than others.

LUCY: There are some things [in the syllabus] that I’ll either focus less on or maybe take more time to discuss, but I decided to teach it as is...I thought, how are we going to actually know whether this Core... curriculum for [my college] actually works, if we don’t teach it? For me, I was like, okay. I’m just going to teach it as is and then supplement any readings that I think might be useful as we go along. For the first week, we read about logical fallacies... Because it was the week of Brett Kavanaugh’s confirmation hearings, what I did is that I actually printed his testimony, and made packets for everyone, and had them go through his testimony to identify and locate logical fallacies that he used in his testimony. It was something where it was a really interesting project for them that they shared with me how excited they were to do this because it was relevant to what was going on today....

LUCY: I think as I continue going on, when I see- like, there’s Sandra Cisneros that we’re going to be teaching, and being able to get more because I know her work, giving her a little more context, and perhaps even pairing that with an Anzaldua piece, something like that, to help them get a little bit more understanding. That’s likely what I’ll do throughout the course, is giving them things like that.

In making decisions about how to teach the outcomes of College 1, such as critical thinking, Lucy chose to incorporate supplementary materials from current events that would make the course more relatable for students. In deciding how to prioritize the readings shared across College 1 instructors at her college, Lucy focused on the authors with whom she was most familiar and knowledgeable.

In our second interview, Lucy described the “vagueness” of her college’s syllabus as an asset to her teaching because it gave instructors “freedom” to adapt the course materials as they best saw fit – as she did by adding the Kavanaugh testimony to her course and more heavily emphasizing the Cisneros reading. Even as she exercised autonomy in “choosing” to teach the prescribed syllabus, with minor changes to the readings, Lucy found several assignments shared among College 1 instructors at her college to be unhelpful and burdensome. She lamented the lack of clear guidance around and vague rationale for these assignments, which felt like “busywork” to both her and her students. She assigned them in her class, but did not fully understand what students were supposed to gain from them.

MEGAN: ...You said that [your college’s] master syllabus was really vague. What did you think about the vagueness? Did it help you in developing the class, or do you wish there had been more specificity in the master syllabus?

LUCY: I think there should be more specificity in at least – what we are wanting to do, what are the learning outcomes that we want from having activities, like a discussion group, a research group, and a creative project at the end? Because at the faculty meetings, it was just such a flurry of, “Okay now we’re gonna do the assessment, and now there’s [this] event tomorrow,” and let’s tell these students about all of these extra events, but not really talking about the material that we’re working on, and what do we want to get out of this discussion group? What’s the point of having it and having this be another task that we’re asking them to complete?

- LUCY: So I think that the vagueness of the general syllabus, in terms of how to put together the texts, I really appreciate it – it allows me a lot more freedom to thematize the syllabus. But not having... a little bit more conversation and discussion about what actually are the outcomes that we want out of those projects, even though they're worth only five percent of the grade, [because] we're still asking [students] to do that. So I think that it would be better to have a little bit more guidelines, a little bit more specificity, just so that-
- MEGAN: So that as an instructor, you know why you're asking students to do it?
- LUCY: Exactly, instead of it feeling like busywork.

At the end of the quarter, Lucy gave an overall positive assessment of her College 1 course. At the same time, she elaborated on the challenges she faced in trying to teach assignments, such as the discussion group, for which she did not fully understand the rationale.

- LUCY: So what I feel like happened, and this is just as an observation, it seems like there was almost an insecurity as to whether or not the course was gonna be rigorous enough without a writing component. So then it seems to me that there was this impulse to want to add these other tasks to still make up for the lack of the writing component, so to add extra tasks to make up for that. I just think that it made it seem like just a lot of busywork for them and for me.

In describing her sense of autonomy over her class, Lucy expressed feeling “freedom” in some ways to interpret and teach the syllabus as she best saw fit. She acted on this freedom – even as she vowed “to teach the syllabus straight as it is” – by bringing in supplemental materials from current events and emphasizing readings with which she was more familiar. At the same time, Lucy felt limited autonomy to change the assignments shared among instructors at her college. She felt compelled to organize the students into “discussion groups and research groups,” as well as assign ten “reading quizzes” throughout the quarter. She described both of these activities as “busywork” for both herself and her students because their purpose was unclear to

her; to her, they seemed to be grounded more in making the course appear “rigorous” than in pedagogical concerns or in instructors’ expertise. Lucy’s perspective on the quizzes differed markedly from Karl’s. While Karl saw himself as part of a community of instructors who “all agreed as a collective to give the quizzes,” Lucy was not involved in her college’s decision to give quizzes and viewed them as “busywork” for both herself and her students; she felt compelled to assign them in order, as she stated in her second interview, “to check off those boxes.”

While Lucy’s account of her experience teaching College 1 suggests that she felt a moderate sense of autonomy over the course, her recommendations for improving the curriculum did not call for granting her more autonomy to change the syllabus as she saw fit. Instead, Lucy asked for more “specificity” and “guidelines” for College 1 instructors that would help them understand the purpose of the assignments they were being asked to use. While Lucy appreciated having “freedom to thematize the syllabus,” she felt frustrated by being asked, at the same time, to give assignments for which she did not understand the rationale.

Thomas, Joanna, and Lucy each articulated a moderate sense of autonomy over their College 1 classes. They voiced an ability to depart from the official curriculum of the colleges at which they taught by emphasizing some readings more than others, cutting out readings when necessary, and bringing in supplemental materials as they saw fit. In making these changes, these instructors resembled instructors who felt a high level of autonomy over their classes. Compared to high autonomy instructors, however, moderate autonomy instructors made more minor

changes to their colleges' curricula and expressed significant concerns about and disagreements with the new College 1 curriculum.

*Low sense of autonomy*

Instructors who expressed high and moderate senses of autonomy over their College 1 classes responded to the new curriculum in distinct but fairly consistent ways. Instructors with a high sense of autonomy took the curriculum into their own hands, modifying it to best suit their teaching style and priorities, while also holding overall favorable opinions of the new curriculum. Instructors with a moderate sense of autonomy made less significant changes to the curriculum and tended to be more critical of the new curriculum than instructors with a high sense of autonomy. In contrast to both these groups, instructors with a low sense of autonomy over their classes held diverse opinions about the value of the new curriculum and adapted their teaching in drastically different ways in response to these changes. At the surface level, each of these instructors adhered closely to the curricula developed at their colleges; however, a closer examination of their responses indicates that even as they “adhered” to a formal curriculum, their classroom practices also included subversion, reluctant compliance, confusion, and hostility.

Jake, a lecturer with several years of experience teaching Core, taught his College 1 course by, as he put it, “subvert[ing]” the curriculum – though for him, this “subversive” approach was not new to College 1. He found that his position as an adjunct lecturer afforded him little power over the decision-making at his college; to stay employed, he needed to accept the curriculum handed down to him from the



university and from his Provost. In our second interview, he described how he adapted to these constraints in his teaching.

JAKE: As an adjunct lecturer, I get no perks except health insurance from [another institution] and a bit of health insurance from here at UCSC – that’s it.... I’m not in the game to push back until I’m in a position as a boss to make those decisions. I’m certainly not one to complain because I think that it’ll take away from my ability to subvert in my own way, and I do. Look, the curriculum, I follow all the rules that I need and then I push to the very edge that I don’t get in trouble, does that makes sense? That’s how I’ve learned to operate in this dynamic.

Even as Jake “subvert[ed]” the curriculum, he also voiced support for the shift from Core to College 1. In our first interview, he expressed that the new curriculum reduced his workload, as he now had less student writing to grade, and required him to make few changes to what he previously taught in Core.

JAKE: For me, this actually became a very streamlined and simple process because I’m just trying to help them think critically. I’m trying to get them to be metacognitive. I’m trying to really focus on those analytical strategies that will be the basis of them becoming great academics or researchers. I was excited. The readings changed a bit, I was disappointed some things left, I was happy some things stayed. But, I don't think there is too much of a shift, at least for me.

JAKE: Now, certainly I scrubbed it and I really wanted to make sure that it’s in line with the new changes, but I don't know. Maybe it’s confirmation bias. I just kind of feel like, I’m already doing what they need. And just to make a note, the outcomes that you sent, I think on the document that was the proposal, right? I’ve never really seen this before. Now, I’m really starting to see range of strategies to understand and analyze texts with more and more – I mean, all the stuff I did last year. It just felt natural this year as well. No resistance on my part to change as instructor.

Further, Jake saw particular pedagogical changes introduced by the new College 1 curriculum in a positive light. He saw the shift to teaching reading strategies

explicitly as a move toward “equity” that actually brought the curriculum *more* into alignment with how he had taught Core the previous year.

JAKE: This year more than last year, there’s this huge... push for equity, like a huge push. The first time [I was] teaching this, it’s like, “Okay, how do we introduce our students to the canon?” Then the second time, this year of teaching, we come in and they’re like, “No, equity, equity, equity, we have to make reading strategies and all this stuff.” That’s kind of my wheelhouse so I think that it gave me permission to do more of what I traditionally do in terms of those type of gestures.

In response to the shift to College 1, then, Jake saw himself as both “in line with the new changes” and “subvert[ing] in [his] own way.” These changes “felt natural” to him because they aligned with how he previously taught Core, so there was “no resistance” from him in teaching the new curriculum – especially with its new focus on “equity.” As he explained later, rather than overtly resist or “push back” on the curriculum, Jake quietly “subvert[ed]” the rules of the institution. His approach to teaching the curriculum – complying with the rules while “push[ing them] to the very edge” – was not new to College 1, but rather was how he had “learned to operate” as an adjunct lecturer.

At first glance, Jake resembles the instructors who voiced a moderate sense of autonomy over their classes. Like Thomas, Joanna, and Lucy, Jake made few apparent changes to the College 1 curriculum handed down to him from his college Provost and – similar to Joanna – expressed support for the shift from Core to College 1. A closer look at Jake’s responses, however, suggests some key differences in how he understood his sense of autonomy. Unlike Joanna, Jake played no role in helping develop the College 1 curriculum at his college and, in fact, indicated during our

interview that this was his first time encountering the official course learning outcomes. Jake described his approach to teaching College 1 as fundamentally shaped by his marginal and precarious position at UCSC; given his lack of job security and power over decision-making, Jake felt compelled to teach the curriculum that was handed down to him – or, to at least present the appearance of doing so. He felt that he was able to exercise his own agency as a teacher not by taking ownership of the course learning outcomes and adapting the curriculum to suit his own style, as Samuel and Karl did, but by “subvert[ing]” the curriculum with his classroom practices while formally adhering to the “rules” established by more powerful stakeholders, including his Provost.

Margaret was another instructor who felt a low sense of autonomy over her classes, though for quite different reasons than Jake. Unlike Jake, who learned about the changes to College 1 from his Provost shortly before the start of Fall quarter, Margaret played a minor role in helping develop the College 1 curriculum for her college. She felt that other instructors were more influential than her in designing this curriculum, which ultimately departed from her own vision for the course. In our first interview, she described serving on the committee to design College 1 at her college.

MEGAN: You said you were on the committee to design College 1. What was your role in that?

MARGARET: Well, my role wasn't very important. I think... [another faculty member] was really running it and they already had things in... They were saying 30 students [per class]. It had to be every single kind of student from the very weakest student to the strongest students. It had to be a course that was supposed to be... well, I don't know. That was going to be in the sequence with the writing courses. So then when it came out that they decided, the whole decision not to have it be a writing course, that was not in my hands... So, I really wasn't a loud

voice in this, because I hadn't been around. [Faculty most involved in developing the ALC] were all from the Writing Program. They knew what was going on and I was not from the Writing Program. Anyway, I was sort of a sideline person.

Even though she served on the committee to develop the College 1 syllabus for her college, Margaret did not feel she significantly influenced its design. That is, even though she had a “seat at the table,” she did not have a “voice at the table.” Instead, she expressed feeling as though other faculty – primarily, Writing Program faculty – had already decided on the curriculum and the constraints of the course, such as class size and a focus on reading rather than writing. She saw herself as a “sideline person” who had minimal power to shape the syllabus at her college because she had not been involved in the initial design of the ALC.

Margaret responded to the shift to College 1 by following the syllabus shared among instructors at her college, even though she disagreed with some of the materials assigned and its approach to teaching the learning outcomes. In our second interview, Margaret described her College 1 course as “somebody else’s course,” and her own position, as the instructor, as similar to that of a “TA” (Teaching Assistant). She taught the syllabus as it was written and made only minor changes to the class schedule – dedicating fewer class sessions to a course text than planned, for instance. She taught each of the texts assigned in her college’s syllabus, even as she was critical of the selection of these texts.

MEGAN: How would you describe your overall approach to the course... what was your main goal for the students?

MARGARET: Well, I was trying to fit into it the ... Because I'd been in those original discussions with [another faculty member] and... our Provost. So, I was trying to fit into what had been decided as the goals... I had put in

a draft of what I thought should happen in the class, which was people seeing systems of power, people finding power for themselves. That kind of thing. But then, another person took over working on the class and picked all different texts than I would've used. So, it ended up not being my course... I was ending up teaching somebody else's course... So, that was hard, and I just kept having to make little compromises with that. So, my vision really kind of got lost. There were some things that I felt like we kind of did, like building community, which I think is good...

MEGAN: I wanted to ask more about adopting someone else's curriculum. What did you find most challenging in terms of with the assignments or the texts of that curriculum?

MARGARET: Well, I think that's what you do all the time when you're TAing for people, right?... One thing was, we were [reading a book], and since I'd already heard from the students that almost all of them had read it before, I did it in three days, the whole of [the book], so it was 70 pages a day. Whether that was a good idea or not, I'm not sure. [Another instructor] set it up. [They] said, "This is the end of the Enlightenment. It is the end of the Enlightenment, the beginning of Romanticism. It's a really important book, and you've gotta set it in its historic context and everything." I did do some of that. But, I also managed to get [students] through it, too.

Margaret had her own vision for how to teach College 1, and – at least on paper – an opportunity to help shape the course at her college through her role on the College 1 committee. However, other instructors' visions for the course ultimately won out over hers, she found, and she felt that she was teaching "somebody else's course." She reluctantly taught the texts shared among instructors at her college, even though she was highly critical of them.

Margaret's experience serving on a committee to help design College 1 at her college departs significantly from the experiences of Samuel and Joanna, both of whom also served on their college's committee to develop the College 1 syllabus. While the latter two instructors felt they played a significant role in designing the syllabi for their colleges, Margaret felt that she had little power to shape the syllabus

that others had already begun to develop and that, ultimately, her college's Core Coordinator had the final say on the curriculum at her college. Margaret felt a low sense of autonomy to teach College 1 as she saw fit and made few changes to her college's curriculum. In contrast, Samuel and Joanna felt higher levels of autonomy to adapt their colleges' curricula to suit their teaching styles and priorities – even as they played major roles in developing them.

Michelle, a long-time Core instructor, was similarly dismayed by the College 1 curriculum developed at one of the colleges at which she taught. She felt a low sense of autonomy to adapt the curriculum to her own style, and, further, believed that doing so “defeats the purpose of College 1” which was to establish a common standard for the course across the university.

MEGAN: Do you feel like you have the autonomy to change your syllabus at [your college] or does it have to be super aligned with everyone else's?

MICHELLE: I felt this year that I needed to align it with everybody else's. And unfortunately for me, I also felt that my students – because of the lack of clarity or the assignments that had been developed for this curriculum – they were just sharing with other people from other classes and... handing in assignments that other instructors had explained... because they didn't feel like they understood what to do. Which I thought was my fault. Like I had not explained well enough what they were supposed to do. But when I sat down to look at the assignment to figure out what they were supposed to do, I had no idea what they were supposed to do. If I couldn't figure it out, how are they going to figure it out?... Again, I think I that having more autonomy defeats the purpose of College 1. Isn't the purpose to do something that is happening across the university where, as far as I know, every single college did some sort of reading log, journal, [or] book? I have a lot to say about that, too – whether that worked or didn't work. But I feel like we're aiming for some sort of standard that we've never done before. And I'm not sure if we're going to achieve it or how we're going to achieve it. I'm really not...

MEGAN: I know I didn't observe your... classes [at another college] but could you speak to that a little bit?

MICHELLE: Yes. The [College 1] classes [at this college] were not designed for the learning outcomes... what they did was they took the entire curriculum that we used to teach as [this college's] Core and then they made an entirely new curriculum that related to these learning outcomes that was a fine curriculum, I'm sure, maybe if you only taught it. I don't see how you could because you had to use the content that was generated by the old curriculum. But they mashed it on top of the other so from the very beginning it was poorly structured, poorly articulated, in terms of its meaning and purpose - and believe it or not, students really get it when something doesn't seem to be jiving with what they expect... I figured out teaching that class that it's really hard for me to teach a class where I have not designed the curriculum.

Michelle believed that, in order to teach College 1 in alignment with the “purpose” of this course, she needed “to align [her class] with everyone else’s” and with university-wide standards; at the same time, she found it challenging to teach a course she did not design herself. At times, she explained, she felt neither she nor her students understood the assignments shared by instructors at the colleges at which she taught. She was uncertain that College 1 would “achieve” the standard it aimed to establish – particularly at one college, where she saw the curriculum as two distinct curricula “mashed” together. In this case, her critique was not of the College 1 curriculum itself, but of how one college at which she taught interpreted this curriculum in developing its syllabus.

At the same time, Michelle held a pessimistic understanding of the shift from Core to College 1 campus-wide. She believed that this change was not motivated by pedagogical concerns, but rather by some Academic Senate members’ view that Core was a waste of time; the ALC emerged, in her view, as a compromise between the colleges and the Writing Program to prevent the course from being eliminated entirely. Under these conditions – a campus-wide curricular change arising out of

necessity and inconsistent interpretations of this curriculum by the colleges at which she taught – Michelle held little faith that College 1 would better serve students than did Core. Still, like Margaret, she reluctantly complied with the changes and taught the course as it was written in spite of her reservations about the curriculum.

Another long-time Core instructor, Janet, felt a low sense of autonomy over her College 1 class and shared Michelle’s experience of not understanding the assignments she gave to her students. This experience was even more prominent for Janet, whose response to the shift to College 1 I characterize as “confusion.” In our first interview, which immediately followed my classroom observation, Janet described feeling “embarrassed,” “insecure,” and “irresponsible” about the assignment she asked her students to complete but not design herself. In my classroom visit, I observed Janet struggling to explain the assignment’s requirements; I noted that she presented the assignment to her students as something that was being required of her and of the students by the college, but which she did not totally buy into.

MEGAN: What were your impressions about how class went today?

JANET: Well, the way that class went today is, like I said, I was embarrassed I have to give them that assignment, another assignment, because I know how overwhelmed they feel already... Like I said, that was a sudden change because I was just going to make them follow the instructions to a T that had been written, but then I ran into that other professor who said... she was skipping that [assignment] altogether, the whole representation thing altogether. So then, I was like okay, well how can I make this easier? I already printed these out. So, that’s the thing is trying to create a consistency for the students, but having the assignments and assignment schedule be too complex – so feeling like how to navigate between what’s being expected of you to fulfill the requirements and then also what you would do on your own if you



were teaching this without somebody telling you what to assign, and also paying attention to the needs of the student.

JANET: So, that makes me feel insecure and kind of ... It makes me feel irresponsible... it's kind of between a rock and a hard place but I also think that that can be worked out in time, like next year will be much easier.

Whereas other instructors expressed feeling like they were teaching “somebody else’s course,” Janet experienced this to a further extreme: teaching another instructor’s course that she did not herself understand. She tried to “navigate” this by “trying to simplify” assignment instructions for her students, but did not feel confident about her success in doing so. She described her position as “between a rock and a hard place” because she felt obligated to “fulfill the requirements” placed on her by her college, but also to serve her students well.

Other instructors at her college decided to take the curriculum into their own hands and abandon the college’s materials, but Janet thought it was important to teach the curriculum as it was designed.

MEGAN: So, it seems like your approach to teaching this class is mostly staying to the letter of what [your college’s] Core Coordinators developed.

JANET: I mean, I’m trying to be respectful to their work and also if this was created by the university and this is supposed to be across campus, you don’t want your students to come out in a disadvantage where they have less skills or whatever it is. And also the fact that the people who developed all this, they have much more experience in teaching writing and reading. Well, reading’s new. So, I’m also trying to be respectful to their experience. But yeah, I don’t think there’s ... Now that I think about it, I don’t think there’s a honest conversation taking place because you have the rebellious other Core instructors who are just not doing it but they’re not telling [the Core Coordinators] they’re not doing it. Like, why not just come out and say, “this isn’t working for me?”

She elaborated, later, on how she distinguished herself from the “rebellious” instructors at her college; unlike them, she did not “really want to resist” the new curriculum, even though she was critical of its “top down” design and, as described in the previous chapter, “neoliberal” attempt to measure learning through the use of learning outcomes.

JANET: Really, when you think about it, we’re supposed to be teaching this kind of collaborative inclusive way of being in the world but... what’s been created is ... top down. I remember when I first applied to being a Core professor a couple of years ago and it said that everybody was going to be teaching a section of Core... it said everybody was expected to teach the same class more or less. And so I imagined that all the professors came together during the summer, [and] collaboratively said, “Oh, I want to read this and I want to do this,” and then everybody decided together and then implemented it. But instead, it was something that was created by [Core] Coordinators... that’s their job. It’s not like they’re bad people or something. They’re actually people who think very collaboratively and then we’re just supposed to take what they say. But you know, it’s like part of the one resistance strategy is just doing your own thing without saying anything. Another resistance strategy is speaking out and saying, “how can we do things different?” So, it seems like the lecturers are taking different resistance strategies to what’s being asked of them...

MEGAN: What's your resistance strategy?

JANET: Probably trying to be honest and respectful at the same time. I mean to be honest, I don’t really want to resist that much because I really like the people at [my] college and [the] university can be a kind of alienating place and amongst the lecturers, at least there’s an understanding of camaraderie and what the university is really supposed to be about which is the students and not just self-promoting research. So, I don’t want to disrespect people who I think are in it for the right reasons but [the curriculum] is too much. So, there’s probably going to need to be continuing conversations. I don’t really want to resist. In fact, I want to just be able to have time to converse to think about how I can do things better.

In our second interview, at the end of the quarter, Janet voiced that she still felt confusion about the new curriculum – even after attending a meeting with her

college's Core Coordinator and other College 1 instructors which gave her a more positive view of the learning outcomes. Commenting on the final project she assigned to her students, Janet found the design of this assignment, and the course as a whole, to be "confusing."

JANET: I don't really 100 percent understand the rationale behind [this assignment]. Which goes for the whole course and all of the assignments. When you don't create it yourself, you don't know exactly the rationale behind all of the assignments. So you have to kind of discern them and try to figure it out and just deliver it as if you did.

Janet held a pessimistic assessment of the shift to College 1 – which, at the campus-wide level, she saw as a "neoliberal" effort to standardize and quantify learning. At the more local level of the college at which she taught, however, Janet was "respectful" of the Core Coordinators who designed the curriculum for her college and viewed them as colleagues who "think collaboratively." In choosing to teach the course materials developed at her college rather than "resist" them, Janet saw herself as respecting the Core Coordinators. At the same time, she felt confused and skeptical about the "rationale" behind the materials developed for the course, and so presented these to students as requirements that were out of her hands.

Michael, a long-time Core instructor, viewed the class as totally "out of his hands" and expressed the lowest sense of autonomy over his College 1 classes among the instructors I spoke with. In both of our interviews, Michael felt he had little power to adapt the course to his own style – a feeling which, by the second interview, had grown to resentment about being "micro-managed." In our first interview, he described feeling less freedom than in past years to make changes to the curriculum.

- MICHAEL: We are limited as to how we can conduct. I mean, basically, [the Provost and Core Coordinator] told us to use the same syllabus for all the sections. I literally copied it word by word. I'm using exactly what I was given. I have remixed things a little bit in terms of [the readings] I pair up...
- MEGAN: So you said that you used the syllabus pretty much as it's written with a few changes. How much autonomy do you think you have in shifting the class to teach how you want to teach it?
- MICHAEL: Not very much this year. Years past, we were given an entire... fourth of the class. We'd be doing a fourth [or] a fifth of the class for us to teach whatever we wanted to. This time, we're all towing the line without adding any additional texts. We've been discouraged from demanding more hours [of students] for class, for meetings with students because of the fact that they'd given us this pretty detailed schedule as to how many hours we are to have the students in the class and how many hours we can ask them to be reading and writing and all of that. So it's like somebody discovered how to use that spreadsheet and determining what a college education entails. So that leaves very little room for play.
- MEGAN: What's your goal this quarter with the classes you have?
- MICHAEL: I'm just going to follow the rules and give them exactly what they're asking. I'll do my best. I'll see what comes out of it because the boundaries are pretty set. So there's not much room to play and we'll see.

Later in the interview, Michael expanded on his comment that he wanted to “see what comes of it” by following the rules for teaching College 1. He decided to treat College 1 as an “experiment;” following the syllabus as it was written ensured he maintained the integrity of the experimental conditions.

- MICHAEL: I'm curious, I want to see how this works out too. I want to see if the [university's] calculation was right which is why I'm more than willing to do [it] exactly by the book. I don't want to do anything that will deviate or will cause it to get a result that doesn't reflect... the original intent of class.
- MEGAN: So you're sticking to it not so much because you're very obligated to but because you want to see if the result-
- MICHAEL: Make sure of it too... We've basically come to the understanding that this is an experiment. I was a biology and chemistry major so I know that the conditions have to be strictly observed and so I'll do that. Am

I going to like it? No, I don't think so. But I'm not here to enjoy myself, that's not my entertainment. So we'll see.

In seeing College 1 as an “experiment,” Michael echoed sentiments shared by several other instructors; both Lucy and Michelle felt compelled to teach the syllabus as it was designed so that their college would see whether or not the new curriculum “worked.” Michael, however, expressed a much more profound cynicism about the changes than did these other instructors, suggesting that his “by the book” implementation of the curriculum was carried out with the intent of exposing the curriculum’s problems. I find that Michael’s response to the changes to Core is best described as hostile compliance, as he implemented the course in a way that was intended to make the new curriculum appear a failure.

I observed this approach in my second classroom observation of Michael, where he introduced the students’ end-of-the-year presentations with an “out of my hands” approach. In this class, each student presented a hard copy book that they had artistically modified – a project shared among all College 1 classes at his college. I reflected on Michael’s approach to leading this class in my field notes.

I found the presentations of every book to be a little superficial. The presentations were so short that students couldn’t go into much depth about the meaning of their altered book (and didn’t seem to be expected to). Michael seemed a bit dismissive of this project, introducing it as “show and tell” at the start of this class. His lack of control over this project also came up in the reflection discussion at the end of class, where he said that he thought it was odd that “they” didn’t let students choose any book they wanted to alter. I assume that “they” referred to the Provost, Core Coordinator, or other higher-ups at the college. He further added right after this comment, “I don’t know how this place works anymore” – again, I assume, referring to the college.

I am not sure how Michael sees the altered book project as connecting to the College 1 learning outcomes, or if he sees it as connecting to these. His

question about what students got from doing the presentation could maybe have been a nod to metacognition – I’m not sure. He certainly had a kind of “it’s out of my hands” type approach to introducing and commenting on this activity. He didn’t ask any critical or analytical questions of the students with regard to their presentations, which suggested to me that he didn’t care much about what they said in their presentations; he didn’t push anyone to more clearly explain the symbolism of their altered books, or connect to course themes/readings. He seemed mostly focused on getting through everyone’s project during class and having time to vote on them.

In teaching this class, Michael formally went through the motions of asking each student to present their final book project. He also demonstrated moments of genuine engagement with and curiosity about some students’ projects. However, he voiced to the students that the requirements of the project were out of his hands, and that he disagreed with or did not understand them.

In our second interview, Michael described conflicts between the instructors and the “powers that be” at his college that escalated over the course of the quarter. The impact of this, he found, was confusion, frustration, and disappointment among students taking the course.

MEGAN: Now that the whole thing’s over, what is your perspective on how the course went?

MICHAEL: It’s the most disorganized – we just kept on stumbling from one issue to another. The course was never settled by the powers that be. We had a number of changes over the quarter, which in general, they are a pain in the ass. But more importantly, they make us [instructors] look like we don’t know what we’re doing. One of the things about coming to college – these kids come from high school thinking that college is going to be something superior to what they have experienced. Then [students] find out that we’re also clueless, so it doesn’t make them feel very good. It was very frustrating to be changing things, and then to be apologizing to them for things that we had begun and we were not going to finish because something had shifted. In that sense, it was very frustrating. Then they throw at us this reading assessment, which was a joke. It was truly one of the most ridiculous things I have ever asked a student of mine to do.

His overall assessment of his experience of teaching College 1 addressed a range of critiques: “micromanaging” by campus leaders, shared resentment among lecturers at his college, disapproval of a book required of his students, and extra demands on lecturers’ time to grade the week 8 assessments. Throughout this account, Michael expressed a clear sense of a lack of autonomy over his course and a low opinion of the new curriculum.

MICHAEL: I have never had such a crappy experience. And on top of that, there was a lot of micromanaging. We were not allowed to do classes and shape them in our own unique ways. At least with the lecturers that I spoke with, we all felt that we have never worked so hard in teaching [our college’s] Core, ever.

MEGAN: Where did the micromanaging come from?

MICHAEL: The demand that we do things according to a specific plan.

MEGAN: By who?

MICHAEL: Well, in this case, from the Provost and the [Core] Coordinator, because they were following this plan that was decided by the powers that decide plans across campus.

MEGAN: Did the Core Coordinator at [your college] design your assignments?

MICHAEL: More or less, in the sense that, well, all the assignments were dictated to us. As a matter of fact, they even gave us the prompts for the assignments. The only one that we were able to have some input in was the prompts for [one] essay. We usually do this in [my college’s] Core, we always circulate our prompts. We borrow ideas from each other. So I used a couple of the prompts that were used by a couple of my colleagues, and I designed some too that were of my own.

MICHAEL: ...In the past, we have always been allowed to take one-fifth of the class and make it our own, choose our own text, how we teach it, all of that. That disappeared completely. We [instructors] were not a very happy bunch of campers.

MICHAEL: We were very verbal in our complaints at the last faculty meeting with the Provost. I think [they were] surprised. We walked in there with a list of complaints about how the course had gone, and what we had hated and we had disliked. There were two levels. Some things we disliked, some things we hated. And the fact that we were not going to read or grade the reading assessment unless they paid us more... that’s what really insulted us.

Michael ended his quarter of College 1 feeling not only “insulted” about the demands being made on lecturers throughout the quarter, but also dismayed about how the course impacted students – some of whom were offended by one of the texts assigned at his college. Whereas in our first interview, Michael expressed skepticism that the “experiment” of the new curriculum would work, by the end of the quarter, he was convinced that the course was both confusing and offensive to students – and, above all, insulting to his professional identity as an instructor. Michael understood the problems that arose in his class as the necessary result of demands being made on him by the “powers that be;” his course, in his view, was largely out of his control. At the same time, Michael made clear early in the quarter, during our first interview, that he had chosen to teach the syllabus exactly as it was written so that the “experiment” of the course could be properly tested and he seemed confident that this experiment would fail; by the end of the quarter, this outcome appeared certain.

Michael represents the most extreme example of an instructor who felt a low sense of autonomy over his College 1 classes, but he was not alone in feeling that he had little power to shape his own course. This feeling was shared by Jake, Margaret, Michelle, and Janet, each of whom responded in a distinct way to teaching a curriculum they perceived to be, as Margaret put it, “somebody else’s course.” While Jake outwardly complied with but quietly subverted elements of the formal curriculum in his classroom, Margaret and Michelle felt obligated to teach the course as it was written, though they did so reluctantly and with highly critical opinions of the change. Janet, like Michael, expressed an exceptionally low sense of autonomy



over her class; in her teaching, however, this low sense of autonomy manifested more as confusion over the curriculum than, as with Michael, hostility toward it. These five instructors' varied responses to their low sense of autonomy over their College 1 classes stands in stark contrast to the more consistent and predictable responses of instructors who felt a high or moderate sense of autonomy over their teaching. These low autonomy instructors each appear, at first glance, to have complied with the curricula developed at each of their colleges. A closer look at how they spoke about their teaching decisions and observations of their classroom practices, however, reveals that this "compliance" manifested in diverse and unpredictable ways in the classroom. In the section below, I explore this contrast among College 1 instructors in relation to the scholarship on academic autonomy.

***Understanding College 1 instructors' senses of autonomy and classroom practices in the context of scholarship on academic autonomy***

As I elaborate in the previous section, College 1 instructors expressed varied perceptions of their autonomy over their teaching and varied responses to the curricular change in their classroom practices. While instructors who felt high and moderate levels of autonomy over their teaching adapted the formal curriculum to suit their own style and priorities to varying degrees, instructors who felt a low level of autonomy responded in diverse and unpredictable ways. Situated in the context of scholarship on academic autonomy, these findings take on additional significance: as empirical evidence of the complex relationship between sense of autonomy and classroom practices, an underexplored area in existing literature.

My interviews with and observations of College 1 instructors both build on and complicate the findings from the literature on academic autonomy and faculty responses to institutional change. Many studies examine faculty members' perceptions of their autonomy in their research and teaching; these studies generally examine the role of autonomy in academic identity, the relationship between sense of autonomy and job satisfaction, macro-level shifts in higher education that diminish academic autonomy, and differences in autonomy among types of faculty. These studies also illuminate significant tensions between how faculty members see themselves – as autonomous researchers and teachers – and how they are viewed by institutions, which are increasingly implementing changes that reduce or challenge faculty autonomy. Rarely, however, do these studies examine the classroom-level *impacts* of a diminished sense of autonomy resulting from institutional changes. Studies on faculty members' response to institutional changes hint at this relationship, but few explore it directly. Degn, for instance, explores both how faculty perceive “threats” to their professional identity resulting from institutional changes and how they respond to these threats. Her analysis, however, does not link these two factors; it is unclear if faculty members' varied responses are linked to *how much* of a threat to their identity they perceive. Other studies of faculty responses to institutional change compare the responses of different types of faculty (Anakin et al. 2018; Danley-Scott and Scott 2014), explore “identity shifts” resulting from the change (McNaughton and Billot 2016), highlight faculty members' emotional responses

(Bahia et al. 2017), and examine how responses change throughout the change process (Venance et al. 2014).

One of the few studies that directly addresses the link between faculty members' sense of autonomy and their response to a curricular change is Barman et al.'s (2014) study of how faculty at a Swedish university implemented an outcomes-based education policy in their classrooms. The authors describe four categories of faculty "approaches" to implementing this change: "container," "technocratic," "pragmatic," and "ideological" (Barman et al. 2014:739). Faculty members who take ideological and container approaches experience a strong sense of autonomy over their teaching, while faculty who take technocratic and pragmatic approaches see the policy as limiting their autonomy in the classroom. In developing their analysis, Barman et al. do not argue for a causal link between faculty members' sense of autonomy and their implementation approach; instead, they treat these factors as inextricably linked: a high sense of autonomy characterizes the ideological and container approaches, while a low sense of autonomy characterizes the technocratic and pragmatic approaches.

This study's findings on College 1 instructors' senses of autonomy and classroom practices both builds on and complicates the findings of studies that speak to faculty members' sense of autonomy and responses to change. Like the faculty members interviewed in Barman et al.'s (2014) study, College 1 instructors articulated a both a diverse range of approaches to implementing the College 1 curriculum in their classrooms and differing senses of autonomy over their teaching.

College 1 instructors who expressed a high level of autonomy resemble faculty members who take an “ideological” approach to implementing policy; like the faculty from Barman et al.’s study, these College 1 instructors took the formal curriculum into their own hands and adapted it to suit their own approach to enhancing student learning. College 1 instructors who voiced a low sense of autonomy, however, demonstrated a range of responses to the curricular change that were more diverse and unpredictable than the “technocratic” and “pragmatic” approaches that Barman et al. describe. While some College 1 instructors who expressed a low sense of autonomy understood the changes to College 1 as “technocratic” rules to be followed or as “pragmatic” teaching tools they were required to use, not all College 1 instructors fit neatly into the schema that Barman et al. develop.

Degn (2018), writing on faculty responses to a research-centered institutional change, describes a wider range of faculty responses to change than do Barman et al.; Degn’s schema comes closer to capturing College 1 instructors’ diverse responses to change. Degn identifies a continuum of responses among faculty members: “pure,” “strategic,” or “cognitive” versions of “ignorance;” “decoupling” of individual practices from the official reforms; or “defiant,” “defeatist,” “strategic,” or “optimistic” versions of “compliance” with the change (Degn 2018:315). College 1 instructors exhibited a similarly wide and complex range of responses to the new College 1 curriculum: major and minor adaptation, subversion, reluctant compliance, confusion, and hostility. Moreover, these responses appear to coincide with *how much* autonomy instructors felt over their teaching. Instructors who felt high and moderate

levels of autonomy over their teaching responded with major and minor adaptations to the curriculum, respectively. Instructors who felt a low level of autonomy over their teaching, in contrast, responded less predictably, including different variations on compliance and resistance – similar to Degn’s findings. This study of College 1 instructors, like Degn’s, challenges Barman et al.’s implicit claim that faculty members’ sense of autonomy is straightforwardly linked to the ways they implement curricular change.

Situated alongside existing scholarship on academic autonomy and faculty responses to institutional change, my findings on College 1 instructors’ sense of autonomy and classroom practices offers a unique scholarly contribution: a rich portrait of the *complexity* of the relationship between sense of autonomy and how faculty implement change. These findings suggest that faculty members who feel a low sense of autonomy over their teaching respond in diverse ways to a curricular change; they do not simply view the change as a set of rules to be followed carefully, as Barman et al. describe, but rather take diverse approaches to complying with and resisting the changes. These approaches, at face value, all centered on close adherence to the curricula developed at their colleges; these instructors taught the “letter” of the new curriculum. A closer examination of their sensemaking around the course and classroom practices, however, suggest that their “adherence” also included subversion, reluctant compliance, confusion, and hostility. In other words, when instructors felt a low sense of autonomy, ownership, and control over their teaching, they implemented the curriculum in unpredictable ways.

The implications of these findings are significant for practice as well as scholarship: sense of autonomy is closely linked with not only how, but how *well*, a curricular change is implemented. Even within the same college at UCSC, for instance, instructors supervised by the same Provost can differ in their perceptions of how much autonomy they have to make changes to the curricula they are given. College and university leaders who seek to implement curricular changes would benefit from recognizing the impact of faculty members' sense of ownership and autonomy over the curricula they are being asked to teach. Instructors struggle most when they do not understand the rationale behind the materials they are being asked to teach, and particularly when they feel compelled to teach these materials "as written," without adapting them to fit their own styles. When they feel little to no autonomy, faculty members may quietly resist the curricular change through a diversity of tactics that, on the surface, appear as compliance. Even when they adhere to the "letter" of the curriculum, instructors who do not buy into its "spirit" can undermine its intentions with their subversion of and feelings of reluctance, confusion, and hostility toward the changes.

## CHAPTER 7: Teaching Chinese International Students in an Untracked College 1 Course

### *Introduction*

The UCSC Core class, for much of its history, was tracked by writing ability: first-year students were placed into different sections of Core depending on their scores on standardized tests taken in high school (such as the Standardized Achievement Test [SAT]) or by their score on a writing test developed by the University of California (UC) called the Analytical Writing Placement Exam (Regents of the University of California 2017). These scores determine whether or not students satisfy the Entry Level Writing Requirement (ELWR). Students who do not satisfy the ELWR prior to beginning their first year at a UC, depending on their scores, must enroll in one or more writing courses at their university in order to meet the ELWR (Regents of the University of California 2017). In the 2017-18 school year, the year prior to the implementation of College 1, UCSC students were enrolled in a variety of iterations of Core; these iterations, which varied by college, included “regular” or “mainstream” Core for students who had satisfied the ELWR, Honors Core, one-quarter or two-quarter “Stretch” Core for students who had not satisfied the ELWR, and Core for international students who had not satisfied ELWR (Council of Provosts 2016).

A central feature of the shift from Core to College 1 is its design as an *untracked* version of Core: there are longer be separate variations of the course for ELWR-satisfied and ELWR-required students, or for international and domestic

students. Instead, incoming first-year students within each college are assigned to sections of College 1 randomly. The rationale for this shift to an untracked course is closely linked to two other features of College 1: first, its focus on academic *reading* rather than *writing*; and second, its intention of fostering student engagement across differences. Elizabeth Abrams, Provost of Merrill College and a co-author of the Academic Literacy Curriculum (ALC), explained the rationale for untracking College 1 as an effort to end “segregation” by race and socioeconomic class in the Core classes.

MEGAN: The formal ALC says, “The call for an untracked Core came from the CEP [Committee on Educational Policy].” Could you say more about this and then how do you see untracking as aligning with the outcomes?

ABRAMS: CEP called for it in part because [the Council of Provosts] said it was a problem... [CEP] had the authority to say, “This is not serving our students well.”... Basically, segregation doesn't serve our students well. Tracking may, in the sense that then you can teach to a particular population, but segregation goes against our values and what we were getting was segregation along with tracking. I actually don't remember whether they said, “Get rid of tracking” or whether they said, “Get rid of segregation.”

MEGAN: How do you see the difference between them?

ABRAMS: Tracking is differentiation by competency – and because of the miserable educational system in the state of California, which is differentiated by class and class is so frequently connected to race, then we wound up with racial segregation in our classes.

MEGAN: I guess how do you do one without the other result? How do you do tracking without segregation resulting?

ABRAMS: You don't. It's way easier to teach to students who are in the same knowledge range, competency range. It would be, I guess okay if we did that, so long as we were not [segregating]... What we were doing was harming students by failing to teach them to engage with each other across their various differences, which is that [learning outcome on] engagement with others.



In Abrams' view, untracking College 1 was a necessary condition for providing students an opportunity to engage with others across difference, one of the course learning outcomes. This rationale for untracking centers on students who attended K-12 schools in California; it would allow students who attended well-funded California schools to share a College 1 classroom with students who attended underfunded California schools, increasing the racial and socioeconomic diversity within a classroom.

In this chapter, I draw from interviews and classroom observations of ten College 1 instructors to examine how these instructors made sense of and navigated challenges related to untracking in their classrooms.<sup>26</sup> I find that rather than highlighting an increase in racial and socioeconomic diversity of California students in their classes, College 1 instructors, by and large, saw an increase in Chinese international students in their classes as the primary impact of untracking; this is the first finding I elaborate in this chapter. Further, instructors spoke at length about their challenges with and strategies for serving these students in their College 1 classes; these comprise the second and third findings of the chapter, respectively. I put these findings into conversation with scholarship and reporting on the rise of Chinese international students at US universities since the late 1990s, as well as with higher education and writing studies scholarship on challenges with and strategies for

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<sup>26</sup> In this chapter, I draw from classroom observations to speak to instructors' classroom practices and to inform questions I asked of instructors in the interviews that followed. When I made assumptions about the race or residency status of students I observed in College 1 classrooms, I verified these assumptions with instructors before including them in these findings. My data do not specify the number of Chinese international students enrolled in the classes I observed.

teaching international students in US higher education. College 1 instructors' articulation of their challenges with and strategies for teaching Chinese international students uniquely contributes to the scholarly literature by highlighting the inadequacy of classroom strategies – including their own – for addressing some of the more fundamental challenges presented by the rise of this population in US higher education.

***Context: Increasing population of Chinese international students at US universities***

To understand College 1 instructors' accounts of the changing demographics of students in their classrooms, I find it important to first consider the larger context of changes in the population of Chinese international students in colleges and universities across the US. This population has grown nationally from 51,001 in 1998-99 to 369,548 in 2018-19, an increase of over 724 percent in two decades (The Institute of International Education 2019a). Within the US, California is the top destination for Chinese international students (The Institute of International Education 2019b).

Choudaha (2017) examines historical trends in international students in higher education and defines three “waves” of international student mobility across the globe. The first wave, 1999-2006, was marked by a demand for “highly skilled talent” in STEM fields; in this wave, research-intensive universities in the US and Europe were the top receiving institutions, while China, India, and South Korea were the top sending countries (Choudaha 2017:826–27). The number of Chinese students (both

undergraduate and graduate) studying abroad globally grew from 123,076 in 1999 to 407,280 in 2006 – an increase of 231 percent (Choudaha 2017:829).

The second wave, 2006-2013, was driven largely by the global financial crisis, which resulted in severe budget cuts for higher education across the globe. Colleges and universities, particularly in the US, increased their recruitment of international students to help alleviate budget shortfalls (Choudaha 2017:827). According to a report on international student mobility, in 2012, “over 95 percent of Chinese students studying overseas were self-funded” (Choudaha, Chang, and Kono 2013). During this wave, Choudaha finds, higher education institutions recruited undergraduate international students with less proficiency in English, but without developing programs or practices to support the needs of these students (2017:828). This issue was examined in a lengthy article published in the *New York Times* titled, “The China Conundrum, which gave a cynical assessment of this rise in international enrollment growth (Bartlett and Fischer 2011). The authors interviewed college admissions officers and faculty members in the US, as well as Chinese students, to highlight both a “tide of application fraud” among Chinese applicants and Chinese students’ dissatisfaction with their education in the US (Bartlett and Fischer 2011).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Abelmann and Kang (2014) conducted a discourse analysis of reporting on to the rise of Chinese international students studying in the US at the tail end of this “second wave.” They cite “The China Conundrum” as an exemplar of “pessimistic” reporting on this trend – one of two types of media responses they identify. The other type of response to the rise of Chinese international students paints this trend in an idealized light, conceiving of it as a “fair exchange” that is beneficial for both US higher education institutions and students from China (Abelmann and Kang 2014:384). For examples of the latter type of reporting, see Kinzie (2009) and Levin (2010).

The third wave, 2013-2020, is distinguished by a slowing economy in China and a rise in Chinese students' questioning of the value of an education abroad, both of which are "decelerating the growth of Chinese students going abroad" (Choudaha 2017:830). Choudaha predicts that a "strong anti-immigration tone" in both the US and UK will slow the growth of international student mobility to these countries, but that nevertheless, "given the size and reputation of the American higher education system, it is expected to continue to be the leading destination" for international students (Choudaha 2017:830). These predictions proved correct; in 2018-19, China remained the top sending country of international students to the US, with 369,548 Chinese international students enrolled in US higher education institutions (The Institute of International Education 2019b). At the same time, as Choudaha predicted, enrollment growth of Chinese international students began to decline in 2018-19, with Chinese students expressing increased difficulty in obtaining a visa and heightened concern about the political climate in the US (Wan 2019).

Moving into the "third wave" of international student mobility, the enrollment of Chinese international students in California colleges and universities was higher than ever. According to an article published by the *Sacramento Bee*, the population of international students, particularly from China, began to rise precipitously after the UC Board of Regents released a report recommending the UC campuses increase their proportion of nonresident students in order to make up for cuts in state funding to the UCs (Koseff 2014). Koseff reports that "UC Santa Cruz, looking to increase its nonresident population from about 2 percent of undergraduates to 10 percent,

invested about \$510,000 in recruitment over the last three years and saw the number of international and out-of-state students in its freshman class more than quadruple” (2014). Representatives from the UC noted that international students were recruited because they were a “financially self-sustaining group” that helped subsidize resident students and university programs that might otherwise need to be cut (Koseff 2014). The population of international undergraduate students at UC Santa Cruz rose from 52 students in 2011-12 (when UCSC began its international recruiting efforts) to 1,310 students in 2018-19.

In the past year, however, Choudaha’s prediction of a decline in international student enrollment in the US began to take effect in California. At UC San Diego, a top destination for Chinese international students within California, enrollment of Chinese students “stalled” dramatically in 2019-20, the *San Diego Union-Tribune* reports (Robbins 2019). In Fall 2019, only 41 new Chinese international students enrolled at UCSD, whereas this population had grown “by an average of 526 students a year over the past decade” (Robbins 2019). The impacts of this nationwide decline in the enrollment of Chinese international students remains to be seen at UCSC.

### ***Challenges with and strategies for teaching international students in US higher education***

The growth of the population of Chinese international students in US colleges and universities generated a wide range of scholarship in both higher education and writing studies. Scholars in these fields tend to focus on two areas in their writing on Chinese international students: challenges experienced by these students in US higher

education institutions and strategies for supporting the unique needs of these students. Higher education scholars address challenges that Chinese international students experience in US higher education institutions more generally, while writing studies scholars focus on challenges specific to first-year composition courses.<sup>28</sup> Both sets of scholars offer strategies for supporting students both inside and outside of the classroom.

*Challenges related to serving Chinese international students: higher education and writing studies scholarship*

Higher education scholarship on the challenges experienced by Chinese international students in US colleges and universities mirrors and expands on the challenges mentioned by journalists reporting on the rise of this population. In “The China Conundrum,” for instance, Bartlett and Fischer describe US universities’ challenges around English fluency, plagiarism, cultural and political differences, feeling unwelcomed, and lack of engagement in extracurricular events among their Chinese students (2011). Each of these issues has been addressed in recent scholarship. First, higher education scholars consider Chinese international students’ challenges related to English fluency (Araujo 2011; Leong 2015; Liu 2016; Sherry, Thomas, and Chui 2010). Reviewing scholarship on the “adjustment issues” of international students in the US, Araujo (2011) finds that limited English fluency predicts higher levels of “acculturative stress,” depression, and anxiety among

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<sup>28</sup> While College 1 is not a first-year composition course, it is precursor to these courses. College 1 is the first course in ALC sequence and is followed by first-year composition courses that are tracked by writing competencies. The ALC proposal, including the design of College 1, draws heavily from writing studies scholarship on first-year composition.

international students (3-4). Leong (2015) elaborates on this finding, noting that international students with limited English proficiency “may not participate in class” and tend to “self-segregate” which, in turn, increases their feelings of isolation and discrimination by both American students and faculty (472). Second, higher education scholars also find that faculty perceive challenges related to plagiarism among Chinese international students and attribute these challenges to cultural differences surrounding the use of texts in academic writing (Caplan and Stevens 2017; Grigg 2016; Weller 2012). One study centered on Chinese international students’ perceptions of American faculty corroborates these findings; Chinese students perceive that faculty often assume that they are “cheating” in their classes (Valdez 2015:196).

Third, in addition to challenges around English fluency and plagiarism, higher education scholars find that Chinese international students often experience challenges related to cultural and political differences with American students and faculty (Caplan and Stevens 2017; Chen and Zhou 2019; Eckhart 2019; Gareis and Jalayer 2017; Grigg 2016; Heng 2018; Leong 2015; Liu 2016; Ross and Chen 2015). Caplan and Stevens (2017), for instance, find that both American faculty members and Chinese students felt “frustrated” by students’ differences in cultural background knowledge (21). Faculty noted that Chinese international students were often unfamiliar with Western historical figures, US government, and games played by American children, as well as expectations for college work in the US (Caplan and Stevens 2017:21). In a study of Chinese international students’ experiences at a US

university, Heng (2018) argues that while these students struggled with cultural and political differences from their American peers, scholars and faculty members should not interpret these difference as “deficient;” instead, they should “recognize that different sociocultural milieus possess different expectations around values, attitudes, and behavior” (32).

Fourth, higher education scholars highlight a range of challenges that Chinese international students experience that relate to feeling welcomed, engaged, and integrated into college life in the US (Chen and Zhou 2019; Eckhart 2019; Gareis and Jalayer 2017; Glass, Kociolek, and Lynch 2015; Heng 2017; Leask and Carroll 2011; Montgomery 2016; Park 2016; Siczek 2015; Wang and BrckaLorenz 2018; Zhu and Bresnahan 2018). Harrison and Su (2016) examine the experiences of Chinese international students through the framework of Slaughter and Rhoades’ (2004) concept of “academic capitalism” (907). “Academic capitalism” describes the market-driven and market-like behavior of higher education institutions, both public and private, in which pursuit of revenue may overshadow educational goals (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). Harrison and Su, through interviews with Chinese international students studying at US and non-US institutions, find that many of these students are “struggling to follow the lectures, take notes, or participate in discussions” and, institutions with dense populations of Chinese international students, experience “social isolation” from non-Chinese students (2016:911–13). In the authors’ analysis, higher education institutions often recruit international students to bring in more tuition revenue, but may “lower their admissions standards” for these students,



resulting in a frustrating educational experience for international students (Harrison and Su 2016:915). Zhu and Bresnahan (2018) offer one of the few analyses that examine the challenges Chinese international students experience in US higher education from the perspective of their American undergraduate peers. The authors find that American students often held negative perceptions of Chinese international students who they saw as “reticent” in academic and social situations; American students viewed these quieter students as “typical” Chinese international students (Zhu and Bresnahan 2018:1628–29). American students, however, were more welcoming to Chinese international students who they saw as “non-typical” – that is, more fluent in English and more assimilated into US culture (Zhu and Bresnahan 2018:1629). Overall, these studies highlight the difficulties Chinese international students face in integrating into college life in the US; these difficulties center on fluency in English, both real and assumed.

Whereas scholarship in higher education addresses a range of challenges that Chinese international students experience inside and outside of the classroom, scholarship in writing studies focuses more narrowly on challenges related to the placement and performance of Chinese international students in first-year composition classes. While early scholarship in this area centers on a debate over the placement of international, non-native English speaking students into separate or mainstream composition courses (Braine 1994a, 1994b, 1996), more recent scholarship complicates this dichotomous view of placement (Bauer and Picciotto 2012; Costino and Hyon 2007; Ferris, Evans, and Kurzer 2017; Ferris, Jensen, and

Wald 2015; Freeman 2018; Matsuda, Saenkhum, and Accardi 2013; Ruecker 2011; Schneider 2018). The latter group of scholars address the challenges international students face in first-year composition courses, challenges instructors encounter in teaching these students, and alternative methods for placement into mainstream or multilingual composition courses.

In a study of Chinese international English Language Learner students' experiences, Milojevic (2019) finds a "mismatch" between students' and English as a Second Language instructors' beliefs about "effective teaching" in three areas: "structure," "scaffolding," and "group work" (63). Chinese international English Language Learner students expressed a desire for clear structure and instructions during class time, and often responded to the lack of structure with "disengagement" (Milojevic 2019:68). Bauer and Picciotto (2012) similarly find that "the dialogic and democratic pedagogy that we are accustomed to promoting does not always seem to work effectively with our international students;" instead, international students often need more "explicit" instruction in vocabulary, grammar, and language conventions (79).

A study of composition instructors' perceptions of international students across University of California campuses finds that instructors often perceive their international students as underprepared for college-level writing (Ferris et al. 2015:58). Ferris and her collaborators note, further, that instructors' "biggest challenges" with working with international students were balancing the needs of international and domestic students in their classes, helping international students

with reading skills, involving international students in class discussions, and giving feedback on language errors (2015:65). At the same time, the authors find that instructors often did not express a desire for professional development in these areas, or adapt their classroom practices to address these challenges – a finding that aligns with that of Matsuda and his collaborators’ (2013) study of writing teachers’ perceptions of English Language Learner students.

A third area of writing studies scholarship considers the placement of international English Language Learner students into mainstream or multilingual composition classes. Costino and Hyon (2007) examine students’ preferences for placement based on their identity and residency status – U.S.-born, U.S.-resident immigrant, or international – and find that neither identity nor residency status aligned clearly with a preference for a mainstream or multilingual composition course (63). Instead, students’ preferences aligned more clearly with their associations with the label of “English as a Second Language;” students who held negative associations with this label, or who were unfamiliar with it, expressed a preference for mainstream courses (Costino and Hyon 2007:77). Overall, they find, students prefer being in writing classes with students who were “like” them in terms of their English language abilities (Costino and Hyon 2007:75–76). Costino and Hyon advocate for placing students into composition courses using a method called “directed self-placement,” in which students choose their own composition course placement after being given more detailed information on their options and in consultation with academic advisors (see also Ferris et al. 2017).

*Strategies for teaching Chinese international students: higher education and writing studies scholarship*

Higher education scholars who write on how to support the needs of international students in US colleges and universities are generally in consensus about best practices for supporting these students inside and outside of the classroom. These scholars offer recommendations for higher education institutions, faculty members, and American students that center on promoting interaction between Chinese and American students (Araujo 2011; Chen 2018; Liu 2016; Montgomery 2016; Siczek 2015; Valdez 2015), actively countering stereotypes of Chinese international students (Chen 2018; Ross and Chen 2015; Valdez 2015), developing culturally appropriate and responsive pedagogy (Chen 2018; Leask and Carroll 2011; Nan 2012; Ross and Chen 2015; Siczek 2015; Valdez 2015), and investing in resources to meet the specific academic and social needs of Chinese international students (Araujo 2011; Chen 2018; Cross et al. 2015; Liu 2016; Montgomery 2016; Nan 2012). Arguing that the increased presence of international students in US higher education are often a “missed opportunity” for all students’ learning, Siczek (2015) offers recommendations for faculty to use inside the classroom to foster the inclusion of international students. These include fostering students’ “world-mindedness through pedagogical means,” “expanding course topics to be inclusive of more diverse experiences,” designing writing courses “around multidisciplinary topics of global significance,” and assigning international and domestic students to work together in small groups or teams (Siczek 2015:12–14).

Other higher education scholars offer recommendations for engaging international students in settings other than the classroom. Montgomery (2016), for example, argues that higher education institutions should embed interactions with international students “into the fabric of the domestic student experience” through residence hall assignments and orientation programs (250); Liu (2016) provides a similar recommendation for a “buddy or ambassador program where international students are paired with a reliable American peer” to both facilitate respectful cross-cultural interactions and help Chinese international students navigate US higher education institutions (13).

Writing studies scholarship on strategies for teaching international students in composition classes, like higher education scholarship, addresses the need for culturally appropriate and responsive pedagogy and for facilitating interaction between international and domestic students through professional development opportunities. Some writing studies scholars, however, draw attention to the limitations of professional development, as well as instructors’ resistance to these institutional efforts. Drawing from a survey of composition instructors who taught English Language Learner students in both mainstream and multilingual courses, Matsuda and his collaborators (2013) find that many instructors make deliberate efforts to support their international students – most commonly, with increased time and attention on these students, and more feedback on grammatical issues in their writing (77-8). The authors also note, however, that some instructors do not adjust their teaching to accommodate international students, nor do they feel it their

responsibility to do so; instead, these instructors place the onus on the institution to “appropriately place” students into mainstream and multilingual sections, as it is beyond the “scope” of mainstream first-year composition to teach, for example, grammar (Matsuda et al. 2013:80–82). Ferris and her collaborators (2015) articulate similar findings about writing instructors who teach international students. While some instructors express interest in receiving more professional development on supporting international students’ unique needs, others see this as beyond the scope of their employment as composition instructors – an “unfair and burdensome” situation that causes them to “resent either the institution and/or the students themselves for this new situation” (Ferris et al. 2017:68–69). They conclude their article by highlighting the limitations of “curricular adjustments” and “in-service training;” these will be inadequate solutions, they find, so long as “some (not all) multilingual undergraduates appear to be truly unprepared for work at the [University of California] level upon matriculation” (Ferris et al. 2015:71).

Scholars in both higher education and writing studies have written extensively on the challenges of serving Chinese international students at US higher education institutions, as well as strategies for meeting the needs of these students both academically and socially. While scholars are largely in agreement about the challenges that both international students and the instructors who teach them experience, there appear to be some key differences in how higher education and writing studies scholars understand strategies for supporting international students. Higher education scholars highlight a range of strategies that place the onus on

faculty, staff, and domestic students to help welcome and integrate Chinese international students on US college campuses. Writing studies scholars, in contrast, focus on composition instructors who teach both domestic and international students and offer analyses that give more complicated recommendations for serving international students. Like higher education scholars, writing studies scholars recognize the need for culturally appropriate pedagogy and facilitating cross-cultural communication between domestic and international students; at the same time, writing studies scholars highlight the limitations of classroom-level interventions to support international students, especially if those students arrive at a US university underprepared to engage in college-level work.

In the next section, I examine the challenges with and strategies for teaching Chinese international students that College 1 instructors in our interviews. These instructors identified the increased presence of Chinese international students in their College 1 classes as the primary impact of untracking the course.

***Findings: Teaching Chinese international students in College 1***

While the stated goal of untracking College 1 was to increase the racial and socioeconomic diversity of each College 1 classroom, instructors' perceptions of this change centered on a much narrower impact: the integration of Chinese international students into classes that are now "mainstream," as writing studies scholars put it. The instructors I interviewed had taught a variety of Core iterations in previous years, including Honors, ELWR-required, international student, and "mainstream" versions of Core; none, however, had taught a version of Core in which students from the

college were placed together without regard for ELWR or residency status. The majority of these instructors responded to my questions about their perceptions of untracking Core by describing the increased presence of Chinese international students in their classes: this is the first finding, which I elaborate in the next section. The second finding looks more closely at how instructors describe the challenges of teaching Chinese international students in “mainstream” College 1 classes. The third finding addresses how instructors attempted to meet the needs of Chinese international students in their classes. I find that a minority of instructors I interviewed described teaching strategies that they felt helped engage and integrate international students in their classes.

*Mainstreaming Chinese international students as the main impact of untracking*

A significant majority of the College 1 instructors I interviewed responded to my questions about untracking with a discussion of the Chinese international students in their classes. I asked all instructors about their perceptions of untracking, in one or both interviews, for a total of fifteen interviews that included a question about untracking. In responding to this question, instructors mentioned Chinese international students eleven times. Figure 9, on the next page, describes instructors’ responses to questions about untracking.

For eight of the ten instructors I interviewed, the presence of Chinese international students in their College 1 classes was a central theme in their responses to my questions about untracking.



<i>Types of Responses</i>	<i>Instances of Response</i>
Mentioned international students in response to question about untracking	11
Did not mention international students in response to question about untracking	4
Was not asked about untracking	5

*Figure 9: Summary of instructors' responses to questions about untracking*

My first interview with Margaret provides an illustrative example of how many instructors responded to a question about untracking:

MEGAN: How is it working out with the untracking of the class, everyone mixed together...?

MARGARET: Well, you were sitting back behind two of the completely straight-from-China people... And then there's two others, and then other people who are straight from China moved into earlier sections, so I have about eleven people straight from China... and they are having a hard time.

For Margaret and other instructors, a question about untracking was itself a question about international students. Margaret noticed early in the quarter that Chinese international students were struggling in her classes – this, in her view, was the primary impact of untracking. Michelle, in our first interview, stated this position even more strongly than Margaret:

MEGAN: What are your thoughts on [untracking] and how it's going for you?

MICHELLE: Well, it's going alright for me personally, but I don't think that it's going okay for the students. I'm having... particularly in one of my classes, I'm having a very hard time with the international Chinese students...[UCSC] need to change this because it's bad for everybody. This has been a disaster for the international students because they have no idea what the hell is going on.

In describing the impacts of untracking, Michelle centers her response on the impact of untracking on Chinese international students in her classes. Like Margaret,

Michelle noticed that the Chinese international students were struggling in her class; further, she saw the impact of integrating these students into mainstream College 1 as “bad for everyone.”

Michelle elaborated on this perspective by presenting an argument for partial rather than full untracking in College 1. She felt that the tracked versions of Core that her college offered before the shift to College 1, Core 80A (“mainstream” Core) and Core 80B (Honors Core), could have been integrated with minimal impact.

**MICHELLE:** It’s really the international students that stick out like a sore thumb in terms of being a problem. I think we could mix up all the 80A and the 80B students and deal with no tracking there. I have not really thought about this on a program level of what it means to do that, all I know is that at every faculty meeting the constant discussion has been how do we deal with this disparity. It’s a real problem. I can’t believe nobody thought about this before they did it...

For Michelle, the untracking of international students represented a fundamental flaw in the design of College 1 and the source of “constant discussion” among College 1 instructors at her college. Untracking students who would have been placed into Core 80A and Core 80B, in her view, would have been much less impactful than untracking international students, as well.

Joanna, unlike other instructors I interviews, responded to my question about untracking by discussing its impact on both international and domestic students. She noted, first, Chinese international students’ struggles with keeping up with course readings, but also the challenges experienced by some domestic students who had less fluency in “academic” English.

**JOANNA:** I think [untracking is] also challenging for some students from Californian high schools who maybe don’t have the academic level of

English required to do really well, either. I don't know, but definitely they're their own unique group and... it feels like such a disturbance sometimes for the students who come and they get such high pressure from families back home to do well... it's an expensive endeavor and if they fail, it's a lot of shame, I think, sometimes.

For Joanna, untracking may also negatively impact domestic students who have less practice with academic English, but face “high pressure” from their families to excel in college.

Only two instructors – Karl and Thomas – responded to my question or questions about untracking *without* mentioning international students. Karl noticed a shift in student demographics and levels of academic preparedness in his classroom as a result of untracking, and he saw this an asset for his class.

MEGAN: Have you noticed any changes with the untracking now that you have different levels of students or more diverse levels of students in your class? Has that changed the dynamic at all from previous Core sections?

KARL: I think it's great to have the diverse levels of students in the classroom. I think it is really good because they seem to be all helping each other out and then also getting that diversity of perspective in the conversation too.

While Karl noticed more “diversity” in his College 1 compared to his earlier Core classes, Thomas felt that untracking had only a minor impact on the demographic composition of his classes. In our first interview early in Fall quarter, Thomas said that the impacts of untracking were “hard to assess” at the time, but that the classroom “dynamic” did not appear to differ significantly from previous years of teaching Core. I followed up on this topic in our second interview at the end of the quarter.

MEGAN: Last time [we spoke], you said...the composition of your class didn't seem to be too different this quarter. Has your perception on that changed?

THOMAS: I don't know... I'm maybe more ambivalent about it now than I was 'cause I think that students who perceive themselves as not being as good a writer or confident necessarily in their interpretive skills do tend to hang to the back. That's always been something. I think with the untracking, maybe I saw it in a bit more pronounced form. There were some students who despite the encouragement I gave them either in person or in office hours or via email communications, they just literally never spoke in class. So is that part of [untracking]? I don't know. I think it might be. But it's also typical of these classes, so it's hard for me to really say one way or the other.

In response to my question about untracking, Thomas notes that some students in his class “never spoke in class” but was unsure if this was a result of untracking; further, he did not specify what types of students “never spoke.” Later in this interview, I asked Thomas directly about the presence of international students in his class. In his view, international students did not “struggle” more with reading literature than did native English-speaking students. While some of these international students were not “big participators,” Thomas was confident that untracking did not impact the number or preparedness of international students in his classes.

MEGAN: Did you have international students in your classes?

THOMAS: Yes.

MEGAN: Was that a new thing or was that something that you've-

THOMAS: No, that's something that I've had before. But none of them to my knowledge struggled any more with...for example, Shakespeare, than some of the native speaking students who had simply not been exposed to his work as much; I didn't notice that as any difference. In the final creative project, these two young women... they are not native English speakers... did a dance piece and did a description of why they did this dance piece that was phenomenal. I didn't notice that as a problem. They also were not, however, big participators. I think one of them talked a couple times, two or three times, the other one didn't at all.

MEGAN: But that didn't stand out to you as a change with untracking?

THOMAS: No.

Whereas many College 1 instructors noticed a significant change in the presence of international students, especially from China, in their classes, Thomas stands out as the only instructor I interviewed who did not notice a demographic shift in his classes as a result of untracking. He noted that he had previously taught international students in Core, but he did not comment on the national origins of his current or previous international students; in our interviews, he made no mention of Chinese international students specifically.

Interviews with College 1 instructors suggest that these instructors overwhelmingly saw the increased presence of international students in their classes as the most significant impact of untracking. The two instructors who expressed outlying views, Karl and Thomas, felt, respectively, that untracking beneficially introduced a greater “diversity of perspective” into the class or that untracking had no clear impact on the demographic composition or academic preparedness of the students in the class. For the other eight instructors, untracking had a clear impact on the presence of international students in their classes – which, as I describe in the section below, presented a range of teaching challenges for College 1 instructors.

*Challenges of teaching international students in mainstream classes*

College 1 instructors spoke at length – often with frustration, exasperation, and dismay – about the challenges they faced teaching Chinese international students in their untracked, “mainstream” classes. In interviews with ten College 1 instructors, these instructors articulated five main concerns with teaching Chinese international

students in College 1: 1) English fluency; 2) balancing the needs of international and domestic students; 3) Chinese international students' isolation or segregation within the classroom; 4) ethical dilemmas around assessing and grading Chinese international students; and 5) differences in Chinese international students' cultural and historical background knowledge. In this section, I elaborate on instructors' understandings of these five distinct concerns.

### **1. Concerns about Chinese international students' English fluency**

First, College 1 instructors expressed a range of challenges with teaching international students in an untracked classroom that centered on English fluency: in reading, understanding, and speaking English. Nine of the ten instructors I interviewed expressed that they felt Chinese international students struggled in one or more of these dimensions of English fluency in their classes. I asked one instructor, Joanna, if she felt that shifting Core from a focus on writing to a focus on reading was beneficial for students who had less fluency in English. She found that some students with less fluency in English still struggled with the reading because they tried to look up the meaning of every word they did not know.

**JOANNA:** I think some of them, their mindset was on reading everything and looking up everything. Early on, I tried to explain [that] when you don't understand a word, try to read the text and get the meaning of it... When they arrive, if they're just enrolled in... College 1, they're not at that place yet. They're still working with their dictionary as if it's... a foreign language class, and it slows them down. Trying to read all of those English texts and not having the fluency, I think, was really challenging.

Joanna advocated for Chinese international students taking College 1 in a later quarter, rather than during their first quarter at UCSC, so that they would be “more

fluent” in English – particularly “speaking and producing their own language” - when they took this class.

Other instructors similar expressed that the quantity of the readings assigned each class and the pace of the class were particularly challenging for students with limited English fluency. Margaret, for instance, said that Chinese international students “were just having a terrible time” reading a novel assigned in her class and had opted to read a Chinese translation of the text, instead. Michael encountered similar challenges in his class, in which students were required to read several challenging novels. He voiced that some of his Chinese international students had spoken with him about their struggles with the class reading and would have preferred to be in a section of College 1 limited to international students.

**MICHAEL:** I do have these Chinese students who wished that they had been given their own section in which things would have gone a little bit... slower. Their reading material would have been a little bit lighter. I mean, the book we are using... is a complex book. I know from talking to a couple of the Chinese students... They're totally, totally clueless as to what's going on.

Here, Michael echoes Michelle's perspective that untracking College 1 has been detrimental to Chinese international students, who “have no idea what the hell is going on.” Michelle explained that she had international students from countries besides China in her classes, but that these students had stronger skills in English than her students from China, and so were not experiencing the same challenges in her class.

Michelle gave an example from her class illustrating why she found the integration of international students into mainstream College 1 students to be unfair to those students.

MICHELLE: I assigned a... three-part prompt... One of my non-domestic Chinese students sent it to me seven hours after it was due... He sent it to me seven hours later and said, "I've been working on it all of this time." It took him seven hours to write the answers to the three questions. He did a very good job, but that's how long it took him to understand the questions. He'd already done the reading, but to understand the questions and make it work- that's a lot. That's a lot of time, when everybody else had only taken an hour [to write the assignment]. It's not fair.

For Michael and Michelle, the design of College 1 as an untracked course did not simply make the class more challenging for students with limited abilities to read in English – most notably, Chinese international students. It also asked international students to keep up with a high volume and reading and assignments that was as Michelle put it, "not fair," for these students.

College 1 instructors voiced that, in addition to their struggles with reading in English, international students had difficulty understanding verbal communications in the course, including lecture, class discussions, and office hours. Michelle, for instance, not only found the reading and writing assignments to be unfair to international students, but also noted that international students often did "not have a clue" what she was saying in lecture – a dilemma I describe in more depth in a later section. Karl, an instructor who held an overall positive assessment of College 1, also worried about international students' abilities to understand what was being said in class. Though Karl articulated few challenges with his classes in our interviews, in



our second interview, he briefly discussed three challenges he faced in teaching College 1: the lack of time to address all of the content in the curriculum, serving the needs of differently-prepared students in the same classroom, and helping international students in his classes. He expressed concern that international students were not following the class discussion, but was uncertain that he had the “tools” to help these students.

**KARL:** The international students in the classroom is one of the challenges, as well. I don't know how much they're understanding, especially in discussion. But I really really like their presence in the classroom because they do add that international perspective to the class... They have a totally different viewpoint and I think it's good for students to understand that and see it from a more global perspective how to see these texts. But it was a challenge because I want to help the students as best as I can and sometimes I don't have the tools to do that.

Lucy similarly expressed appreciation for international students' contributions in her class, but was concerned that untracking College 1, in practice, made the course into an “immersion English” class for international students; in her view, this was a “disservice” to them, as they no longer were no longer “cater[ed] to” by having their own section. She described an example of these students' struggles with English fluency when she would ask to meet with them in office hours.

**LUCY:** Having a mix of students was actually quite hard on the five international students that I had. They would kind of group together to explain things to each other, and when I would ask to see them individually, they would all come in a group. So I would say I want to meet with one of you at a time, and then they would say, “Can we all come in, because we want to explain it to each other?” I thought that that was ... I don't know, just a major disservice to them because the way that the Core had been taught before, it was grouping international students together and kind of catering to them. I think this year, it was more of a challenge, more of having them be in an... immersion English class.

Even in one-on-one conversations with her Chinese international students, Lucy found that students had difficulty understanding her without the help of their peers. In her view, this suggested that Chinese international students experienced unique negative impacts as a result of untracking.

The third challenge related to international students' fluency in English that College 1 instructors articulated centered on these students' speaking abilities. Samuel, an instructor who generally spoke confidently about his course and his teaching approach, expressed insecurity and "embarrass[ment]" about his inability to understand the English spoken by his Chinese international students. He pointed to the larger, structural issues underlying the rise of Chinese international students at UCSC in making sense of his challenges.

**SAMUEL:** Well, okay, so the biggest challenge is when [Chinese international students] come up to me after class and ask me a question and I can't understand what they're saying. That's really a huge challenge. It's embarrassing for everybody. I don't know what to do about that... I know what the university should do is they should require Skype oral interviews before they let people in, but they won't do that, because they're making a lot of money from these Chinese students. I think the Writing Program has been giving feedback on this issue for a long time now, as [the university] keep[s] increasing the numbers... certainly over the last few years, it seems like we've seen an increase in international students. I've had to deal with a bunch [of students] who I couldn't understand. This is a common refrain among writing instructors...

Samuel felt that Chinese international students arrive to the UC without the English skills necessary to succeed in "mainstream" courses, and that the University had little interest in ensuring that the international students it admits are adequately prepared to read, write, and speak in English. Samuel and other College 1 instructors I spoke with

expressed concern about the integration of international students with limited English fluency into their “mainstream” College 1 classes, though they did not present these students as themselves a “problem.” Instead, the problem was institutional, in various ways. For Michael, Michelle, and Lucy, the problem was untracking, which was fundamentally “unfair” or a “disservice” to international students. For Karl, the problem was his lack of training (“tools,” as he put it) to prepare him to serve international students, while for Joanna, the problem was the timing of the course; in her view, students should take College 1 in a later quarter. Lastly, for Samuel, the problem was institutional on a deeper level: the funding model of the University of California, which relied on tuition from international students as a revenue source.

## **2. Concerns about balancing needs of international and domestic students**

College 1 instructors I spoke with expressed a deep commitment to serving the needs of all students in their classrooms. At the same time, several instructors voiced concerns about their ability to – or even the possibility of – meeting the needs of students, both domestic and international, who were so differently prepared for the work required in College 1. Instructors’ concerns about balancing different students’ needs in the classroom often centered on the *pace* of the class; while more advanced students wanted to move quickly through materials and easily understood the course readings, lectures, and discussions, struggling students – particularly Chinese international students – could only engage with the course when the instructor made a deliberate effort to slow down.

Michael described having, in one of his College 1 classes, “three or four” Chinese international students, and also having several domestic students “who could be teaching this class” because “they are so far advanced” and “so well-read.” This latter group of students, he explained, expressed “frustration” with the slow pace of his class.

**MICHAEL:** [Several advanced students have] had a bad attitude since we started. As I keep on telling them, it’s not about them because it’s true - I mean, I have to balance. I have to bring everybody in at the end of the journey and everybody better be floating. I cannot let anybody drown. So that is very difficult when you have such a disproportionate imbalance, in ability and in preparation.

Michael described his efforts to help Chinese international students, who he noticed were struggling in his class, through group tutoring outside of class. He felt that even with this extra instruction, these students struggled in his class.

**MICHAEL:** I gave [Chinese international students] an extra session on Thursday nights. After I had done with faculty meetings, and journal reviews, I would meet with them for an hour, an hour and a half, and I would try to explain to them. They really didn’t understand anything that I had said in class, because their language skills are just not there. Then I [also] had these very bright students who felt that I was going too slow. So where do I find the balance, right?

Michelle voiced a similar challenge with finding an appropriate “balance” in the pace of her class. She slowed down her lectures to allow time to define vocabulary terms that international students appeared not to understand, but found that doing so was sometimes frustratingly slow for her more advanced students.

**MICHELLE:** Back to the tracking issues, my advanced students, those who had passed the AP exam, and are in these classes with the international students are also really frustrated... that I have to stop and define what I’m talking about when I say like, “All right, in the vernacular of [this author]...” The international students will not raise their hand to say,

“Please define vernacular.” But I can see in their faces that they don’t have a clue to what I just said, so I have to go back and define my own vocabulary for them. Even then, unless I write it on the board with the definition, which takes a couple of minutes... every time it happens, and [it] breaks the flow of both the lecture and the conversation.

Like Michael and Michelle, Janet and Margaret commented on the difficulty of balancing the needs of both advanced students and students struggling to read, speak, and understand English. While Margaret attempted to balance these students’ needs by creating “more challenge” for advanced students, Janet felt underprepared to serve her international students and “how to address that level of English as a second language” in her classroom.

Thomas, the only instructor I spoke with who did not articulate any challenges with working with international students in College 1, spoke indirectly to a concern about balancing advanced and struggling students’ needs in his classroom. While he was uncertain if untracking impacted the number of international students in his classes, he did notice a “bit more pronounced” diversity of preparation among his students compared to previous quarters of Core. Balancing the differing needs of these students was challenging, he found, because being the presence of more advanced students could have positive or negative impacts on struggling students:

THOMAS: So on the one hand you could say untracking puts more types of students together and the students who are not as strong might... be able to learn from the stronger ones. The obverse of that is that they’ll just be embarrassed and less certain of themselves.

Thomas ended the first quarter of College 1 feeling uncertain about how to balance the needs of differently prepared students, both international and domestic, and about the impacts of untracking on less prepared students in the class.

Instructors who voiced a concern about balancing different students' needs in their College 1 classrooms found that a disparity in student abilities or preparation caused the most challenges for the *pacing* of the class. These instructors generally saw their most struggling students, which included their Chinese international students, as capable of engaging with the same materials and completing the same work as their more advanced peers; the difference was that struggling students, in their view, would be best served by a course that slowed down the pace of instruction, allowing students more time to read, discuss, and write. In a faster-paced class designed with the assumption of students fluent in English, however, many Chinese international students struggled to keep up with both in- and out-of-class assignments and activities.

### **3. Concerns about the isolation and segregation of Chinese international students within the classroom**

Chinese international students, as observed by their College 1 instructors, often struggled with reading, understanding, and speaking English, and felt overwhelmed by the pace of their College 1 classes. Lucy, for instance, noted that her Chinese international students struggled to understand what she said in class; as a result, they requested to attend her office hours as a group, rather than individually, so that they could help interpret for each other. This example speaks to a larger trend College 1 instructors observed and expressed concern about in their classrooms: isolation of Chinese international students from other students within the classroom.

From the perspectives of the College 1 instructors I interviewed, Chinese international students often chose to sit and work together during class, particularly during activities in which students worked in small groups to complete a task, prepare a presentation, or work on a research project. Instructors who spoke to this issue all hoped for a more “integrated” class, as Jake put it, but articulated different views on the harm or value of international students’ self-grouping. While some instructors worried that Chinese international students gained less from the class if they worked only with each other, other instructors found that allowing international students to work in groups together helped them feel more comfortable in the class.

Janet expressed that she attempted to do break up groups of international students in her classes but eventually “gave up,” as the students would re-group themselves with other international students in the next class. Margaret similarly allowed five Chinese international students to work together on a group project in one of her College 1 classes, but reflected at the end of the quarter, “I don’t think that was a good idea.” She found that, in her classes, Chinese international students were better served by working in small groups that included both international and domestic students.

Both Michael and Michelle stated that they required Chinese international students to work with domestic students in their classes. As Michael put it, “I broke them up forcefully, because all they did is just talk to each other.” Michelle, too, grouped international and domestic students intentionally for their first group projects early in the quarter. She found, however, that “breaking up” international students did

not go as well as she had hoped. Michelle explained how domestic “white students” were impatient with their international student collaborators in giving a class presentation; this persuaded Michelle to allow students to choose their own groups for the next presentation.

**MICHELLE:** I made [Chinese international students] break up for presentations and separated them, and it was interesting because I found that the white students working with the international students were frustrated by them... they were a little condescending. They didn't give them space in the presentations. Partially because [international students] had language issues in speaking - and I disliked [how the white students acted]. And so, the last presentation that they did, I let [students] organize themselves and... all the international students worked only with other international students.

Michelle allowed international students in her class to work together reluctantly and only after her first effort at breaking them up had not gone as planned. Other instructors, in contrast, encouraged students to choose their own groups – even if this resulted in international students grouping themselves together.

Samuel, of all the instructors I spoke with, was the most vocal supporter of allowing students to group themselves as they chose. In his view, College 1 was a significant improvement from the earlier, tracked Core in that students were in the same classroom as students who were different from them; this mattered much more than how students selected peer groups within the classroom. Further, he found that when students grouped themselves in his classroom, international students would often sit down with students who looked like them, but who were actually domestic students. This allowed for more integration of international and domestic students than might be expected among self-selected groups.



SAMUEL: ...in previous years, [Core] was always siloed. It's like you wouldn't talk to those students [who were different from you] because they were in different classes and you never had a chance to interact with them. They sit together at the dining hall and in my groups, where in my class – we're mixed... the Chinese students of course tend to go together, and I don't discourage that... The reality is when they sit down in their groups at the beginning of the quarter, which is how they choose their groups, they don't know whether or not somebody's a native [English] speaker. So that you'd have three people who spoke Mandarin and one person who looks Chinese but was actually from San Francisco. Or there was one empty seat in another group and a guy who looked Indian but actually was a total native speaker sat down. So just it was built into [my class] that they got to really... mix with people from different language backgrounds and different cultures. That happened much less in the previous incarnation of the Core system.

In Samuel's College 1 classes, as he described, students placed themselves in small groups on the first day of class. Samuel arranged his classroom desks into groups of four before the first class meeting, which forced each student to join a group as they entered class. Samuel was the only instructor I observed who set up his classroom this way, which may account for why he did not observe Chinese international students grouping themselves as exclusively as in other College 1 classes, where students formed groups later in the quarter.

Jake, in describing one of his College 1 classes, spoke to both sides of this debate in articulating his dilemma over allowing Chinese international students to sit together in his class.

JAKE: I think that at least ten of [this class' international] students are from China, and this is their first experience in the US.... I want the class to really be more integrated. But, at the same time I want them to feel comfortable and I think there's still some cultural conversion going on, some language acquisition going on that they... need to rely on each other to translate, too. I don't want to shut that down, either, because I think that is important... I know we're learning English, but

sometimes, you have to be able to speak your mother tongue to kind of engage the intellectual candor that we are expecting from you.

While Jake expressed a desire for his class to be “more integrated,” he understood why Chinese international students often grouped themselves together and allowed them to do so. Jake felt that Chinese international students might be better able to engage with the course materials by helping each other “translate” – a practice among students that Lucy also observed with the international students who attended her office hours as a group and in small groups in her classroom.

College 1 instructors I interviewed all expressed a desire to help their international students “integrate” and engage with the class. They offered differing perspectives, however, on how to do so. While some instructors found it necessary to “break up” Chinese international students in small group work, others allowed these “silos” to form so that international students could help support each other and feel more comfortable. However, even Samuel – the instructor who was most supportive of allowing international students to group together – advocated for the mixing of international and domestic students within small groups. Rather than “force” students to do this, Samuel achieved this mixing through the way he set up his classroom, which required students to sit together in small groups on the first day of class – before they knew each other and, crucially, before they knew who in the class was an international student and who was a domestic student. For other instructors like Michelle and Jake, however, allowing Chinese international students to form “silos” in small group work seemed like the only way to help these students feel comfortable in the classroom.

#### **4. Concerns about the ethics of assessing and grading Chinese international students**

A fourth challenge voiced by College 1 instructors centered on ethical dilemmas around assessing and grading (especially, assigning failing grades to) international students. On a smaller scale of individual assignments, instructors articulated that it seemed unfair to assess Chinese international students by the same standards they used to assess domestic students. On the larger scale of assigning grades in the course, instructors worried about the consequences of failing College 1 on international students' academic progress and visa status.

In our first discussion of untracking during our first interview, Michael expressed that he felt untracking was a “huge mistake,” particularly for international students, and that it was not “fair” that international students would “be graded by the same standard” as the most advanced domestic students. Elizabeth Abrams was similarly concerned by the preliminary results of the assessment of College 1 across all colleges carried out in week eight of the quarter, which suggested “a significantly lower pass rate on the assessment for international students” as compared to domestic students. She found that College 1 instructors at her college struggled to “engage with students at various different levels of learning,” which might be addressed – as it was at another UCSC college – by using “stratified assignments so that students can meet the assignment at whatever level they are at” in College 1 classes.

Michelle, too, argued for offering different modes and standards of assessment for international students – not just at the level of individual assignments, but for the

course as a whole. For her, the success of Chinese international students in her College 1 classes was important for racial equity, as these students comprised the majority of students of color in her classes.

**MICHELLE:** Because of the language skills it seems like it's almost impossible [for Chinese international students] to succeed in the class at the same level as everybody else so there has to be a kind of an adjustment to assessing them and evaluating them. Because I don't want it to be that all the people of color don't pass the class. That's not right.

Michelle felt an ethical obligation to make an "adjustment" to how she evaluated international students in her classes to ensure that they did not all fail. For Joanna, the ethical dilemma around assigning an international student a failing grade centered on concerns around their student visa.

Joanna gave the example of an international student she encouraged to withdraw from her College 1 early in the quarter because the student had missed several classes and had not completed the assignments. She reached out to this student's advisers, who told her the student should not withdraw from the class due to visa requirements.

**JOANNA:** [The advisers] all were like, "No, no, no. If she withdraws, she needs this number of units in order to stay on her visa." Then... she didn't come to class on Tuesday and she never came back, so I had emailed her and the advising and said she is going to fail now because she didn't withdraw. I feel bad about it-

**MEGAN:** Maybe an F doesn't matter for the visa?

**JOANNA:** That's kind of what I had asked them. I said, "Is it better for her if she fails or better if she withdraws?" They weren't able to give me answer, so is that the case? That an F is better? I don't know... That's the kind of thing where the international students pose this very particular problem... I know the international students would benefit from being [enrolled] part-time but can't because of their visa.

- MEGAN: Right, and you're in this awkward position of the stakes of failing them, or encouraging them to withdraw, are much higher for these students than for others.
- JOANNA: Right. Frankly, I think that particular student... didn't really deserve to pass the class. Some of them do, and have put in effort, but still their English skills are not at a place where you feel like you can pass them – and that doesn't feel right, either, because it's not necessarily a class about your English skills.

Joanna feels an obligation to pass international students who “have put in effort” not only because College 1 is “not necessarily a class about your English skills,” but also because the consequences of failing international students or asking them to withdraw are higher for these students than for many domestic students.

Like Michelle and Joanna, Samuel expressed an ethical dilemma around failing Chinese international students. For him, the dilemma concerned weighing the financial consequences of requiring students to re-take College 1 when they pay so much in non-resident tuition as compared to the consequences of passing them when they might not be prepared to succeed in Writing 1, the next course in ALC sequence.

- SAMUEL: The question is... with these international students, would it serve them better to take College 1 again and to fail them, with paying \$60,000 a year in tuition?... Where really in another ten weeks, and they're gonna go on and become computer majors anyway. Is that productive for them and the university? Or am I gonna pass them and they're gonna go on to Writing 1 and then they just won't be able to do it?

Samuel expressed concern about giving Chinese international students passing grades in College 1 not because they did not meet the same standards as domestic students, but because they might be poorly prepared to succeed in Writing 1. This concern presented a dilemma not addressed by suggestions from Michael, Michelle, and Abrams that Chinese international students be assessed by different standards that

align with, as Abrams put it, “whatever level they are at” in College 1. For Samuel, passing students who had not met the requirements of College 1 had the potential consequence of setting them up for failure in their next writing course.

#### **5. Concerns about differences in Chinese international students’ cultural and historical background knowledge**

The final challenge that College 1 instructors articulated about their experiences teaching international students centered on differences between international and domestic students’ knowledge of US history and context, as well as differences in culture and values. Even instructors who were highly supportive of integrating international and domestic students in College 1 voiced concerns related to these issues. Instructors noted that Chinese international students often struggled to understand the historical and scholarly references made in class readings, as well as topics related to social justice that were the focus of many colleges’ “themes:” racism, sexism, and LGBTQ+ issues.

Samuel, a supporter of untracking, expressed that many students in his College 1 classes – and particularly Chinese international students – had limited knowledge of US history; for this reason, his lesson on affirmative action needed to engage with this topic at a more basic level. He explained, “I wasn’t trying to get them to have a comprehensive understanding of affirmative action, because that would take weeks or a month – and especially for the Chinese students, it would take a lot longer than that to really get them to understand what it’s all about.” Margaret, on the other hand, was initially hopeful that Chinese international students would

have historical knowledge relevant to understanding a class text. She assigned a book related to Marxism, which she hoped would resonate with Chinese international students, as they might have historical background knowledge about Mao that would introduce them to Marx and Hegel. She found, however, that this was not the case, and that Chinese international students struggled to understand the class text.

MARGARET: I thought the Chinese students would really know [Hegel], because Mao, that was his thing, really, was continuing revolution... I always read about Mao and what he was trying to do, and I thought, "Okay. He's trying to continue on so that the people in power know that there's gonna be an antithesis..." So I thought that the cultural revolution could be seen that way, but-

MEGAN: They didn't seem to-

MARGARET: They didn't get it.

Michael similarly found that Chinese international students struggled to understand course readings because they were unfamiliar with the historical and scholarly references in these readings.

MICHAEL: [Chinese international students] have no cultural context or reference to a lot of the to a lot of the material that they're encountering. I mean I doubt very much if they heard of Malcolm X or would know him to a certain degree, to a degree in which what he's saying becomes... fully understandable to them, or Plato for that matter. I mean, I don't know if they studied much Occidental Western philosophy or history or American culture... So I have to slow it down to make sure that they are coming along.

Later in this interview, I asked Michael how many of the domestic students in his College 1 classes appeared to be familiar with the references to Western philosophy in the course readings, to which he responded that at least a few of them were; further, these students were frustrated by the slow pace of his class. Michael's concern about international students' lack of historical background knowledge, then,

coincided with his concern about balancing the needs of differently prepared students. Using class time to explain historical and scholarly references to Chinese international students, in his view, was detrimental to the advanced students who were already familiar with these references. Margaret, in contrast, did not expect her domestic students to have studied Western philosophy like Marx and Hegel, but was hopeful that her Chinese international students would have knowledge about Marxism by way of Mao, which they could then share with the rest of the class; however, this did not turn out to be the case.

Margaret and Michael articulated challenges related to international students' lack of knowledge about particular historical and scholarly references – a gap in preparedness that was likely not unique to international students. Other College 1 instructors noted a sharp contrast in domestic and international students' knowledge and values relating to topics in which most domestic students seemed well-versed: social justice topics such as racism, sexism, and LGBTQ+ rights. Elizabeth Abrams, a strong supporter of untracking, noted that Chinese international students often held different “cultural knowledge” than that held by domestic students, which would lead to challenges in – for example – a College 1 class about racism.

**ABRAMS:** So you've got a key set of readings and a Core course that is about racism and endemic racism and then you've got a bunch of students from China who are saying, “There's no racism in China,” and it's, of course, not true. It's just that it's not part of a frame of reference that they have been educated in. Racism is something that happens here [in these students' view], not in a country where there's a phenotype that is so widespread.

For Abrams, the challenge was not only that Chinese international students lacked



knowledge about the US context of racism, but also that they struggled to identify racism in the society in which they were raised. Jake noted that he had many more Chinese international students in one of his College 1 classes than the other, and that students' historical and cultural knowledge of the US varied greatly between these two classes. Chinese international students, he found, were "just in the dark... on racism in the United States, or even gender and sex dynamics in the United States." To address these differences in his classes, Jake noted that he prepared different lectures for his two classes: one that gave background on "cultural" topics, and one that did not.

Joanna elaborated on similar challenges in her College 1 classes, in which Chinese international students expressed that homosexuality, transgendered people, inequality in education, homelessness, and inequality did not exist in China. Instead, they viewed these issues as uniquely "American," and challenged Joanna when she suggested that these issues may also exist in China.

JOANNA: It's very easy for [Chinese international students], especially with this topic [of schooling], to say, "Well, this is an American thing. Injustice doesn't happen in China. Everybody's equal. Everyone has an equal opportunity to go to college." Anyway, so that is a very challenging population, I would say, in all ways... I mean, it's such a serious thing that I think they almost need a course on deconstructing China before they're able to really engage in some of the courses that are offered. But anyway, I don't know that there's time, and most of them are science majors, so they're not interested in international relations.

For Joanna, international students' reluctance to critically examine Chinese society limited their ability to engage in the social justice topics of her College 1 classes.

When discussing a social justice topic, she found, Chinese international students would interpret the problem as “an American thing” that was not applicable to China.

Michelle, of the instructors I spoke with, gave the most extreme example of cultural differences between international and domestic students in one of her classes on the issue of gender identity.

MICHELLE: In [one of my College 1 classes], we’re teaching [an] article... about feminism and about women being oppressed and silenced in society. And I also had several transgender students in that class who hated that article because it was written from a cisgendered woman’s point of view and ignored the neo-feminist problems of transgender people. Well, the international students were like, “what?” Let’s start with “cisgendered.” They did not know what that was about... [Later] we had a project after that article that was... about imagin[ing] what it would be like to be outside the dominant paradigm and to make a choice regarding your gender identity that’s not heteronormative.

MICHELLE: Well, when we discussed it as group the international students were like, “if I didn’t feel like I was the gender that I was born with, I would definitely not tell anybody and I would do everything I could to be my biological gender.” And on the other side of the room we have the trans people feeling extremely angry about that and about that cultural norm.

MEGAN: But do you think it was good to have [these students] in the same room, or no?

MICHELLE: Well, I feel like in terms of engaging across differences we had a real teaching opportunity there. To bridge those gaps or to at least... to show them and to sort of metacognitively think about them. And so I do think it was good to have people from all perspectives in the room, but what I think was not good was that it was really frustrating on both sides. I feel like the class would have been better if the international students... [had] taken it in their last quarter of their freshman year, when they were a little bit more used to UCSC – and possibly the same thing could be true for the people who are already there with the vocabulary. They might have more tolerance because truly they were more frustrated than the international students. They were the ones who... after the class would be like, “why do I have to take this class? This is pointless, I don’t want to explain what cisgendered means to people who don’t already know.”

MEGAN: Even with that animosity between the Chinese international students [and domestic students]... Do you think they ever started to understand each other or no?

MICHELLE: Unfortunately, I believe that they further developed in their camps. There was not integration in that class... the issues that were at stake were higher-level issues, I want to say. More personal issues... if we disagree fundamentally on gender identity, we're going to have a harder time understanding one another. And tolerating one another.

For Michelle, not only did Chinese international students have different cultural background knowledge and beliefs about social justice topics like gender identity, but found that these differences ultimately polarized domestic and international students. For a specific group of domestic students who were also transgender, the beliefs held by Chinese international students were not just different, but offensive; rather than fostering cross-cultural understanding, classroom conversations around these contentious topics resulted in students “further develop[ing] in their camps.”

College 1 instructors proposed a variety of solutions for addressing the challenges of international and domestic students' differences in historical knowledge about US context and in culture and values. For Joanna, an ideal (but unlikely) solution would be a class for Chinese international students on “deconstructing China” that would ask students to critically examine Chinese society and thus, in her view, prepare international students to engage in discussions of social justice topics in College 1. Michelle advocated for all students – not just international students – taking College 1 their last quarter of their first year, so that they could be “a bit more used to UCSC” and better prepared to engage in discussions in which they disagree with other students. Elizabeth Abrams suggested changing the content of some College 1 classes to provide more background information on topics with which

international students may not be familiar, and to make the workload more manageable for international students. Abrams felt confident that a preliminary assessment of College 1 would show that “we probably need to change the course in at least some of the colleges – so, perhaps not as many readings, [and] perhaps more attention to establishing a cultural framework so that students can engage with that differently.”

Jake, unlike other instructors, did not recommend changes to the content or timing of College 1, but rather voiced a desire to better understand the backgrounds and needs of his Chinese international students; his ability to do this, however, was hindered by the size of his teaching load and limits to how much time he could spend preparing for each class.

JAKE: I needed to educate myself more on maybe what younger people or younger students’ learning strategies, their experiences coming from their respective countries... Some of those students actually did do a year or two in the United States so maybe a SurveyMonkey or something about their educational experience... instead of just... my assumptions as an educator, and I think that’s what this class really showed... [Instructors] have deficit thinking and [it] immediately negates the opportunity to think creatively and see a bigger picture for these students. I just went in [to my College 1 class], I was like, “Oh, I know what I’m going to do because I’ve taught this class before,” [but] it was a different ball game.

JAKE: I think it starts with me going to [the students] and me understanding more because I did that at my previous institutions – like I really got a feel for, okay, what’s the refugee process, what are these individuals bringing here to this educational system so I can better help them and support them in their writing process – and I didn’t do that in this class, I was just like, “Oh, you’re here, you’re supposed to know this,” and that’s deficit thinking. I think that’s where we’d start: going to them more, trying to understand culturally how they’re translating this experience. I think that’s something that I really need to put on my shoulders this term moving forward... Again, you can’t even

stereotype all the Chinese students... [but] I could have done more to just be better prepared for, culturally, their experience.

Reflecting on his approach to teaching Chinese international students in his College 1 classes, Jake recognized that he had engaged in “deficit thinking” about these students – seeing differences in these students’ cultural backgrounds as a lack of knowledge, rather than as a difference in knowledge that could be a potential strength. He hoped to better inform himself about international students’ “experiences coming from their respective countries,” while also avoiding “stereotyp[ing] all the Chinese students,” in future quarters.

Other College 1 instructors appeared, like Jake, to engage in “deficit thinking” about their international students’ cultural and historical background knowledge. Michael, for example, was dismayed that Chinese international students were unfamiliar with Western philosophy, and Joanna was alarmed that they had limited knowledge of homelessness in the US or in China. Michelle, too, felt uncertain about how to teach domestic and international students who had such different frames of reference for understanding gender and sexuality. At the same time Michelle, described fundamental differences between students’ values that make engagement across difference challenging in her classroom – a problem that exceeds the issue of “deficit thinking.” In the next section, I describe instructors’ varying strategies for integrating and engaging Chinese international students in their classrooms that address many of the challenges they articulated.

*Strategies for teaching Chinese international students in mainstream classes*

Even as College 1 instructors described a wide range of challenges with serving Chinese international students in their classes, they also articulated a range of strategies to address – at least in part – many of these challenges and to engage international students in their classrooms. Seven of the ten instructors I interviewed gave specific examples of strategies they used to teach, engage, and create a welcoming environment for Chinese international students in their classes. These strategies included small group work, presenting information in multiple ways, and assigning course materials from and about China.

Joanna, who in our first interview expressed many challenges with engaging Chinese international students in her classes, felt by the end of the quarter that she had some success in doing so in one of her classes through the use of small group work. In this class, she found that international students became “more and more fluent” in English as the quarter progressed; this was further aided by creating small groups that included both international and domestic students. She explained, “knowing some of the domestic students more intimately helped [international students] be able to engage.” Both Margaret and Michelle, too, found that placing international and domestic students together in small groups was beneficial for international students. In a class that included only a few Chinese international students, Michelle noticed that these students “would usually find a compassionate native English speaker to sit next to help them interpret what was going on in class.” In each of these cases, instructors found that small groups that included a mix of

international and domestic students allowed international students to more fully engage in the course. Jake also found small group work to be helpful to international students; in his view, even small groups comprised wholly of international students were effective because these students were able to support each other in and outside of the classroom.

**JAKE:** From the feedback that I've gotten from what the students said to me, they tend to take it back to the dorms, they tend to talk with each other. I only saw people helping each other. Even if it is in Chinese, I'm just happy to see them supporting each other and talking and trying to build things up and trying to fill in the gaps.

For Joanna, Margaret, Michelle, and Jake, small groups provided Chinese international students a supportive space in which to practice their English and receive help from their peers, both domestic and international, even if they struggled to comprehend course materials or participate in the whole-class discussion.

A second strategy College 1 instructors employed to specifically support their international students was diversifying the ways they presented information in their classrooms. Margaret knew that her Chinese international students would struggle to understand her verbal instructions, especially because she spoke "too fast;" for this reason, she printed out an agenda for each class session that she distributed to each student at the beginning of class and used an activity in which students wrote their answers to a question on the blackboard.

**MARGARET:** I'm printing out the whole agenda... [so that students] know what's happening really close[ly] and can take notes on that... I always try to put things on the board. For instance, two sessions ago, I had [students] storm the board... you ask a question and then everybody goes and writes their answers on the board. And then you go through and talk about the different answers that got up there, and I let them

put any time they agree with somebody whose stuff is already up there... So that way they're always looking [at the board]. I'm trying to get all these ways in which they're getting the information auditorily and visually, too, so that the weaker students can get it in multiple methods.

Lucy, too, found that Chinese international students who did not speak up in class discussion would more readily respond to discussion prompts in their reading log assignments. For instance, she felt that international students were more likely to disclose the amount of time they had spent completing a reading in reading logs than in class discussion; she explained, "maybe just because of the anonymity, [international students] felt safer to be able to write down" how long they had spent reading. By asking the same questions in class discussion and in her reading log assignment, Lucy provided students multiple ways to engage with course topics.

Samuel advocated for yet another way to diversify the presentation of information in his classroom: documentaries and podcasts. Samuel found the use of these "multimodal" materials to be an effective tool not only for introducing international students to course topics, but for helping them improve their fluency in English.

**SAMUEL:** Documentaries... because it's a multimodal input, you see the words on the screen... which is how you learn grammar and spelling. You don't learn grammar and spelling from going through a workbook... If [students] see lots and lots of text on the screen and hear the words at the same time, and then have the images in the back to create context and meaning so that learning grammar, punctuation, spelling, vocabulary all requires meaningful context. The documentaries provide that. That's an aid. If I have Chinese students and I give them really hard articles from some scholarly journal and a long article from the New Yorker – because I need to also have the people who are advanced have something that challenges them – the same day, they're also assigned to watch a Michael Moore documentary.



Here, Samuel referenced one of his classes that I observed. In this class session, Samuel presented a slideshow that gave history and statistics on mass incarceration in the US, showed a clip of a Michael Moore documentary on the Norwegian prison system, assigned a “quick write” activity, and facilitated a class discussion on how the Norwegian system might work in the US. As in Lucy’s class, students were given the same discussion prompt for both the quick write activity and for the class discussion, offering them multiple ways to engage with the topic of the class; in other words, they had several options for class “outputs.” Beyond this, however, Samuel also provided students multiple ways to access the materials – different “inputs” – that included a short lecture with visuals, a documentary clip, and readings completed before class.

The first two strategies College 1 instructors shared as approaches for teaching Chinese international students, small group work and presenting information in a variety of ways, that they felt to be beneficial to *any* struggling student in their College 1 classes – not just Chinese international students. The third strategy that several instructors shared, however, centered uniquely on this group of students: teaching course materials from or about China. Margaret and Karl each used this strategy in their classrooms and found that it helped bring Chinese international students into the class conversation.

Margaret chose to assign a video clip about a famous Chinese blogger in her class for a unit about social media. She found that even as this cultural reference proved to be out of date from students’ point of view, it gave Chinese international

students in her class “an area of expertise” about which they could speak confidently in class.

MARGARET: Before class, they had watched a video clip about a Chinese blogger... I thought it was good because the question that I put online was, “Either respond to the video with the Chinese blogger or respond to another TED talk... about social media.” So, the whole issue was social media and you... they could either [discuss the Chinese blogger] or not, and so I think that was good... Then, of course, the Chinese students made fun of me because [this Chinese blogger] is so yesterday... Also that Weibo, which is their version of YouTube, or their version of Facebook... they said, “Some of those [platforms] we’re not doing anymore. We’ve got different social media platforms.” But at least it gave them an area of expertise, because they knew all about [this Chinese blogger].”

While Margaret intentionally brought in materials for class about which her Chinese international students would have more “expertise” than her domestic students, Karl brought in materials from China because these materials were already included in his college’s shared syllabus for College 1, without an explicit goal of reaching Chinese international students. Even as he did not create or adjust his syllabus with international students in mind, when discussing the impact of untracking on his College 1 class, Karl spoke favorably about the integration of Chinese international students and their contributions to class discussion.

KARL: [Chinese international students] offer really good, poignant points in conversation and I really like it because a lot of students in the class are from California or from the United States, and so to get that international perspective in this conversation I think is really important. I think the Chinese students, although I think it might be intimidating for them to speak in a language that is not their native tongue, they’re taking that courageous step to enter into the conversation. So I’m really grateful to have them in class because I think it really does help broaden our perspective on how human beings see these ideas we’ve been discussing... So I think it’s been good to have the international students in class.

The second of Karl's classes that I observed highlighted an example of how Chinese international students engaged with the class. For this class, students had been assigned to read several chapters of a religious text, the Tao Te Ching, for homework. The class session began by watching a short video and presentation on Taoism, followed by small group work in which students interpreted a chapter of the text, and ending with a class discussion of the chapters. My field notes following this observation noted Chinese international students' participation in the class discussion; these students spoke confidently about their own understandings of the Tao and of the role of Taoism in Chinese culture today.

A good variety of both domestic and international, as well as male and female, students contributed voluntarily to discussion... What stands out most to me about this class was how all three male Chinese international students present spoke up voluntarily during the class. Each of them spoke about their understanding of Taoism and what it means in China and for Chinese people. In some cases, their contributions didn't dig into the level of analysis that Karl was asking for in the questions he posed; though in some cases, their comments did attempt to directly respond to his questions.

In both Margaret and Karl's classes, teaching course materials from or about China gave Chinese international students an "area of expertise," as Margaret put it, that facilitated these students' entry into the class discussion. These two examples of course materials from and about China also put into relief the *absence* of such materials in the other eight College 1 classrooms I observed, which overwhelmingly taught texts from and about the United States. The lack of texts from and about China in most College 1 classrooms may help account for instructors' perceptions that

Chinese international students lacked the cultural and historical background knowledge necessary to engage in the course.

College 1 instructors articulated serious concerns about and challenges with teaching Chinese international students in their classes; these included concerns about English fluency, balancing the needs of international and domestic students, self-segregation of international students within the classroom, the ethics of assessing international students, and differences in cultural and historical background knowledge. At the same time, a majority of instructors I interviewed shared strategies for engaging international students in their classrooms: incorporating small group work, presenting information in a variety of ways, and teaching course materials from and about China. These strategies addressed several of their concerns. In small group work, Chinese international students had opportunities to meet and work with domestic students; this helped mitigate the concern about self-segregation or “silos” of international students. Chinese international students also practiced speaking English and received support in understanding course materials from their peers, both domestic and international, by working in small groups. Similarly, when instructors presented information in different ways, students who struggled with English fluency were offered more ways to access course content and to participate during class. Lastly, when instructors taught materials from or about China, Chinese international students were better able to participate in class activities because they held the requisite cultural and historical background knowledge for understanding these materials.

These three strategies for teaching and engaging Chinese international students in College 1, however, appeared to address only three of the five areas of concern that instructors articulated: English fluency, the isolation and segregation of Chinese international students, and differences in the cultural and historical background knowledge of Chinese international students. Concerns around balancing the needs of international and domestic students, as well as the ethics of assessing and grading international students, exceeded the scope of the classroom strategies that instructors shared. Even instructors who went to great lengths to integrate, engage, and welcome Chinese international students in their classrooms voiced serious concerns with the efficacy and ethics of moving to a fully untracked version of Core. While the ALC's vision of untracking centered on leveling the playing field among students of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, for many instructors, the reality of untracking was a College 1 class made up of students so diversely prepared that teaching them all equitably in the same classroom seemed almost impossible.

***Situating College 1 instructors' challenges with and strategies for teaching Chinese international students in higher education and writing studies scholarship***

This dissertation began with a focus on how College 1 instructors made sense of and implemented the new course learning outcomes, particularly those related to metacognition, self-efficacy, and engagement across difference. While I knew that the “engagement across difference” outcome was tied to a structural change in the course, untracking, I did not center my research questions around untracking and its impacts. In my interviews with College 1 instructors, I quickly became aware not only of the

centrality of untracking in instructors' understanding of the changes to the Core course, but of an impact I had not anticipated: the increased presence of Chinese international students in "mainstream" College 1 classes. Three key findings emerged from College 1 instructors' comments about untracking: first, that a majority of instructors I spoke with responded to my questions about untracking with a discussion of Chinese international students in their classrooms; second, that instructors articulated a range of challenges in teaching these students; and third, that instructors voiced and demonstrated a variety of strategies for supporting these students in their classrooms. These findings take on greater significance when considered alongside scholarship in higher education and writing studies that considers the growth of the population of Chinese international students in US colleges and universities, as well as challenges with and strategies for serving this population. While College 1 instructors largely mirror scholars' findings in their assessment of challenges with and strategies for teaching Chinese international students, they uniquely contribute to this literature by highlighting the inadequacy of classroom strategies – including their own – for addressing some of the more fundamental challenges presented by the rise of this population in US higher education.

As I describe in the section above, College 1 instructors' challenges with teaching Chinese international students in their classrooms centered on five main concerns: Chinese international students' English fluency, balancing the needs of international and domestic students, Chinese international students' isolation within the classroom, the ethics of grading and assessing Chinese international students, and

differences in Chinese international students' cultural and historical background knowledge. These concerns closely resemble those articulated in both higher education and writing studies scholarship, though with several key differences.

Scholars find, for instance, that Chinese international students studying in US colleges and universities often experience challenges with English fluency, both written and oral (Araujo 2011; Leong 2015; Liu 2016; Sherry et al. 2010). Like Leong (2015), College 1 instructors noted that Chinese international students in their classes often struggled to participate in class discussions due to their limited abilities in speaking English. Similarly, College 1 instructors struggled to find a balance between meeting the needs of Chinese international students, particularly those with limited English fluency, and domestic students in the classroom – a finding shared by several writing studies scholars. Ferris and her collaborators (2015), for example, find that balancing the needs of international and domestic students was the “biggest challenge” voiced by composition instructors who taught classes that included international students (65).

On the issues of the isolation of and differing cultural and historical background knowledge held by Chinese international students, College 1 instructors and scholars also voiced similar challenges and concerns. Higher education and writing studies scholars note the isolation of Chinese international students not only within the classroom, but at US colleges and universities more generally; Harrison and Su (2016), for instance, find that in institutions with a high density of Chinese international students, these students tend to stick together and experience “social

isolation” from non-Chinese students (2016:911–13). Zhu and Bresnahan (2018) suggest that this isolation may be just as much the result of domestic students’ unwillingness to befriend Chinese international students as it is the result of Chinese international students’ tendency to self-segregate. College 1 instructors noted that Chinese international students often chose to work together during class and, in one instructor’s experience, attend office hours together. While they unanimously expressed a desire for domestic and international students in their classes to be more “integrated,” they held differing views about the best means to achieve this.

Another obstacle to this “integration,” expressed by both College 1 instructors and in the scholarship, is differences in the cultural and historical background knowledge held by Chinese international students. Caplan and Stevens (2017) find that instructors often felt “frustrated” by Chinese international students’ lack of familiarity with the US context – for instance, how US government systems work (21). College 1 instructors’ concerns about differences in cultural and historical background knowledge mirror this finding from Caplan and Stevens, but also exceed the challenges articulated in higher education scholarship. Some College 1 instructors voiced concerns about Chinese international students’ lack of familiarity with key texts in Western philosophy, Marxism, and this history of affirmative action in the US, for example. Other instructors, however, voiced more profound challenges. Joanna and Michelle noted that Chinese international students not only lacked familiarity with social justice topics like racism, educational inequality, and LGBTQ issues, but appeared unwilling to consider the relevance of these issues to Chinese



society; instead, they saw these issues as “an American thing,” as one of Joanna’s students put it.

College 1 instructors’ challenges with teaching Chinese international students differed from those articulated in higher education and writing studies scholarship in two key ways. First, unlike both of these sets of scholars, College 1 instructors did not express challenges with plagiarism among Chinese international students in their courses. This is likely due to the course’s unique focus on reading strategies and metacognitive skills; College 1 classes often did not include formal writing assignments that could be more readily be plagiarized. Second, College 1 instructors voiced a concern not addressed directly in the scholarship: ethical dilemmas around grading and assessing Chinese international students in a “mainstream” course. While writing studies scholars consider questions about how best to place international students into mainstream or multilingual sections of first-year composition, they do not elaborate on the ethical issues raised by grading international, English Language Learner students in a mainstream class when some of these students may be underprepared to succeed in the class. College 1 instructors, in contrast to the scholarship, presented a more nuanced analysis of the ethical dilemmas they faced. On the one hand, instructors felt an ethical obligation to give Chinese international students passing grades, even if they did not achieve the outcomes of the course, due to the potential implications for their visa status and academic progress; on the other hand, instructors worried that allowing students who had not met the outcomes to

move on to the next course in the Academic Literacy Curriculum sequence would set these students up for failure in that course.

As with the challenges they articulated, College 1 instructors shared similarities with higher education and writing studies scholars in the strategies they employed for teaching Chinese international students in their courses. These strategies both built on and complicated scholars' findings. College 1 instructors' strategies centered on the use of small group work, presenting information in multiple ways, and assigning course materials from and about China. The value of small group work, in the view of College 1 instructors, was that it facilitated interaction and cross-cultural communication between international and domestic students. In small groups, Chinese international students in College 1 classrooms had opportunities to practice speaking English and to receive support from domestic students, who could help explain course materials and instructions for class activities to them. College 1 instructors' strategic use of small group work exemplifies a strategy that higher education and writing studies scholars recommend: facilitating interaction between domestic and international students (Araujo 2011; Chen 2018; Liu 2016; Montgomery 2016; Siczek 2015; Valdez 2015). Similar to Siczek's (2015) recommendation for assigning domestic and international students to work together in teams, College 1 instructors made use of small groups within their classrooms to facilitate cross-cultural connections among students.

College 1 instructors' second strategy for teaching Chinese international students, presenting information in multiple ways, aligns with scholars' call for

creating resources to meet the specific academic and social needs of Chinese international students (Araujo 2011; Chen 2018; Cross et al. 2015; Liu 2016; Montgomery 2016; Nan 2012). While scholars focus primarily on resources outside of the classroom, such as offering specialized support in writing center appointments or improving orientation programs for Chinese international students, College 1 instructors craft a variety of “resources” to facilitate Chinese international students’ learning within the classroom. Margaret, for instance, provided students of a printed copy of the class agenda to help them follow along with class activities, while Samuel assigned students a variety of written and audiovisual course “texts” to engage students with widely varying abilities in English.

Lastly, College 1 instructors’ use of course materials from and about China offers a concrete example of scholars’ recommendations for culturally appropriate and responsive pedagogy (Chen 2018; Leask and Carroll 2011; Nan 2012; Ross and Chen 2015; Siczek 2015; Valdez 2015). Margaret, who asked students to watch a video on a Chinese blogger, and Karl, who assigned students to read a religious text that originated in China, both found that bringing in course materials from and about China gave Chinese international students a unique opportunity to be an “expert” on a course topic and for their unique cultural and historical background knowledge to be relevant to the course. This strategy goes beyond calls from writing studies scholars, for instance, to teach in a directive than “dialogic” way (Bauer and Picciotto 2012:79) and from higher education scholars to “expand topics for class reading, discussion, writing, and research” (Siczek 2015:13). Providing course materials about which

Chinese international students will have unique cultural and historical background knowledge allows for this knowledge to be a valuable difference in the classroom, rather than a “deficit” (Heng 2018).

Even as College 1 instructors identified a variety of strategies for supporting Chinese international students in their classrooms, looking at these strategies in comparison with the challenges instructors articulated reveals an imperfect alignment between challenges and strategies. While the strategies that instructors employed help mitigate their concerns around English fluency, the isolation and segregation of Chinese international students, and differences in the cultural and historical background knowledge of Chinese international students, concerns around balancing the needs of international and domestic students, as well as the ethics of assessing and grading international students, were not addressed by their classroom strategies.

This highlights another similarity with writing studies scholars who argue that instructors’ classroom practices, no matter how well designed, may not be enough to meet the needs of Chinese international students in mainstream courses. Like the composition instructors cited in the studies conducted by Matsuda et al. (2013) and Ferris et al. (2015), College 1 instructors often voiced that providing direct instruction in English language, for example, was beyond the scope of the College 1 curriculum and of their own professional training. Several College 1 instructors voiced support for placing Chinese international students in their own sections of College 1, and would likely agree with Ferris and her collaborators’ observation that “some (not all) multilingual undergraduates appear to be truly unprepared for work at the [University

of California] level upon matriculation” (2015:71). These instructors’ convictions that Chinese international students would be better served by separate sections were not motivated simply (if at all) by a desire to teach only better-prepared students; rather, as their discussion of their concerns reveals, College 1 instructors believed that placing students with great disparities in English fluency together in the same classroom raised serious ethical dilemmas related to the consequences of assigning both passing and failing grades to international students. College 1 instructors found themselves in an untenable situation in which they were obligated to meet the unique academic needs of international and domestic students with widely varying abilities in English, while also assessing these students according to a uniform set of outcomes for the course.

The original vision for untracking College 1 articulated in the Academic Literacy Curriculum centers on leveling the playing field among students of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds; in this vision, students who attended underfunded public schools in California and those who attended more affluent schools would have an opportunity to have the same College 1 experience and, as the ALC puts it, “engage with others across difference” (Abrams et al. 2017). As described in the previous two chapters, instructors felt varying senses of autonomy to shape the syllabus for their College 1 classes and took diverse approaches to teaching the College 1 learning outcomes. Many instructors, I found, interpreted the shift from Core to College 1 as a fairly minor curricular reform and structured their College 1 classroom activities and assignments in a similar way to their Core classes.

Instructors felt underprepared, then, when “untracking” had a more significant impact on the dynamics of their classroom than they had anticipated when planning their courses. Activities that worked well with a classroom of domestic students were less successful with Chinese international students, and assumptions that instructors took for granted – that students would be familiar with the context of racism in the US, for instance – were now called into question. Even instructors who prioritized the College 1 learning outcome calling for “engagement with others across difference,” like Samuel, voiced significant concerns about their ability to meet the needs of both domestic and international students within the constraints of the College 1 curriculum.

For many College 1 instructors, the reality of untracking was a sudden introduction of international students from China into mainstream classes, many of whom appeared to instructors as underprepared for the course. In comparison to this change, a shift to a more diverse mix of domestic students in College 1 classes went largely unnoticed by instructors. Rather than facilitating “engagement across difference,” some College 1 instructors felt that untracking resulted in classes made up of students so diversely prepared that teaching them all equitably in the same classroom seemed almost impossible.

## CHAPTER 8: Conclusion

### *Overview of the study*

Since the founding of UC Santa Cruz in 1965, first-year undergraduate students have enrolled in class called Core: a seminar offered by their college that introduces students to the theme of the college and, in recent decades, college-level writing. Beginning in Fall 2018, Core was reformed into a new course called College 1. Unlike Core, College 1 focuses on academic reading rather than writing and includes a common set of learning outcomes designed around the “ACMES:” analysis, critical thinking, metacognition, engagement across difference, and self-efficacy. The content of College 1 still varies by college; each college’s version of the course includes readings specific to that college’s theme. Several features, however, are shared across all sections of College 1: each section enrolls 30 students; the sections are “untracked,” meaning that students are not placed into different sections based on their writing competencies; all sections share a common set of learning outcomes; and students in all sections in Fall 2018 were required to complete an in-class assessment during week eight of the quarter (Abrams et al. 2017).

The shift from Core to College 1 in 2018, while significant, was not the only major reform to the Core course in UCSC’s history. In the late 1960s, the Core course became optional for students at many colleges; it also drifted away from the college theme and toward instructors’ individual research interests, and it was increasingly taught by Teaching Assistants rather than faculty members. In the 1980s, UCSC Chancellor Robert Sinsheimer called for a campus-wide review of the Core courses

and attempted, with limited success, to standardize the assessment of these courses (Noreña 2004). Most recently, in the early 2000s, the Core courses became tied to the new Composition 1 General Education requirement for undergraduate students; Core offerings across the colleges also become more varied in these years, with some colleges offering 2-quarter courses, 8-unit (rather than the standard 5-unit) courses, and separate sections for international students (Council of Provosts 2016).

Understood in the context of the history of these changes to Core, College 1 mirrors earlier reforms in some ways and stands out as unique in others. Like earlier reforms to Core, the shift to College 1 was motivated, in part, by the Provosts' and some faculty members' desire to preserve the college system at UCSC, by a persistent concern about the quality of students' writing, and by a goal of building community among students within each college. Unlike earlier reforms to Core, however, College 1 stands out for its focus on explicit reading instruction, its articulation of the ACMES outcomes, and the centrality of formal learning outcomes in its design.

This dissertation examines the implementation of this new course from the perspectives of the instructors who first taught it in Fall 2018. Rather than focus on undergraduate students who would be taking the class, I chose to center this study on the course's *instructors* – the key actors who would be implementing this course – in order to shed light on how curricular change plays out in practice. Three central research questions guide this study:

RQ1: How do College 1 instructors teach the College 1 learning outcomes centered on the “ACMES” in their classrooms?



RQ2: How do they make decisions about teaching practices related to the learning outcomes?

RQ3: How do they navigate teaching-related dilemmas that arise in the implementation of the College 1 curriculum?

To address these questions, I conducted interviews with and classroom observations of ten College 1 instructors, representing six of the ten UCSC colleges, to illuminate instructors' sensemaking around the shift to College 1. I also conducted a survey of all instructors who taught College 1 in Fall 2018; this survey had a response rate of 36.7 percent and included instructors from eight colleges.

The early chapters of this dissertation provide context for interpreting the findings. Chapter two provides an overview of the history of the Core course at UCSC, leading up to and including the development of the Academic Literacy Curriculum (ALC), which describes the College 1 course. Chapter three develops the theoretical framework for this study by highlighting two recent developments in institutional theory: "inhabited institutions" and sensemaking theory. These areas of institutional theory provide analytical tools for examining the relationship of instructors' beliefs and practices to larger-scale institutional changes. Chapter four outlines the research methods employed in this study.

Chapters five, six, and seven each present a set of findings and center on three themes that emerged from the investigation of the research questions. In chapter five, I examine College 1 instructors' sensemaking and decision-making around teaching the learning outcomes, finding that instructors tended to adopt explicit, implicit, or

oppositional approaches to teaching these outcomes. In chapter six, I consider the relationship between instructors' classroom practices and their sense of autonomy over their College 1 classes, finding that instructors varied significantly in how they perceived their own freedom and control over their teaching. In chapter seven, I highlight a central challenge articulated by instructors: the integration of Chinese international students into their untracked College 1 classes. Now, in the conclusion, I will 1) revisit these findings in relation to each of these research questions, 2) consider the implications of these findings for institutional theory, 3) explore the implications of these findings for practice, and 4) address the limitations of this study and areas for future research.

### ***Answering the study's research questions***

The three central findings of this dissertation elaborated in chapters five, six, and seven each represent an answer to one of the three research questions. Each finding, in centering a specific theme that emerged from my interviews with, observations of, and survey responses from College 1 instructors, offers only a *partial* answer to its corresponding research question. Rather than present *all* of the ways that instructors taught the ACMES outcomes in their College 1 classrooms, for instance, chapter five centers on just one key theme that arose in my analysis of instructors' comments about teaching these outcomes. The three findings chapters highlight the most salient and pressing issues that College 1 instructors articulated in relation to the research questions. Below, I elaborate on how each findings chapter provides an answer to each of the study's research question.

*RQ1: How do College 1 instructors teach the College 1 learning outcomes centered on the “ACMES” in their classrooms?*

In my interviews with College 1 instructors, I asked instructors how they made sense of and aligned their teaching with the course learning outcomes. I focused, particularly, on learning outcomes related to the latter three ACMES outcomes: metacognition, engagement across difference, and self-efficacy. Instructors’ engagement with these outcomes was also a focus of my classroom observations carried out throughout the Fall 2018 quarter. In both my interviews and observations, I found that instructors tended to take one of three distinct approaches to teaching the College 1 outcomes: an explicit approach, in which instructors used the language of the ACMES outcomes in their teaching, an implicit approach, in which instructors embedded ACMES skills in their teaching without naming them, and an oppositional approach, in which instructors critiqued the use of learning outcomes altogether.

The varied ways that instructors taught the College 1 learning outcomes, I found, were shaped by how instructors understood the relationship between learning outcomes and students’ learning. For some instructors, using the language of the course learning outcomes in their teaching enhanced students’ learning by providing students with a shared vocabulary that would transfer to future courses in the ALC. For other instructors, the language of the learning outcomes was inaccessible to students and represented unnecessary jargon that impeded students’ learning; these instructors valued the skills expressed by the learning outcomes, but did not find it

necessary to use the vocabulary of the learning outcomes in order to teach these skills. Lastly, instructors who took an oppositional view of learning outcomes critiqued not only the particular wording of the College 1 learning outcomes, but also the use of learning outcomes in higher education altogether. These instructors saw learning outcomes as antithetical to students' learning because they represented learning as a predefined set of measurable skills, which in turn limited students' capacity to learn to think holistically, creatively, and critically.

*RQ2: How do they make decisions about teaching practices related to the learning outcomes?*

To address this research question, I did not ask College 1 instructors directly, "how do you make decisions about your teaching practices related to the learning outcomes?" Interview-based research aims to facilitate, as Castillo-Montoya (2016) puts it, an "inquiry-based conversation;" to do this, researchers must ask interview questions that are informed by the research questions, but which are less theoretical and more immediately relevant to participants (813-24). With this in mind, I arrived at an answer to the first research question through identifying key themes that emerged from the qualitative data: interview transcripts, classroom observation notes, and instructors' responses to open-ended survey questions. One of these key themes was instructors' feelings of ownership of, control over, and freedom to adapt the College 1 curriculum shared among instructors at their college; I call this set of issues "sense of autonomy," and found that instructors varied widely in their senses of autonomy over their College 1 classes.

A close analysis of this theme suggests that instructors' varying senses of autonomy corresponded to their approaches to teaching the College 1 curriculum in their courses. While instructors with high and moderate senses over their College 1 classes made changes to the course curriculum (to varying degrees) to suit their own teaching style and priorities, instructors with a low sense of autonomy over their College 1 classes tended to teach the curriculum as it was written. However, these latter instructors' approaches to teaching the College 1 curriculum "as it was written" included subversion, reluctant compliance, confusion, and hostility in these instructors' classroom practices. I employ the metaphor of "letter" and "spirit" (as in the letter versus the spirit of the law) to understand these differences. Instructors with higher senses of autonomy over their teaching tended to abide by the spirit, but not always the letter, of the curriculum, whereas instructors with lower sense of autonomy more often abided by the letter, but not the spirit, of the curriculum.

My analysis in chapter six suggests that how College 1 instructors made decisions around their teaching practices – particularly, whether they adhered to or adapted the course curriculum – aligned with their sense of autonomy over their course. This finding is not a comprehensive answer to the question, "How do College 1 instructors make decisions about teaching practices related to the learning outcomes?" but rather a partial one that highlights a key theme that emerged from the accounts instructors gave of their teaching in College 1. Other factors shaping how College 1 instructors made decisions around their teaching included how long an instructor had taught Core at UCSC, the instructor's pedagogical approach and

beliefs, at which college or colleges an instructor taught, the instructor's perceptions of their college Provost, and the instructor's disciplinary and educational background, among other factors. While not the only factor, instructors' sense of autonomy over their teaching appeared the most *significant* factor shaping how instructors implemented the College 1 curriculum in their classrooms.

*RQ3: How do they navigate teaching-related dilemmas that arise in the implementation of the College 1 curriculum?*

As with the second research question, my answer to the third research question guiding this dissertation emerged not from directly asking College 1 instructors how they “navigated teaching-related dilemmas,” but rather from a key theme that emerged from my analysis of the data. In asking instructors about the challenges they encountered in teaching College 1, I found that instructors articulated a range of challenges: increased class size (from 25 to 30 students), making time for the week eight assessment, challenges related to untracking, too many learning outcomes, assessing students' reading rather than their writing skills, students who did not “buy in” to the new course, too many readings, and too much student work to grade. Of these challenges, the first three – increased class size, the week eight assessment, and untracking-related challenges – were the most widely shared among instructors.

I chose to center chapter seven on just one set of challenges, those related to untracking, because College 1 instructors elaborated on these challenges and their attempts to address them in much greater length and detail than they did the other

challenges. In other words, while College 1 instructors articulated a range of challenges in teaching the new curriculum, those related to untracking most clearly presented instructors with *dilemmas* that they were forced to continually navigate in their first quarter of teaching College 1. Instructors' challenges around untracking, I found, centered primarily around teaching Chinese international students. Instructors voiced five main concerns around teaching these students in an untracked College 1: 1) English fluency; 2) balancing the needs of international and domestic students; 3) Chinese international students' isolation or segregation within the classroom; 4) ethical dilemmas around assessing and grading Chinese international students; and 5) differences in Chinese international students' cultural and historical background knowledge. At the same time, they described three strategies for supporting these students in their classrooms: 1) small group work; 2) presenting information in multiple ways; and 3) assigning course materials from and about China. While their strategies addressed some of the concerns they voiced, instructors' concerns around balancing the needs of international and domestic students in their classes, as well as ethical dilemmas related to assessing and grading Chinese international students, exceeded the scope of the strategies they employed to support Chinese international students. Still, these strategies illustrate the ways in which College 1 instructors navigated dilemmas around teaching Chinese international students in their classes.

Chapter seven, then, offers a partial answer to the question, "How do instructors navigate teaching-related dilemmas that arise in the implementation of the College 1 curriculum?" This answer highlights a key theme that emerged from

instructors' discussion of the challenges they encountered in teaching the new curriculum – supporting Chinese international students in an untracked College 1 – as well as how they navigated these challenges in their classroom practices. Instructors' efforts to navigate these dilemmas, I find, did not fully address the concerns they articulated; this suggests that the challenges posed by the integration of Chinese international students into untracked classrooms may not be able to be fully resolved through shifts in pedagogy. I elaborate on the implications of this later in this chapter.

### ***Implications for theory***

In chapter three of this dissertation, I introduced two recent developments in institutional theory, “inhabited institutions” and sensemaking theory, as a framework for interpreting my findings about College 1. These branches of institutional theory, I argue, are useful for understanding the case of College 1 for several reasons: 1) this study's research questions speak to the “coupling” debate among education scholars who use an institutional theory approach; 2) the shift to College 1 represents what, in their article defining sensemaking, Weick and his collaborators call a state of “uncertainty” in which individuals – in this case, instructors – are trying to discern whether reality is the “same or different” from their expectations (Weick et al. 2005:414); and 3) “inhabited institutions” and sensemaking theory provide a conceptual frameworks that link the beliefs and classroom practices of College 1 instructors to larger questions about how curricular change happens in universities. My findings speak to each of issues: the coupling debate, instructors' “uncertainty” around the College 1 reform, and the implications of instructors' classroom practices



for curricular change. In this section, I link the findings of this study to concepts from “inhabited institutions” and sensemaking theory to highlight this study’s contributions to institutional theory. I identify two main theoretical contributions of this study; first, to ongoing scholarly debates on whether higher education is a “decoupled” institution or if it has been “recoupled;” and second, to empirical studies of sensemaking in higher education settings.

First, my findings on College 1 instructors’ approaches to teaching the course learning outcomes and on how instructors’ sense of autonomy shapes their classroom practices both speak to the ongoing debate in education scholarship over coupling. I use the term “coupling” here to refer to the linkages between different elements of a higher education institution: between administration and faculty, for instance, or between formal policy and everyday practice. Early institutional theorists described educational institutions as “decoupled” or “loosely coupled” systems (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Weick 1976), by which they meant that different parts of the institution (administrators and teachers, for instance) operate with relative independence from each other. More recent studies, in contrast, find that educational institutions have become “recoupled;” that is, instructors’ classroom practices have become more tightly linked to and influenced by external pressures (Coburn 2004; Hallett 2010). In the case of College 1, I consider the extent of coupling between the formal College 1 curriculum shared among instructors at each college and instructors’ classroom practices.

Recent scholarship in education tends to highlight recoupling processes in schools: how accountability policies are creating tighter linkages between teachers' practices and outcomes assessment, diminishing teachers' autonomy and control over their teaching. In some studies, this process is straightforward: a rise in accountability policies leads to an increase in recoupling. In one study, however, Degn (2018) complicates this view by highlighting the coexistence of both tight and loose coupling within one university. This study of the ways Danish academics made sense of their identity in light of major reforms to higher education noted how different elements of one university (faculty, administration, and the policy context) were characterized by differing levels of coupling. When higher levels of management at the institutions were tightly coupled with the broader move toward managerialism in the Danish political system, instructors and other academic staff experienced weaker coupling with the institution. These instructors and staff perceived management's alignment with managerialism as a threat to their professional identity as academics, and often responded by ignoring pressure to change their practices or by complying with these pressures in "defiant or defeatist" ways (Degn 2018:315–16). Even under the conditions of increased accountability associated with managerialism, then, instructors in Degn's study experienced their teaching as loosely coupled to the goals of the institution.

This study on College 1 both speaks to recent scholarship on coupling and complicates it. My findings suggest that the extent of decoupling or recoupling in an educational institution can vary from classroom to classroom and, further, that

teachers' sensemaking around curriculum reform influences this variation. While some instructors adhered closely to the College 1 curriculum in their teaching, as I describe in chapters five and six, others took the class in their own direction, teaching the curriculum and the learning outcomes as they best saw fit. Instructors who taught to the "letter" of the curriculum saw themselves as beholden to external pressures to teach the class as it was written; they experienced their classroom as tightly coupled to the formal curriculum. This stance was most clearly articulated by Michael, who expressed that the new curriculum did not allow him "much room to play" to adapt the curriculum; he explained, "I'm just going to follow the rules and give them exactly what they're asking." Michael and other instructors were particularly dismayed by the week eight assessment, which distracted from their teaching in College 1 and represented an unwelcome imposition from UCSC administration in their classrooms. In contrast, other instructors expressed feeling a high degree of freedom to make changes to the curriculum; these instructors experienced their classes as more loosely coupled with the curriculum. Samuel, for instance, found that "there's a lot of different ways to interpret" the College 1 learning outcomes, which gave him the ability to teach these outcomes as he best saw fit. While he felt an obligation to teach the learning outcomes defined in the formal curriculum, Samuel did not experience his classroom practices as closely linked to or limited by external pressures, as Michael did.

Michael and Samuel, who taught at different UCSC colleges, represent two extremes of College 1 instructors' senses of autonomy over their teaching. Beyond

these two cases, I found that instructors in my study – even those employed at the same college – held widely varying perceptions of their own freedom and control over how they taught College 1. While some instructors experienced their classroom practices as tightly coupled to the formal curriculum and to the expectations of their college Provost, for instance, other instructors felt more freedom and autonomy to teach the class as they best saw fit; they experienced their classrooms as loosely coupled to external pressures. This finding both extends and complicates current scholarship in education that highlights recoupling processes in higher education institutions. Some College 1 instructors would likely agree with the claim that higher education is becoming increasingly coupled to external pressures; the establishment of formal learning outcomes and the week eight assessment served as examples of this pressure. Other instructors, however, appeared less impacted by the curricular changes that might have been experienced as recoupling. These instructors continued to teach their College 1 class as they best saw fit and in their own style, as would be expected in a loosely coupled educational institution. These differences among College 1 instructors suggest that scholars need to be cautious and nuanced in their characterizations of educational institutions as tightly or loosely coupled. A closer look at how individual instructors navigate a new curriculum, for instance, indicates that a single institution may be *both* tightly and loosely coupled simultaneously, and that the experience of tight or loose coupling varies from individual to individual. Even individuals who hold similar positions in an educational position – in this case,

College 1 instructors – may have drastically different perceptions of the degree of coupling between their own classroom practices and external forces.

In addition to contributing to the scholarship on coupling in educational institutions, this dissertation has a second theoretical contribution: to empirical studies of sensemaking in higher education settings. Studies of sensemaking in organizations, both higher education and otherwise, often center on cases of top-down organizational changes (Gonzales 2013:184; Kezar 2013:763). Kezar and Eckel (2002), for example, examine sensemaking among administrators, faculty, staff, and students at two higher education institutions undergoing significant campus-wide curricular reforms. One of their key findings is that successful change efforts – ones that undergo what they call “transformational change” – are successful because their “staff development, robust design, and collaborative leadership” elements each afforded participants opportunities to help shape the “direction and priorities of the institution” and to understand their own roles in enacting the changes (Kezar and Eckel 2002:313–14). While Kezar and Eckel take a broader, institution-level view of sensemaking around institutional change, Coulter (2016) focuses specifically on adjunct faculty members’ sensemaking in her study of a student success initiative at a community college. Coulter considers how adjuncts made sense of this change initiative and changed their teaching (or not) in response to this initiative; she finds that adjuncts’ “receptivity” to changing their teaching practices to align with the initiative corresponded to how much respect they felt they had been shown by campus leaders (“change agents”) at their institution (Coulter 2016:11). These studies

each highlight a core finding of sensemaking studies in higher education literature: that top-down institutional change is more successful when stakeholders feel they have a degree of influence in shaping these changes or, at least, that their professional identity and expertise has been respected in this process.

This study of College 1 instructors builds on these findings in the sensemaking literature. For all but a few College 1 instructors who were involved in the development of the new curriculum (like Elizabeth Abrams), instructors experienced the shift from Core to College 1 as a top-down institutional change. Janet, a long-time Core instructor, felt disillusioned by the shift from Core to College 1, and found that how this reform was carried out contradicted its stated purpose. She said in our first interview, “we’re supposed to be teaching this kind of collaborative, inclusive way of being in the world, but... what’s been created is... top-down.” Like many College 1 instructors I spoke with, Janet saw the new College 1 curriculum as a top-down imposition over which instructors had little say. Margaret differed from most College 1 instructors in that she had what she described as a “minor role” in helping develop the new curriculum at her college. Despite having an opportunity to weigh in on this new curriculum, however, Margaret found that her input was not taken into account and ultimately did not shape the curriculum that was developed for her college. In other words, while she had a “seat at the table,” Margaret did not have a *voice* at the table in developing College 1 at her college.

Two instructors I spoke with, Samuel and Joanna, expressed that they contributed significantly to the development of the College 1 curriculum at their

colleges; these two instructors also held overall favorable assessments of the shift from Core to College 1. Understood in the context of the higher education scholarship on sensemaking, these findings take on greater significance. Like the participants in Kezar and Eckel's (2002) and Coulter's (2016) studies, College 1 instructors in this study demonstrated more "receptivity," as Coulter put it, to the curricular changes when they felt they had some influence over shaping the new curriculum. When instructors felt that they had not been included or listened to in the development of College 1, they held more negative opinions of the change. This suggests that instructors' sensemaking around the shift to College 1 was a key mediating factor in how this reform was implemented in Fall 2018. The degree of instructors' meaningful participation in and contribution to the development of College 1 shaped their sensemaking around this reform, which in turn influenced how instructors implemented the new curriculum in their classrooms. Instructors' "receptivity" to this reform was shaped not only by their understanding of the reform itself, but by a complex range of factors: their involvement in developing the new curriculum, their previous experiences teaching Core, their sense of being respected as a professional, and their pedagogical beliefs and practices, among other factors.

This study draws from and contributes to recent scholarship in institutional theory on "inhabited institutions" and sensemaking theory, two related and intertwined areas of institutional research. Scholars in these areas provide context for understanding the shift from Core to College 1 as a complex and uncertain process that is shaped significantly by the individuals who carry out this change. Some

scholars raise questions that consider in what ways and to what extent higher education institutions have been “recoupled” to external pressures, while other scholars highlight the important role instructors’ sensemaking plays in how institutional reforms play out in practice. This study contributes to both of these areas of scholarship. First, my findings suggest that individuals within higher education institutions experience coupling in diverse and complex ways. Even individuals who occupy the same position within an institution (in this case, College 1 instructors) respond to institutional change in varying and sometimes unpredictable ways. Instructors who feel a low sense of autonomy over their teaching, for example, may outwardly comply with institutional changes but do so in ways that undermine the “spirit” of the new curriculum. Thus, researchers should consider individual institutional actors’ beliefs and practices to gain a more complete understanding of the extent of coupling within an institution. Second, my findings illustrate the ways in which sensemaking shapes institutional actors’ practices. Like other scholars, I find that how institutional actors make sense of and enact top-down changes is mediated by the degree of influence and respect that they feel they have been accorded in the change process. This study provides an empirical example of how instructors’ sensemaking around their sense of autonomy during the shift to College 1 shaped their classroom practices. More broadly, it illustrates how individuals’ perceptions of influence and respect, in concert with other factors, impact the implementation of institutional changes.



### *Implications for practice*

In this dissertation's findings chapters, I positioned my findings in the context of higher education and writing studies scholarship. Chapters five, six, and seven engaged with, respectively, scholarship on learning outcomes, instructor autonomy, and teaching international students. In this section, I extend my discussion of these findings to consider their implications for everyday practice: both for planning and teaching future iterations of College 1 and, more generally, for teaching academic literacy and first-year composition at the college level. I make three recommendations relevant to both of these contexts. First, I recommend that professional development around a new curriculum should meaningfully involve and draw from the input of the instructors who teach (or will teach) this curriculum. Second, I recommend that professional development around teaching using learning outcomes should engage instructors in an open-ended discussion about how to teach using learning outcomes, rather than offer prescriptive advice for doing so. Lastly, I offer recommendations for instructors to better support and engage Chinese international students in untracked literacy or first-year composition courses, as well as recommendations for structural changes to the delivery of College 1.

My first recommendation draws from chapter six, on College 1 instructors' sense of autonomy, and provides a framework for implementing the two recommendations that follow. While the latter two recommendations relate to professional development training for instructors, this first recommendation calls for re-thinking how campus leaders – both at UCSC and other institutions – carry out this

professional development so that it prioritizes respecting instructors' professional identity and expertise, as well as meaningfully solicits and draws from instructors' input. Penrose (2012), writing on the professional identities of non-tenure track composition instructors, finds that these instructors may see professional development trainings as "coercive" rather than "supportive" if they perceive these trainings as remediation for their teaching. She elaborates:

"...under the conditions of contingent employment, "professional development" can easily be interpreted as a euphemism for brainwashing or remediation, deepening the skepticism with which such activities are often viewed in university culture. Under this interpretation, professional development activities are intended to regulate and regularize and thus present a clear challenge to in experienced faculty member's autonomy and professional identity." (Penrose 2012:116)

My findings on College 1 instructors' sense of autonomy and its relation to their teaching practices indicate that simply telling instructors the "right" way to teach the new curriculum may not result in the outcomes intended for the course. Like the instructors in Penrose's study, College 1 instructors I spoke with often felt that the training they had received prior to and during their first quarter teaching College 1 was intended to "regulate and regularize" their teaching, as Penrose put it, rather than support their professional development. Instructors who felt as though their input had not been considered or listened to in the development of College 1, as I argue in chapter six, taught the course in a way that aligned with the "letter" of the curriculum, but not its "spirit." They felt coerced into abiding by the changes to Core, even if they did not buy into or understand these changes.

Future quarters of College 1 likely will require that instructors engage in professional development before or at the same time as they teach this course. My findings on how College 1 instructors did or did not buy in to the changes to the curriculum suggest that future professional development trainings for College 1 instructors will be most successful if they meaningfully solicit and draw from instructors' input. One respondent to my survey of College 1 instructors commented, "You absolutely need to give faculty REAL input in creating the courses that they are teaching if you want them to have a shared curriculum." While it may not be possible for future College 1 instructors to provide input on the design of this class at a campus-wide level, professional development trainings could engage instructors in open-ended discussion of *how* the curriculum can and should be taught. When instructors – of College 1, or of any first-year literacy or composition course – feel as though they have not just a "seat at the table," but also a *voice* at the table, they may be more likely to buy in to the changes they are being asked to adopt in their classrooms.

My second recommendation, which addresses professional development around learning outcomes, represents an example of what my first recommendation might look like in practice. Chapter five of this dissertation highlights College 1 instructors' diverse approaches to teaching the course learning outcomes. Several instructors adopted what I call an "explicit approach," which mirrors the approach suggested by the formal Academic Literacy Curriculum (ALC) proposal; these instructors used the language of the learning outcomes in their teaching to establish a

common vocabulary among students that would be transferrable to future writing courses in the ALC. A few other instructors took a vastly different approach by voicing criticism of the use of learning outcomes in higher education altogether. Most instructors, however, fell between these two extremes by taking what I describe as an “implicit approach” to teaching the course learning outcomes. These instructors found the learning outcomes to be valuable tools for guiding their instruction, but they did not feel it necessary or useful to use the language of these outcomes with their students. They saw this language as inaccessible or uninteresting to students, and thus an impediment to their learning.

These findings on how College 1 instructors taught the course learning outcomes suggest that future professional development around teaching using learning outcomes should not simply prescribe that instructors use the language of the outcomes with their students. If instructors do not understand or buy in to the reasons for using this language, as my findings suggest, they likely will not do so. However, instructors who do not use the language of the learning outcomes with their students may not be ignoring the outcomes altogether; they may be adopting an “implicit approach” to teaching these outcomes by embedding them in the activities and assignments they create. Professional development around teaching using learning outcomes could be improved by engaging instructors in an open-ended conversation about *how* best to teach using learning outcomes, rather than prescribing advice to teach them explicitly. This would provide instructors an opportunity to discuss the benefits and downfalls of, for example, the implicit approach to teaching learning

outcomes – a discussion that would not be possible if the professional development training were rigidly tied to one “correct” way to teach using learning outcomes.

My third and final set of recommendations addresses my findings in chapter seven, around the challenges of and strategies for teaching Chinese international students. These recommendations consists of two parts: recommendations for professional development trainings for College 1 instructors and recommendations for structural changes to the delivery of College 1. As I describe in chapter seven, College 1 instructors expressed a range of concerns around and strategies for teaching Chinese international students in their newly untracked classes. They articulated three main strategies for supporting this population of students in their classrooms: making strategic use of small group work, presenting information in multiple ways, and assigning course materials from and about China. Scholarship in higher education and writing studies on teaching international students echoes these strategies for supporting international students both in and outside of the classroom; this scholarship calls for facilitating interaction between domestic and international students, creating resources to meet the specific academic and social needs of Chinese international students, and making use of culturally appropriate and responsive pedagogy. Future professional development trainings for College 1 instructors (or for any instructor teaching untracked first-year literacy or composition classes) would be well-served by offering instructors concrete, practical strategies that align with these three goals described in the scholarship. In line with my first recommendation, these professional development trainings should not be prescriptive, but rather be an

opportunity for instructors to share with each other strategies related to encouraging collaboration between international and domestic students in their classrooms, for example, and to discuss what “culturally responsive pedagogy” looks like in practice. Allowing instructors to share strategies with each other, rather than specifying in advance what those strategies should be, provides instructors the opportunity to give meaningful input into the teaching of the new curriculum and respects their professional expertise.

The second part of my recommendations around teaching Chinese international students draws from my finding that College 1 instructors’ concerns around teaching these students exceeded the scope of the strategies they devised to address them. Instructors voiced two concerns that were not alleviated by their pedagogical strategies: concerns around balancing the needs of international and domestic students in their classrooms, and concerns around the ethics of assessing and grading international students. In chapter seven, I argue that College 1 instructors would likely agree with the conclusions drawn by Ferris et al. (2015), who find that changes to composition instructors’ pedagogy may not be sufficient to meet the needs of all students who enroll in their classes because some international students “appear to be truly unprepared for work at the [University of California] level upon matriculation” (2015:71). Ferris and her colleagues recommend that beyond adapting their pedagogy to best support international students, instructors should also advocate for fair admissions policies that better support student success. They elaborate on this recommendation in the conclusion of their article:

“Even the most enlightened instruction available cannot solve that problem [of underprepared students]; an award-winning calculus professor will likely not be able to teach calculus to a seventh-grade pre-algebra class. Perhaps one takeaway from this investigation is that writing programs need to document student issues more precisely and help various administrative units understand that student qualifications for admission and needs for support upon arrival are just as important as hitting enrollment and revenue targets. If there is a better fit between student preparation and the programs/instructors tasked with supporting them, the results will be more satisfying for everyone.” (Ferris et al. 2015:71)

College 1 instructors may not be in a position to influence how UCSC makes decisions around recruiting and enrolling international students. Short of this more drastic effort, however, several College 1 instructors I spoke with expressed that they felt Chinese international students would be better served by being placed into separate sections of College 1 (even as all other students remained untracked); other instructors argued that all students should take College 1 in a later quarter so that Chinese international students have more time to acclimate to UCSC and gain confidence speaking English before they enroll in College 1. Another suggestion, from writing studies scholars, is to offer more out-of-class instructional support to Chinese international students through writing center tutoring designed specifically to meet the academic needs of these students (Bauer and Picciotto 2012; Nan 2012). All of these suggestions indicate a need for future iterations of College 1 to consider not only pedagogical changes that instructors can make within their classrooms, but also larger, structural changes to the course that will help address the issues of balancing international and domestic students’ needs, as well as ethical concerns around assigning failing grades to international students. Ultimately, to address these concerns, the University of California should reconsider its practices around

recruiting and admitting international students who may be underprepared to succeed at the UC if it hopes for, as Ferris et al. argue, outcomes that are “more satisfying for everyone” (2015:71).

In this section, I have offered recommendations for planning and teaching future iterations of College 1 and, more generally, for teaching academic literacy and first-year composition at the college level. These recommendations center around professional development for instructors. First, I argue that professional development trainings must actively solicit and draw from instructors’ input. Building on this recommendation, I advocate for professional development around College 1, or similar first-year literacy or composition courses, in two areas: how to teach using learning outcomes and how to support Chinese international students in an untracked classroom. The central theme that emerged from my findings, and which informs each of these recommendations, is that implementation of a curricular change is more successful when instructors have meaningful opportunities to provide input into the design and development of the change. As the key institutional actors responsible for implementing curricular change, instructors need to buy in to the change in order to adapt their teaching practices in ways that align not only with the “letter” of the new curriculum, but also with its “spirit.” Developing professional development trainings that recognize and respect instructors’ professional expertise is an important step toward gaining their buy-in to new or ongoing curricular changes.



### ***Limitations of the study and directions for future research***

The design of this study – a qualitative study of a small sample of College 1 instructors at one university that took place during one quarter of instruction – includes many limitations for the generalizability of my findings. First, the study centered on interview and classroom observation data from only ten instructors, of 89 who taught College 1 in Fall 2018. While this qualitative sample was supplemented with a survey administered to all Fall 2018 College 1 instructors, this survey yielded only 29 responses – a response rate of 36.7 percent. Even with the survey responses, then, the data collection captured the perspectives of a minority of College 1 instructors. Future research on College 1 could benefit from interview with and surveys of a larger sample from the population of instructors.

Second, the study was limited to the first quarter of College 1's implementation. As such, this study cannot speak to questions about the implementation of the course long-term, nor can it clearly differentiate between challenges that arose because of the specific College 1 curriculum and those that arose because of the challenges of implementing a new course, more generally. One survey respondent in my study stated about their challenges teaching College 1, "My challenges were typical of the first time through any course." A longitudinal study of College 1 would allow researchers to speak to, for instance, recurring challenges for instructors over several years of teaching College 1, or to the impacts of College 1 on students' success in later courses in the ALC sequence.

Third, the design of this study centered on instructors' sensemaking around the shift to College 1; it was not an evaluation of the impacts or outcomes of the curriculum. The recommendations for practice that I offer in this dissertation address only future professional development for instructors with the purpose of increasing instructors' buy-in to curricular change; my recommendations cannot speak to the curriculum's impact on students, for example, or to research-based best practices around teaching learning outcomes. Further research is needed to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the College 1 curriculum and recommendations for best practices around teaching the course learning outcomes.

Fourth, this study focused entirely on College 1 instructors. Missing from this study are the voices of campus leaders and administrators involved in the design of College 1, and also – most significantly – the voices of the undergraduate students who took the class. A study centered on students' rather than instructors' perspectives could offer, for example, an analysis of the short- and long-term impacts of instructors' efforts to foster engagement across difference and self-efficacy in their College 1 classrooms.

Future research could provide more robust findings about College 1 by addressing the limitations outlined above, while still addressing research questions similar to those that guide this study. At the same time, I believe that future research on College 1 could benefit from considering a wholly new set of research questions. For instance, my interviews with and survey comments from College 1 instructors highlighted a significant concern shared among instructors that was beyond the scope

of my research questions: the conditions of their employment as lecturers at UCSC. Instructors employed as lecturers are generally hired for one-time appointments and thus enjoy little job security; they are also compensated with low wages and may not be eligible for employer insurance benefits. As a result, many instructors teach multiple courses each quarter. Fall 2018 College 1 instructors who responded to my survey reported teaching an average of 2.5 classes during that quarter; one instructor reported teaching seven courses that quarter across three higher education institutions.

College 1 instructors often expressed frustration around their capacity to teach their classes as they best saw fit due to lack of time for planning and grading. Several respondents to my survey expressed the need to pay lecturers for the extra time they spend helping develop and refine the College 1 curriculum; one instructor responded to my question about what they would like their Provost and campus administrators to know about their experience teaching College 1 by elaborating on this issue:

“[E]veryone must be aware of the enormous uncompensated labor involved in teaching this class, especially as a new course still under development. Never minding the more mechanical accounting of new assignments, new rubrics, feedback, and measures for success, new reading, new handouts, etc., the minimum increase is a three-fold increase in intellectual labor – understanding the course, teaching the course, and critically evaluating the course (then, of course, improving/fixing the course)... The class is not a usual 5-unit class from an instructors’ perspective. For it to work out sustainably going forward, support for collaborative teaching and professional development must be added above the current faculty compensation.”

The success of future iterations of College 1 lies only in part with the decisions instructors make in their classrooms; ultimately, creating conditions for these instructors to earn an adequate living and feel respected as professionals in their field

is crucial to the success of any curricular reform effort implemented in a higher education institution.

## APPENDIX A: Participant recruitment materials

I sent the following email to each College 1 instructor listed in the UCSC Schedule of Classes in Summer 2018:

*Subject line:* Participate in study of instructors' views on College 1

*Body of email:*

Dear Prof. [LAST NAME],

My name is Megan Alpine and I'm a PhD Candidate in Sociology at UCSC. For my dissertation project, I am looking at the implementation of College 1 in Fall 2018 from the perspective of instructors. I found you listed in the Fall 2018 Schedule of Classes as a College 1 instructor for [COLLEGE NAME].

I am reaching out to you to see if you would be interested in participating in my study. By participating, you'll have a chance to shape how College 1 is taught in future quarters. It's also an opportunity to talk through the challenges and successes you experience in your classroom!

Here are a few details about my study:

- **Your participation:** 2 observations of your class in Fall 2018, and 2 audio-recorded interviews with you (in person or Skype). I have flexibility around dates, times, and locations for observations and interviews.
- **Confidentiality:** Your identity will be known only to myself and my dissertation adviser, Dr. Rebecca London
- **Interview topics:** Fostering students' sense of self-efficacy, encouraging engagement across difference, teaching metacognition, and your views on the implementation of College 1
- **Why participate:** I will create a short report for College Provosts, the Writing Program, and the Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning (CITL) based on my research findings and your anonymized input. In this report, I aim to highlight instructors' perspectives - and not just students' academic outcomes - as an important dimension to consider when assessing the implementation of College 1.
- **Survey:** I will be conducting a short online survey of all College 1 instructors at the end of Fall quarter. This is another opportunity to give your feedback on College 1, anonymously, if you do not want to participate in the interviews and observations.

I am attaching a one-page description of my study if you would like to read more about my study.

**Please respond to this email by Friday, September 21st** if you are interested in participating in this study, or if you have any questions. You're also welcome to give me a call! Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,  
Megan Alpine  
Phone: (208) 830-4099

*Attachment:* College 1 Implementation Study description (see Figure 10)



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

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### College 1 Implementation Study

**Background:** This study examines the implementation of the College 1, the first course in the new Academic Literacy Curriculum (ALC). College 1, which replaces the existing Core course across all Colleges in Fall 2018, introduces a focus on academic literacy and on what the proposal names as “critical habits of mind:” metacognition, self-efficacy, and interpersonal engagement across differences.<sup>1</sup> The Colleges will be conducting an evaluation of College 1 using survey responses and academic outcomes among its first cohort of students; in contrast, this study will examine the implementation of the new College 1 curriculum from the perspective of the instructors who teach it. |

**Study Focus:** The proposed study will examine the implementation of the College 1 curriculum in Fall 2018 as taught by 10 instructors from the Writing Program and from the Colleges. The central research questions of the study are: How do College 1 instructors teach the College 1 Learning Outcomes centered on “critical habits of mind” in their classrooms? How do they make decisions about teaching practices related to these Learning Outcomes? Lastly, how do they navigate teaching-related dilemmas that arise in the implementation of the C1 curriculum?

**Data Collection:** Data collected for this project will include:

- Observations of 10 College 1 classrooms, taught by 10 different instructors, across all 10 Colleges (1 instructor per College). Each classroom will be observed twice: once during the first 5 weeks of the quarter, once during the latter 5 weeks of the quarter (a total of 20 observations).
- Two interviews with each participating College 1 instructors (a total of 20 interviews). The first of these interviews will be conducted within a week (7 days) following the first observation of their classroom; the second interview will take place during finals week of Fall quarter 2018 or in January 2019.
- Content analysis of all Fall 2018 College 1 syllabi, centered on content related to the “critical habits of mind.”
- End-of-quarter survey of all Fall 2018 College 1 instructors.

**Reporting:** The researcher will present a report of the study’s findings to the Writing Program, the Council of Provosts, and the Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning in Spring 2019. This report will highlight instructors’ successes and challenges in implementing the College 1 curriculum.

**Principal Investigator (PI) Contact:**

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<sup>1</sup> [https://senate.ucsc.edu/committees/cep-committee-on-educational-policy/Academic\\_Literacy\\_Curriculum\\_COP\\_Writing-Program-Joint-Proposal-10-04-17.pdf](https://senate.ucsc.edu/committees/cep-committee-on-educational-policy/Academic_Literacy_Curriculum_COP_Writing-Program-Joint-Proposal-10-04-17.pdf), pg. 1

Figure 10: Document providing overview of College 1 Implementation study

I sent the following email to each College 1 instructor currently teaching College 1 during Week 10 of the 2018 Fall quarter:

*Subject line:* Survey of College 1 instructors

*Body of email:*

Dear Fall 2018 College 1 instructors,

My name is Megan Alpine and I'm a PhD Candidate in Sociology at UCSC. For my dissertation project, I am looking at the implementation of College 1 in Fall 2018 from the perspective of instructors. I emailed each of you just before the start of the quarter to ask if you would be interested in being interviewed and observed for my study (unless your name was not yet listed in the UCSC Schedule of Classes). Many of you responded, and that part of my project is nearly complete!

**Now, I'm writing to ask for your participation in an anonymous online survey of all Fall 2018 College 1 instructors. The survey can be accessed here: <https://goo.gl/forms/7JHvHmwNQ6YgKLkj2>**

The survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. You will need to be logged into your UCSC email account to access the survey. It asks about your approach to and experience teaching College 1, as well as demographic questions that I will use to describe the population of College 1 instructors. All survey questions are optional and may be skipped.

Thank you in advance for your time, and feel free to contact me if you have any questions about my study. I am attaching a one-page description of my study if you would like to read more about the complete study.

Sincerely,  
Megan Alpine  
Phone: (208) 830-4099

*Attachment:* College 1 Implementation Study description (see Figure 10)



## APPENDIX B: Interview protocols

### **Interview Protocol for College 1 Instructors – First Interview**

#### *Introductory questions*

1. Tell me about your teaching history at UCSC. What departments have you taught in, what courses have you taught, and what is your degree in?
2. How do you feel about the changes put in place for College 1?
  - a. Learning Outcomes of College 1? (Review these outcomes.)
  - b. How do you feel about the “untracking” of this class – that students’ high school and standardized test performance is no longer considered when placing students into College 1 sections?
3. How did you hear about the change from the old Core class to College 1?
  - a. Were you at all involved in the development of the syllabi?
  - b. Did you attend any meetings or professional development opportunities to learn more about College 1?

#### *General teaching philosophy and pedagogical decision-making questions*

1. Overall, what is your approach to teaching College 1?
2. How do you think the course is going so far?
  - a. What are some things that are going well?
  - b. Have there been any unexpected positives so far? Describe.
  - c. What are some challenges, if any, that you have faced so far in teaching this course?
  - d. Can you describe one challenging situation that you’ve faced in teaching this course? What was challenging for you about this situation, and how did you deal with it?
  - e. Do you anticipate any new challenges arising? Describe.
  - f. How would you describe the overall climate or “feel” of your College 1 classroom so far?

*Classroom observation-centered questions*

1. Could you talk me through your lesson plan for the class I observed?
  - a. What were you hoping students would get out of the lesson?
  - b. What specific Learning Outcomes or objectives did you have in mind in planning this lesson? How do you see this lesson connecting to the overall Learning Outcomes for the course?
  - c. Do you feel that students met your objectives or goals for the lesson plan? Why or why not?
  - d. How do you feel the lesson went overall?
  - e. Did any challenging situations come up for you during this class? Describe.
2. (Ask about any specific activities or situations I observed, if not yet addressed.)

*Concluding questions*

1. (If not yet addressed) In my study, I'm focusing on the College 1 Learning Outcomes related to engagement across difference, self-efficacy, and metacognition. (Review Learning Outcomes that address these.) Could you say more about how you think about these issues in your approach to teaching College 1?
  - a. What is your understanding of "engagement across difference," "self-efficacy," and/or "metacognition"?
  - b. How important do you think these Learning Outcomes are? How do you prioritize them in your class?
2. And lastly, imagining that you had no resource constraints: what do you think is the best way to teach students academic literacy and critical habits of mind?
3. Is there anything else you think I should know that I haven't asked about?

**Interview Protocol for College 1 Instructors – Second Interview**

*Overall reflection on the course and pedagogical decision-making questions*

1. Overall, how do you think your College 1 course went this quarter?

2. How would you describe your *teaching philosophy* in your College 1 class(es)?
3. Tell me about some *teaching strategies* that you felt were effective in your College 1 class(es).
  - a. Probes: What were your strategies for teaching metacognition?
  - b. ... self-efficacy?
  - c. ... engagement across difference?
4. What was your approach to evaluating student work (grading) in your class(es)?
5. What were you hoping your College 1 students would learn in your class?
  - a. Probes: Which Learning Outcomes did you prioritize?
  - b. Did you have other goals for your classes that aren't addressed by the Learning Outcomes? What were these?
6. What are some challenges, if any, that you faced in teaching this course?
  - a. Probes: Can you describe one challenging situation that you faced in this class?
  - b. What was challenging for you about this situation?
  - c. How did you deal with it?

*2<sup>nd</sup> observation* – [Ask about a specific incident if relevant]

*Implementation questions* – [Only for instructors who didn't talk about how they learned about the changes in the first interview]

1. How did you first learn about the changes to Core (now "College 1," as of Fall 2018)?
  - a. Probe: What was your involvement in the development of the College 1 curriculum at the College(s) at which you taught?

*Concluding questions*

1. Now that you've taught the new curriculum, what do you think about the College 1 Learning Outcomes (academic literacy skills, metacognition, self-efficacy, and engagement with others across difference)?
  - a. Probe: What, if anything, would you take out of, add to, or change about these Learning Outcomes?
2. What do you think about the "untracking" of Core?
  - a. Probe: How did this play out in your class(es)?
  - b. How did untracking influence (or not) your approach to teaching College 1?
3. Is there anything else you think I should know about your experience with College 1 that I haven't asked about?

## **Interview Protocol for Elizabeth Abrams**

### *ALC development questions*

1. Can you tell me about your role in developing College 1 and the ALC?
2. What is your understanding of the reasons for the changes to Core and to the sequence of first-year writing courses?
3. What do you see as the key pedagogical beliefs or values informing the ALC?
  - a. What scholarship informs the ALC? The “sample bibliography” in the ALC proposal, and/or other scholarship?
4. How did the CoP and the Writing Program arrive at these pedagogical beliefs or values, in your view?
  - a. Where did the focus on the ACMES (analysis, critical thinking, metacognition, engagement across difference, & self-efficacy) come from?
  - b. Where did the choice to “untrack” College 1 come from? The ALC proposal says that the Committee on Educational Policy called for this; can you say more about this?
5. What was the role of Core instructors in developing the ALC?

### *College 1 implementation questions*

6. What challenges did you anticipate would emerge in implementing College 1?
  - a. For instructors, students, administrators?
7. What challenges, if any, did you face as the Merrill Provost with regards to College 1 this past Fall?
8. What challenges, if any, did you face as an instructor of College 1?
  - a. What was your approach to teaching the “critical habits of mind:” metacognition, engagement across difference, & self-efficacy?
  - b. How did “untracking” go in your class? The ALC proposal often mentions the “recursive” approach informing College 1. How did this work out in your class?
  - c. What was the “anchor assignment” at Merrill, and how did that go?

### *Concluding question*

9. Is there anything else you think I should know about developing or implementing College 1 that I haven’t asked about?

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