Perceptions on Collaborative Writing: Exploring Student and Instructor Perceptions of Collaborative Writing Practices in Professional Communication

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PERCEPTIONS ON COLLABORATIVE WRITING: EXPLORING STUDENT AND INSTRUCTOR PERCEPTIONS OF COLLABORATIVE WRITING PRACTICES IN PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION

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PERCEPTIONS ON COLLABORATIVE WRITING: EXPLORING STUDENT AND INSTRUCTOR PERCEPTIONS OF COLLABORATIVE WRITING PRACTICES IN PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION

by

LEVI MARTIN, B.A., M.A.

DISSERTATION

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In harmony with the focus of this dissertation, this work is first and foremost a collaborative endeavor (isn’t everything?). There are so many people—from family to peers to colleagues to mentors to scholars—without which none of this would have ever come to fruition. From casual conversations to long, intense research and writing sessions, the entirety of my conversation is to thank. My wife, Elsa, should really be listed as a co-author here for the amount of conversation and ideas she has given me. Elsa, without doubt, this would have never been completed without you. My director, Dr. Maggy Smith, thank you for your patience, persistence, and guidance. My parents, thank you for your constant support. Finally, my research was supported by the Juergen & Phyllis Hunter Strauss Fellowship, offered by The Department of English at The University of Texas at El Paso. I greatly appreciate both the English Department and the Strauss Fellowship for granting me this support.
Abstract

This research study focuses on the perceptions of collaborative writing held by undergraduate students enrolled in professional writing course at The University of Texas at El Paso. Working with current scholarship surrounding effective collaborative writing practices as well as Achievement Goal Theory (AGT), the author observed two different courses of professional writing. Three types of data were collected: 1. survey responses from participants at the beginning-of and end-of the course; 2. interviews with participants at the end of the semester; and 3. classroom observations. The range of data collected provided similar and different perceptions held by the student participants. The research showed that students largely held positive perceptions of the need for collaborative writing skillsets as they enter the workforce as well as positive perceptions of the value of collaborative writing in their education. However, this did not correspond with students’ enjoyment of collaborative writing activities. Additionally, the research showed that the ways in which the students viewed collaborative writing was largely dependent on the exposure to the discussion and practices exampled in the course. These results led to The Spectrum of Collaborative Writing which provides a framework for understanding collaborative writing practices and the benefits associated with different types of collaborative writing practices.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Writing is not something that comes easily or naturally to me. Writing is a difficult and painstaking process for me that requires me to force myself to do something that I know is difficult and that I do not like to do. This understanding and process is compounded by the fact that a large number of things I take on come rather easily to me. Yet, I have chosen—from the beginning of my foray into the academy—to focus on writing. First with my bachelor’s degree in Print Media Journalism and immediately followed by my stumble into the field of Rhetoric and Writing in pursuit of my master’s, despite my initial interest in literature. I still do not enjoy writing. Even as I sit here struggling on the beginnings of my very overdue dissertation—the last requirement I need to fulfill for my PhD in Rhetoric and Composition Studies—I question the choices I have made that have led me to a career that is largely dependent on my ability to write and teach writing. I am not comfortable with this feeling of being lost and uncertain.

I do, however, enjoy teaching. I can teach writing. I have learned so much more about writing from teaching writing than I have by formally studying writing. Working with students and discussing topics, organization, and even grammar has given me so much more insight into writing than the mounds of journal articles that line my desk. While I don’t dismiss the background and insight that these articles give me in the classroom, it is the actual practice and development of student writing that has taught me about writing. There is something incredibly rewarding and insightful about watching a student overcome problems in their own writing and produce texts that are beyond what they initially sought out to create. Watching students’ journeys gives me the same feeling that I get from listening to a passionate speaker; this inspiration that I can move beyond the stagnation that seems to occupy my work at times—that I can produce a text that is beyond what I have initially sought to create.

When researching and looking for a topic for my dissertation, despite my interest in a number of relevant topics, I, again, took the route to working on something that I do not enjoy: collaborative writing. With writing already being a problematic endeavor for me, collaborative writing just compounds this issue. Now I am not just faced with my own writing issues, but I have also to contend with the issues of others. Thinking back on my time in writing classes as a
student, by far the majority of writing classes required me to write collaboratively at one point or another--usually for the final project. I have recently spent some time looking back at these collaborative compositions and have asked myself if the work that came from these collaborative projects is what I would have produced on my own, whether it be better or worse, or, more specifically, working to find my voice in these writings—a task that has proven to be somewhat difficult. At times I can point to ideas and prose that I know were mine. At other times, I cannot even remember ever working on the project. I take this to be indicative of my level of participation in the project.

Yet, despite my unfamiliarity with these texts, they must have achieved their goals at the time, as I was able to pass the classes and move on to the next. What made these projects successful if I cannot even find myself in them? How can I be successfully evaluated in my ability if I didn’t really write all that much? These are the questions that ultimately led me to my dissertation topic. I was never taught how to write collaboratively. Yes, I was told many times that I needed to write collaboratively, but I was not told how to do this. I can remember being taught how to conduct meetings, take meeting minutes, and work as a group, but not how to actually write anything together. This resulted in my groups taking the “divide and conquer” approach—an approach I often see students in my composition courses taking. Specifically, we would all meet as a group, generally very briefly, and decide who would do what. I would work on the first five pages with the other members of the group also taking their five pages and we would reconvene at another time to mash it all together. Inevitably we would wait until the week or even day before the assignment was due to take what we had all written and put it together with an extremely brief edit. This process produced, as I can now see, a very disjointed work. And, at times a 20-page paper that has four different parts each with its own distinct introduction, body, and conclusion, as that is how we were taught to write. We never stopped to consider the other authors and their contributions. We focused on our part and our page count. This is not collaborative writing. Or is it?

Collaborative writing is such a large part of what I do now I am at a loss to explain why I was never taught how to do this effectively. It is not because research showing how veteran
writers effectively write collaboratively is sparse, rather it is quite plentiful. Ede and Lunsford’s (1990) monumental *Singular Texts/Plural Authors* gives readers a wonderfully insightful look at how writing is actually done collaboratively and even a discussion surrounding the pedagogy of collaboration. Furthermore, wonderful research has been done on large scale professional collaborative writing projects by Geoffrey Cross (1994, 2001, & 2011). There is by far no lack of research into collaborative writing. Scholars and educators are fully aware of the necessity and prevalence of collaborative writing in the workforce. We can see evidence of this in the prevalence of collaborative writing projects assigned (hoping that they are assigned with a pedagogical purpose as opposed to a way of cutting down on grading). This all leads me to ask myself if everyone is aware of how important collaborative writing skills are and how much these students will actually be writing collaboratively, why is this not more heavily taught and are these students themselves aware of the prevalence of collaborative writing in the workforce?

As I discussed with my own collaborative writing experiences, collaboration plays an integral role in the coursework that takes place throughout an individual’s undergraduate education. From projects that ask student teams to work towards a common goal in science labs to writing classrooms that task students to compose research collaboratively, effective teamwork skills quickly become necessary in undergraduate education. The goals and purposes surrounding these pedagogical choices are plentiful: from providing students with the opportunity to work out problems with others in an effort to provide a more fruitful education to breaking down the solitary walls that students tend to place themselves in—a paradigm often discussed and used in writing classrooms (Cooper & Holzman, 1989). As a composition instructor, I am quite familiar with the displeasure that students emit when collaborative projects are introduced. And, despite the objection to these types of projects, I often find that at the end of these assignments, students are often very happy with the collaborative experience. Witnessing and experiencing this contradiction in collaborative endeavors has led me towards further inquiry into collaboration, specifically towards understanding how students’ perceptions of the value of collaborative skills influence the development of these skills.
In line with the prevalence of team projects found in undergraduate coursework, collaboration can be found in just about every professional field from computer engineering to the sciences to technical writing. With the heavy recurrence of collaborative skill sets being utilized within professional fields, it makes sense that undergraduate education places such a strong emphasis on collaboration in the classroom. However, this link from classroom to workplace is not always made clear to students. Recent professional publications such as the Conference Board—a global independent, non-partisan, and non-profit business membership and research association—have showcased the need for collaborative skill sets going so far as to list collaboration as a “core competency” (The Conference Board, 2011) which they define as being “knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviors that contribute to an employee’s job success and that are often included in corporate human resource development plans” (p. 15). The ability to work with others to complete projects in a collaborative environment is a highly desired skill in the workplace. With that in mind, my dissertation research is guided by the overarching concern as to whether or not students have positive perception regarding the need to develop these skill sets in preparation for joining the professional workforce.

However, given the direct aim at collaborative writing that my research is built upon, an understanding of what collaborative writing is, in relation to this study, needs to be clearly defined. Collaborative writing is understood to be a multitude of practices from discipline to discipline and even from individual to individual. Research about collaborative writing has, itself, provided a variety of definitions of collaborative writing. For example, Allen, Atkinson, Morgan, Moore, & Snow (as cited in Ede & Lunsford, 1990) established a three-point definition from descriptions provided by experienced collaborators which states that collaborative writing features

1. Production of a shared document
2. Substantive interaction among members
3. Shared decision-making power over and responsibility for the document (p. 15).
Similarly, Bosley (as cited in Ede & Lunsford, 1990) defined collaborative writing as being, “two or more people working together to produce one written document in a situation in which a group takes responsibility for having produced the document” (p. 15). Both of these definitions focus primarily on the document being produced and secondarily on the group or individuals producing the document and their methods for doing so. Ede & Lunsford (1990) themselves took a step back and broadly defined collaborative writing for the purposes of their research as being, “any writing done in collaboration with one or more persons” (p. 15).

For the purposes of the present research, an emphasis on both the document and methods is necessary as the students in the classes studied are working on developing their collaborative writing skills in conjunction with professional writing skills. Thus, for the purposes of this research study, collaborative writing is defined as being two or more individuals working jointly with one another, using a variety of methods, to create a single document or project with a common, shared goal, for which all individuals are equally accountable. With this definition of collaborative writing in mind, the next section will work to delineate the purpose of my dissertation research.

**Purpose of the Study**

Realizing the purpose or reasons behind an achievement or task has been shown to increase one’s learning in the related area (Pintrich, 2000). These goals, referred to in Educational Psychology as *Achievement Goals* are understood as "the purposes or reasons an individual is pursuing an achievement task (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). It has been noted by researchers that students bring different goals with them into the classroom and the positive impact of initial motivations (achievement goals) on subsequent learning (Wolters, 2004). Working to develop an understanding of the value students place on collaborative learning, the present research aims to understand the value that students place on collaboration both during their education and the role that it will play upon their joining the professional workplace.
In order to further understand the variables at play in the successful transfer of collaborative skill sets from the professional writing classroom to the workplace, focus is placed on the perceptions\(^1\) surrounding collaborative writing held by undergraduate students enrolled in these courses. The purpose of the present grounded theory study is to develop an understanding of the perceptions and motivations held by college students within two upper division professional writing courses—one Technical Writing course and one Workplace Writing course—and how these perceptions and motivations can be used to further develop pedagogical practices aimed at developing students’ collaborative writing skills in preparation for entering the workforce. These upper division courses were specifically chosen for this research as they both focus on developing students writing skills that is directly applicable to their future workplace writing practices—a focus that is central to the subject matter of the two courses. Additionally, by working with upper division courses the students will have, hopefully, had past experiences with collaborative writing and developed some perceptions, either negative or positive, regarding the practice.

**Found in the Dissertation**

In the chapters that follow, I will contextualize, detail, and discuss the present research study:

- Chapter 2 develops the theoretical grounding for the present study. This grounding is developed by discussing the foundation of research that has been established within collaborative writing research including a history of relevant theoretical research in social constructionism, social cognitivism, and achievement goal theory. Furthermore, studies in collaborative writing in the workplace, the technology used, as well as

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\(^1\)For the purposes of this research study, perceptions are defined as the interpretation or view that is held regarding someone or something.
research about undergraduates and collaborative writing are presented in relation to the current study.

- Chapter 3 describes the methodological approach that was taken in the research project. This chapter provides a clear understanding of the methods used, why they were used, and what effect using these methods had on the research and/or results.

- Chapter 4 provides the results of the research detailed in Chapter 3. Details are provided regarding the methods for collecting and analyzing the data as well as the resulting data. The gathered data is described and analyzed under the provided guidelines.

- Chapter 5 provides an analysis of the data presented in Chapter 4. Working from previous studies in collaborative writing and connecting these studies in to the current study, the data is used to interpret the results of the research questions. Additionally, limitations of the present study as well as recommendations for future research are provided.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Research surrounding collaborative writing is plentiful within Rhetoric and Composition studies; from large-scale, workplace collaborations reported by Cross (1994, 2001, & 2011) to work discussing the habits of seasoned collaborators to those of beginning writers (Allen, Atkinson, Morgan, Moore, & Snow, 1987). While research surrounding this practice is vast, research focused on the perceptions that students have regarding the practice is not—with the research that has been conducted in regards to perceptions is largely focused around second language (L2) leaners’ reaction to collaborative writing (Dobao, 2013). In an effort to expand the scholarship aimed at collaborative writing and student perceptions therein, this chapter will work to do the following:

1. Discuss the definition of collaborative writing is defined as being according to the scholarship and the present research.
2. Discuss research surrounding collaborative writing within undergraduate classes that use collaborative writing assignments.
3. Discuss collaborative writing in the classroom and in the workplace.

What is collaborative writing?

James Watson, winner of the 1962 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for his co-discovery (with Maurice Wilkins and Francis Crick) of the double-helix DNA molecule, aptly stated that, “Nothing new that is really interesting comes without collaboration.” While the idea of individual brilliance is one that is deeply rooted in modern culture, collaboration is unquestionably at the forefront of human advancement—from technological, architectural, educational, and physiological advancements, collaboration plays a critical and necessary role without which these achievements would never have come to fruition (Johnson et al., 1998). The development and understanding of collaboration within education has been a topic of great collaboration in and of itself—from debates regarding what actually constitutes collaboration (Katz & Martin, 1997; Subramanyam, 1983) to what makes for effective collaboration (Ede & Lunsford, 1990; Topping, Nixon, Sutherland, & Yarrow, 2000; Rojas-Drummond & Mercer,
When collaboration and writing meet, despite the somewhat narrowing of the topic, the debates continue. This section provides a background and basis for what scholarship says regarding what collaborative writing is and what constitutes effective collaborative writing practices.

Collaborative writing is understood to be a multitude of practices from discipline to discipline and even from individual to individual. Research within collaborative writing has, itself, provided a variety of definitions of collaborative writing. For example, in building their own definition for collaborative writing, Ede & Lunsford (1990) reference Allen, Atkinson, Moore, & Snow (1987) as establishing a three-point definition from descriptions provided by experienced collaborators which states that collaborative writing features:

- Production of a shared document
- Substantive interaction among members
- Shared decision-making power over and responsibility for the document (p. 15).

Additionally, Ede & Lunsford (1990) cite Bosley (1989) as defining collaborative writing as, “two or more people working together to produce one written document in a situation in which a group takes responsibility for having produced the document” (p. 15). Both of these definitions focus primarily on the document being produced and secondly on the group or individuals producing the document and their methods for doing so. To conclude their definition, Ede & Lunsford (1990) take a step back and broadly define collaborative writing for the purposes of their research as being, “any writing done in collaboration with one or more persons” (p. 15). However, despite the initial broad definition, Ede & Lunsford (1990) later, in response to their research findings, modify their definition to include two different modes of collaboration: the hierarchical and the dialogic. The predominant hierarchical mode of collaborative writing is heavily structured collaboration often used in “situations that locate power in structurally oppressive ways” (p. 134). Conversely, the less frequent dialogic mode of collaborative writing is less structured and the roles within it are fluid and members “generally value the creative tension inherent in multivoiced and multivalent ventures” (p. 133).
Beyond the seminal research from Ede & Lunsford, definitions surrounding collaborative writing are often constructed contextually for the specifics of the research study or in reflection of the research. In response to the heavy focus on collaborative writing with composition studies, Farkas (1991) responded with a discussion of collaborative writing as it relates to software development. Farkas argues that researchers within composition studies need to expand the focus of collaborative writing beyond being focused on the activity of writing, but also the countless “forms of human activity” (p. 13). Building on this argument, Farkas (1991) provides a four-point definition of collaborative writing as being

- Two or more people jointly composing the complete text of a document
- Two or more people contributing components to a document
- One or more persons modifying, by editing and/or reviewing, the document
- One person working interactively with one or more persons and drafting a document based on the ideas of the person or persons (p. 14).

While Farkas draws numerous comparisons between software development/coding and writing, one specific difference he points out is the clarity of terms and concepts within software development and works to provide precise and clear definition of collaborative writing. Despite this assertion, the definition is in line with Ede & Lunsford’s (1990) modes of collaborative writing. Ens (2013) argues that a number of contemporary definitions of collaborative writing still remain under the hierarchical and the dialogic modes put forth by Ede & Lunsford (1990). In fact, in a survey of scholarly articles related to collaboration in the 1990s, Thompson (2001) found that the majority of research on collaboration composed similar definitions to Ede & Lunsford’s 1990 definition. This focus on the power and, I argue, ownership is a central theme to definitions of collaborative writing.

Building on this theme, and for the purposes of the present research, an emphasis on both the document and methods is necessary as the students are working on developing their collaborative writing skills in conjunction with professional writing skills. Thus, for the purposes of this research study, collaborative writing is defined as the following: two or more individuals working jointly with one another, using a variety of methods, to create a single document or
project with a common, shared goal, for which all individuals are equally accountable. Building on these definitions of collaborative writing, the next section will discuss research surrounding undergraduate students and collaborative writing.

**The Importance of Undergraduate Collaborative Writing.** Defining and characterizing what collaborative writing is understood to be has been studied by several scholars and often works to include activities beyond that of the actual writing of the piece. The skills associated with successful collaborative writing are similar to those required for collaborative learning. Bruffee (2003) defines collaborative learning as a “form of indirect teaching in which the teacher sets the problem and organizes students to work it out collaboratively” (p. 418). While Bruffee’s definition is a broad and overarching theme surrounding collaboration, it is necessary to work to further develop an understanding surrounding collaboration within specific disciplines and, more directly, within specific classrooms with a special focus on what the goals for collaboration both are and should be. Both Faigley and Miller (1982) and Ede and Lunsford (1990) showed that an overwhelming number of writers were required to write collaboratively at work. Despite the frequent occurrence of collaboration in workplace settings verified by Faigley & Miller and Ede & Lunsford’s early research, Allen et al. (1987) argue that most research in technical communication has focused on other aspects of the writing process (style, invention, formatting, editing, etc.). They assert that writing instructors interested in collaboration have had to extract facts about collaboration from
research directed towards other disciplines which leads to the information being fragmented and unfocused.

Despite this fragmentation of discipline directed research on collaboration, the skills necessary in collaborative learning and the relationship between these skills and the workplace is well documented. Once collaborative groups are formed, it is important to understand the dynamics of the learning that takes place and the way in which groups make decisions. Collaborative learning and, ultimately, collaborative decision making involve complex skills which involve learning to argue, present compelling evidence, and persuade (Wallis, 2006). Unless a group is introduced and tasked with using the aforementioned skills, they cannot progress. According to Wallis (2006), these group skills are expected by employers in the workplace. The need for the development of these group skills is compounded by the need for students to have a working knowledge of all facets of communication. Carliner (2001) points out that managers of technical communication often rely on hiring people who communicate in their medium with writers hiring only writers and visual designers only hiring visual designers. Despite this hiring practice, these professional writers are often asked to solve problems that frequently involve graphic design, editorials, and tool skills, all involving collaboration (Cross, 2011). While the development of communication practices is often at the forefront of both the technical communication and composition classroom, a focus on the development of collaborative writing skills required in the workplace is generally not. Johnson et al. (1998) infers that this could be due to students not having been taught how to work cooperatively with one another as the prevailing culture and rewards systems of both society and colleges are generally orientated towards competitive and individualistic work.

Echoing the arguments put forth by Johnson et al. (1998) regarding students’ developments of orientating their work individualistically, Farkas (1991), in his discussion on software development and collaboration, also draws this connection. Farkas adds that, “Programmers, like writers, form strong emotional commitments to their work” (p. 23). Coupling the influence of competitive individualism with strong connections to personal writing, what
Farkas calls *private masterpieces*, creates a scenario for students that is new and uncomfortable. Having to share work with peers for the first time can be a daunting task; however, as discussed by Farkas (1991), the development of these skills is extremely necessary to be competitive and knowledgeable in the workplace.

With the large need for collaborative skills in the workplace, an understanding of what is taking place within the collaborative writing classroom is needed. Classroom research surrounding collaborative writing encompasses a number of sub-areas of collaborative writing instruction and effective practices, often focused on individual case studies which, as the previous critique by Allen et al. (1987) highlight, requires the extraction of these practices from the research.

In one such study, Davis & Estey (1977) described their experiences with developing collaborative writing skills in their student teams. The study describes sophomores at Boston University College who were tasked with examining a specific problem in the city and composing a collaborative paper with a minimum of 50 pages in teams of 4-7 students. Upon completion of the paper, the students were then required to defend their paper in “a two-hour oral examination in which each student was held accountable for all areas of the paper, not just the part of the paper he/she wrote or for which he/she had done the research” (p. 204). The students were then given individual grade on the oral examination which comprised 30 percent of their final semester grade. To aid the teams in the development of these documents, the faculty required the teams to submit outlines and rough drafts of the assignment and met with the students on a regular basis to evaluate the progress the teams were making. Despite the positive experiences relayed by the faculty and students who participated, the faculty were disappointed by the quality of the papers the students produced. The faculty noted that the compositions tended to be “nothing more than a compendia of 10-15 page essays written by individual members of the groups” (p. 204).

Moving on to the next school year and working to adjust their pedagogical approach in response to the less than ideal papers they received, Davis & Estey (1977) made a number of
adjustments. While the requirements of the assignment stayed the same, the students were now required to produce instructor-directed opening and closing chapters and were provided with 13-page manual written by the faculty to guide group writing on specific topics (e.g., research, focussing, organization, proofreading). Additionally, the students were required to complete team writing assignments prior to having to work with one another on the larger project in order to provide time to develop better interpersonal communication and also met with counselors to alleviate in interpersonal issues. This case study of how collaboration was implemented in Boston University College provides the reader with information on how the researchers worked to alleviate issues within the collaborative writing groups they were working with in an effort to provide details that could be extracted and adapted to other instances.

In another study, Woolever (1991) argues for the inclusion and benefits of collaborative writing in the undergraduate classroom. Woolever (1991) provides six key point on the benefits of collaborative writing.

• Collaborative writing functions as a heuristic for discovery both of ideas and of organizing principles.
• Collaborative writing focuses on writing as problem solving.
• Collaborative writing gives writers a sense of audience early in the process.
• Collaborative writing allows writers to see that finding a voice depends on understanding the social milieu in which they write.
• Collaborative writing allows for editing intervention early in the process.
• Collaborative writing parallels the way writing is done in the professional world.

Working to expand on these benefits, and in line with the assertions made by Allen et al. (1987), Woolever (1991) states, “Rather than discussing these concepts in the abstract, I thought it would be best to illustrate specific ways collaboration work in various kinds of advanced composition classes” (p. 5). Woolever (1991) provides six examples of “successful” classroom collaborative writing practices as they have been enacted in classes from advanced writing seminars to technical writing giving the reader the opportunity to evaluate and adapt these practices as they see fit.
While these studies worked to provide an overview of how collaborative writing was successfully enacted within their specific practices, the research surrounding collaborative writing, as previously mentioned, encompasses a number of sub-areas of collaborative writing instruction and effective practices. The research within these sub-areas also, like the research on collaborative writing projects as a whole, are most often provided in case study examples. Research reporting classroom practices focused on specific collaborative planning, peer review, and conferencing will be discussed in the sections that follow.

**Collaborative Writing and Planning Research.** Planning skills play a foundational role in collaborative writing projects and are the focus of a number of collaborative writing research projects (Burnett, 1990; Flower & Higgins, 1991; Gist, 1994; Wallace, 1994). Effective planning and mapping projects, like any skill, are ones that develop and fine tune over time. Experienced collaborators are able to plan and follow their maps to meet their initial or modified goals. Eventualities are planned for and built into the project. Again echoing the assertions of competitive individualism previously discussed, Burnett (1990) writes that undergraduate students in their third year and beyond are beginning to learn and work within the disciplinary content of their writing; however, they often still struggle during planning. Refreshingly shifting the focus away from the student and their practices, Burnett (1990) is quick to focus on the instructors providing what is needed for the student.

Building on this issue, Burnett (1990) argues for the usage of collaborative planning as a heuristic in her work on collaborative planning within business communication classrooms. In working to develop the students collaborative planning skills, Burnett structures her courses and all assignments, whether individual, coauthored, or team projects, around collaborative planning. This is done by dividing students into two different roles designed to not only provide students with collaborative planning skills, but also give them the opportunity to, “explore and elaborate
their plans for writing by identifying and then discussing various rhetorical elements and their relationship to each other, including the context in which the document is used” (p.16)—skills which are highly needed for collaboration in the workplace. The roles and responsibilities for students are outlined as the following

- **Planner (Author)**
  - Prepares a preliminary plan *before* meeting with your collaborator(s); be able to explain your plan.
  - Be open to suggestions that may help you improve the plan; respond to comments and contributions to the plan.
  - Give thoughtful responses to questions; respond to challenges.
  - Be flexible so you can improve your plan.

- **Supporters**
  - Be an active listener; ask for explanations and clarifications of the plan.
  - Offer comments that help the writer think about the plan’s strengths and weaknesses; offer relevant contributions to improve the plan.
  - Encourage exploration by asking probing questions; challenge the writer.
  - Be interested, attentive, and engaged. (Burnett, 1990, p. 11).

The benefits of these roles and responsibilities is used as an introduction to the benefits and research surrounding collaborative planning to the students at the beginning of the class. In addition to this introduction, model questions and discussion practices are showcased for the students. In doing so, the students can see the connections between these practices and the development of the project and ideas as well as the needs of their audience. However, Flower & Higgins (1991) argue that the collaborative process is dynamic and students, either planner or supporter, are learning as they collaborate.

In their research on students’ practices surrounding the collaborative planning of a writing assignment, Flower & Higgins (1991) were unable to find a specific pattern students used when planning the writing assignment. They did, however, observe three critical elements of the students’ collaborative planning process: goals, strategies, and awareness. Grouping these elements together, Flower & Higgins (1991) argue that students are utilizing *strategic knowledge*
which, “turns knowledge into a strategic act and that lets writers embed the strategies they control in a coherent theory of action” (p. 50). Building on this strategic knowledge, they argue that collaborative planning provides students with help in negotiating their authority as writers. In utilizing this ability to plan and strategize towards action, a common form of collaboration used within writing classrooms and one that closely resembles the roles and responsibilities discussed by Burnett (1990) is peer review. However, where collaborative planning places its focus on the relevant rhetorical elements, peer review places its focus on the text.

**Peer Review and Conferencing.** Further delineating the tools for collaborative writers are strategies for effective peer review, editing, and revising. Peer review plays a large role in the writing courses that I teach as well as those that I have taken. Working similar to conferences—which will be discussed later—, peer review allows the writer to have a new set of ideas, thoughts, and attitudes applied to their writing and further consider the implications of the writing. However, peer review is only one of the collaborative tools available and, by itself, has no significant effect on improving student writing (Carter, 1982 as cited in Speck, 1999). Flynn (1984) points out that this could be due, in part, to the fact that students are often unwilling to offer negative feedback to one another and are, presumptively, compensating in their own reading for the writer’s inadequacies.

Nearly 30 years later, Flynn (2011) revisits her assertions on peer review and concludes that, while a number of effective peer review strategies has been researched and presented, “without effective training, students my not be able to provide useful feedback” (para. 24). Furthermore, earlier research on collaborative writing from Brumberger (1999) asserts that this issue is compounded by students being uncomfortable with evaluating one’s classmates and often end up evaluating their peers based more on effort than on actual contributions. One method of peer review that Flynn (2011) discusses to aid student’s ability to provide effective
feedback is Fosmire’s (2010) *Calibrated Peer Review* (CPR). CPR is aimed at providing a program of peer review for large classroom settings and works to automate the process of submitting, distributing, and compiling grades and works by first developing students ability to provide effective evaluations of their peers written works. The process works as follows:

1. The students are given a writing assignment.
2. The students compose and submit their assignment to the software server by a specific deadline.
3. The CPR system provides the students with three instructor-created “calibration” essays to grade according to a rubric.
4. After the students have “passed” the calibration essays which work to ensure they understand the grading criteria, the students then receive three of the peers essays to grade against the same rubric.
5. Students are then called on to evaluate their own essays under the same rubric. The scores the student provides on their own writing is then compared to the scores their peers provided them to evaluate if the students accurately graded their own work. (Fosmire, 2011, p. 158)

While Fosmire’s CPR program is largely aimed at allowing students to provide grading of writing assignments for large classrooms, the system can be modified to include that of peer comments on drafts. By allowing students to practice their peer reviewing and developing a sense of what makes for effective feedback, students can then better provide feedback to their peers. By developing students’ feedback skills, the issue surrounding students’ unwillingness to offer negative feedback argued by Flynn (1984) could be negated.

Focusing on smaller classrooms and also working to make peer review a more beneficial practice for all students, Grimm (1986) developed and implemented guidelines for use with writing groups and peer review within her courses. Observing that students often complain that peer review feels like the “blind leading the blind” (p. 92), Grimm initially focused on providing her students with guiding questions specific to the assignment. For example, questions like “What do you think the main point of the paper is?” and, “What examples does the writer use to support the main idea?” were included on assignment-specific response sheets. However, Grimm noted that students answered the questions with mechanical responses and not responses geared towards aiding the writer. Further developing these guiding questions, Grimm replaced the
response sheets with ten guidelines for writing groups that guides the groups through effective strategies for not only peer review, but also the collaborative writing process as a whole. The ten guidelines, briefly stated, are as follows:

1. Develop a plan of action and account for the time necessary to complete the project.
2. Focus meeting times (class time) on oral communication and complete written responses as homework.
3. Meetings should begin with the author reading their work aloud as other team members follow along on their own copies.
4. Allow for silence after this reading to give team members time to develop their own thoughts on the writing without time pressure.
5. Begin the discussion by focusing on the positive attributes of the writing.
6. Ask the writer probing questions.
7. Elaborate on other’s comments and encourage everyone to contribute.
8. Keep the assignment and audience for the piece in mind.
9. Point to specific parts that you feel are strong.
10. Conclude by giving the writer a few specific items they feel the writer should concentrate on revising (Grimm, 1986).

The guidelines also include 3 points for the writer to keep in mind when receiving feedback:

1. Take notes on your peer’s responses.
2. Decide what changes you would like to make.
3. Limit the defense of your writing. Instead, focus on listening to the readers and ask them questions (Grimm, 1986).

By working to provide the students with guidelines for not only effective peer review, but also for effective collaboration, the students are able to develop skills in project and time management that they can make use of in future project. However, while Grimm (1986) argues for students to complete the oral discussions in class and the writing as homework, advocating for using group activities in business writing classrooms, Cullinan (1987) makes a case for students writing solely in the classroom to more closely mimic the expectations and practices of the workplace. However, it is important to note that Cullinan is focused on the business communication course as opposed to a general writing course and, as such, the outcomes of the
courses are different. In addition to using peer review as a strategy for aiding the development of student collaborative skills, Cronin (1983) argues that the most effective procedure for teaching collaborative writing skills is by combining strategies like peer review with student-teacher conferences.

Conferencing with students regarding their writing and projects has shown to be an effective practice in developing student collaborative writing skills. Harris (1990) argues that students rarely view the instructor as a “helper” in their writing. By conducting conferences with the students, the instructor is allowed to play the role of the audience and ask students open-ended questions that allow the student to further develop their writing. Harris (1990) is quick to note that it is important that the instructor focus on allowing the student to maintain the role of the writer and not take over. Additionally, she argues that instructors can also work to aid students in turning off their internal editor, which she argues can be harsh critics. Ultimately, Harris (1990) is arguing for a writing relationship similar to that found with graduate students and their faculty mentors—one that allows for a conversation to take place regarding the writing while still maintaining the student as the writer. Depending on the number of students an instructor has, this can be an admittedly difficult task.

The collaborative aspect of student-teacher conferences works not on a textual level as peer review does. Rather it places the instructor in a role to aid students in the development of ideas. The talk that aides the development of ideas for writing, Harris (1990) argues, can be such a beneficial part of the production aspect of composing that is should be at the forefront of any invention heuristic that is offered to students. Harris (1990) describes the role of the teacher as a collaborator in student-teacher conferences as

*The teacher is both a partner in the search and also a potential reader asking for information. Being a good listener, as well as offering comment and questions, helps the talk to flow in productive ways. The teacher’s collaborative comments are those which help the writer find her direction and the words to get there.* (p. 156)

These focused comments and the inquisitive collaborative role of the instructor supports and encourages the student’s development of ideas. Furthermore, Bowen (1993) argues that writing conferences can be areas where writers “may reveal something about the goals and decisions that
influenced their writing” (p. 188). Posing these questions and content analysis to the students provides an opportunity for reflection and introspection on their writing. In her research of effective student conferencing, Bowen (1993) provides four “critical characteristics of effective conferences” (p. 191).

- Effective conferences are characterized by reversible role relationships.
- Conferences provide an opportunity to discuss both process and product.
- Conferences offer writers carefully tuned support.
- Conferences provide a predictable structure for writers.

In conducting effective student conferences during the students composing, the instructor not only provides a chance for reflection on the students writing, but also works to provide the students with the ability to recognize and describe the strategies writers use as well as “provide the basis for discussion of students’ roles as peer readers and make students better able to support other writers in the classroom” (Bowen, 1993, p. 199). The development of these peer reader skills would benefit both the student and their peers in future collaborative writing endeavors whether they be in the workforce or in later writing courses such as a professional or technical communication course.

Professional & Technical Communication in the Classroom and the Workplace. In a study that analyzed the content of 55 journal articles published in leading Technical Communication journals from 1990-1999, Thompson (2001) found that the majority of articles focused on classroom collaboration or used classroom examples to support ideas. Other large focuses found within the article were on the workplace, specifically workplace and classroom collaborations, and faculty/student collaborations. Within this survey, Thompson (2001) was
able to categorize all of the articles as displaying one of four distinct modes or models of collaboration. The modes that were identified are as follows

- Hierarchical, formal process, or assembly line model;
- Division of labor;
- Asymmetrical mode; and
- Dialogic, integrative, integrated team, or symphony model. (p. 166)

It is important to note that both the hierarchical and dialogic models as these are the same two modes identified by Ede & Lunsford (1990) and their influence on research surrounding collaborative writing is evident here. With Ede & Lunsford’s *Singular Texts/Plural Authors* being published in 1990, the following year research surrounding collaboration peaked in professional writing publications and slowly declined throughout the decade. While the reasons behind this decline are unclear, it can be argued that the increased reliance on computers in the classroom and online education has taken research on collaborative writing in a new direction and this is supported by Thompson’s (2001) results regarding the discussion of Electronic Technologies and Collaboration within the examined journal articles. Thompson (2001) found that at the beginning of the 1990s discussions surrounding technology and collaboration were largely concerned with the difficulty that technology brought to classroom collaboration. In fact, there was a disbelief that technology could provide “anything close to the degree of interchange, stimulation, and speed accomplished by people working together in the same room” (Olson, 1989, p. 100 as quoted in Thompson, 2001). However, after 1995 the discussions were largely focused on the enhancing collaboration with the use of technology and it was largely agreed upon that technology was an “integral part of collaboration” (Thompson, 2001, p. 166).

Showcasing the increased reliance and usage of technology within collaborative writing education, Paretti, McNair, & Holloway-Attaway (2007) provide a look at the ways in which collaboration took place between a group of U.S. and Swedish students—a collaboration that is far from the early 1990s reactions on technology and the preference towards “people working together in the same room” (Olson, 1989, p. 100). The study focused on the experiences and
practices of Swedish students in a digital media class composing white papers and websites for U.S. engineering students using a distributed work model. The researchers found that while the results of the collaborations were successful, the students lacked the skills and framework associated with successful, distributed-work collaborations.

Further illuminating the issues that students in technical writing classrooms face, Brumberger (1999) provides a window into her technical writing classroom and the collaborative assignments her students work on and the difficulties they experience. Interestingly, Brumberger (1999) notes that none of the students in her class intend to pursue technical writing as a career, rather they often “come to the class with the attitude that they never will really need the material from the course in their careers” (p. 194). Tasked with collaboratively composing a 20-page technical report for a specific, student chosen audience and purpose, the students spend 7 weeks collaborating on the report culminating in a team presentation. Brumberger (1999) observes that teams that are less successful are often characterized by serious conflicts and lack the skills to negotiate these differences resulting in students who were often unwilling to take ownership of the final product.

Case studies showcasing and exampling instances of collaboration as they have been implemented in classrooms are the second most frequent type of research publications found in collaboration within technical and professional writing with research reviews being the first (Thompson, 2001). In these case studies, Thompson (2001) reported that four types of assignments were mentioned:

- Task-Oriented Scenarios: Teams review existing document or compose short documents
- Consulting Project Scenarios: Teams compose larger and more complex documents
- Whole Class Project Scenarios: An entire class collaborates in producing a newsletter or similar document
- Website Composing Scenarios: Teams work with clients and with each other in developing a website

The case study discussed from Brumberger (1999) using collaborative technical reports falls into consulting project scenarios. However, perhaps showcasing the aforementioned increased
discussion surrounding collaborative writing and technology, Paretti, McNair, & Holloway-Attaway’s (2007) case study work to incorporate a mix between a consulting project scenario and a website composing scenario, making use of the client collaboration. This exposure to client-side collaborations within technical and professional writing is a welcome addition to the curriculum and one that is mutually agreed to be beneficial by both workplace practitioners and the academy (Thompson, 2001) as they work to better prepare students for the work they will be taking part in upon joining the professional workforce.

These skills and frameworks are essential to the students as they make the shift from using their skills in a classroom setting to using them in the workforce. The collaboration practices that take place in the workplace are a vital aspect to consider when looking towards the development of efficient classroom collaborative practices. Duin (1991), for example, explained the primary differences between classroom collaboration and workplace collaborative writing by stating, “Whereas collaboration procedures are structured into the workplace and are part of the workplace’s social context for getting this done, such collaboration procedures are less a part of the writing classroom” (p. 127). Following in the footsteps of Ede and Lunsford (1990), Rheling (1994) argues that student writers are concerned about teamwork; whereas, workplace writers are primarily concerned about product criteria. The context, as Duin (1991) stated, of the collaboration as well as the community in which the collaborative writing takes place are stark differences between workplace and classroom practices. Where classroom writing takes place within the context of the classroom as a response to “somewhat predictable rhetorical contexts, often meant to serve a given set of communicative purposes, for a specified single readership” (Bhatia, 1999, p. 22), workplace practices, according to Bremner (2010), are “instituted for pragmatic or instrumental reasons, which relate to the overall goals of the organization” (p. 123).

Demonstrating the skills that technical communicators will need upon entering the workforce, Whiteside (2003) interviewed technical communication graduates and managers to find out what skills students will need before entering business and industry as new technical communicators. Recent graduates stated that they felt their largest deficiencies were in business operations/correspondence, software tools, and project management skills and that the classroom
was overly heavy in theory and did not focus enough on hands-on practical knowledge. The managers similarly responded that business operation skills and project management skills were skills that their new employees lacked. However, the managers also reported that their new technical communicators lacked people skills and interpersonal skills—skills that are developed alongside collaborative writing tasks and instruction.

The context of the writing that takes place within the classroom and the workplace presents a challenge for professional and technical communication instructors. Additionally, the community producing these texts—students versus employees—also differs in diversity. Workplace communicators will often be diverse participants in relation to knowledge, disciplinary background, work styles, and experience—which provides the collaborators with the presence of intertextuality, also a form of collaboration (Bremner, 2010). This is further supported by Cross (2001) who states that workplace collaborators may also have differences in writing approaches. On the other hand, classroom collaborators generally have similar experience, knowledge, and goals (Bremner, 2010). Gollin (1999) argues that collaborative writing practices within the two contexts show very different purposes, scopes, and audiences stating that collaborative writing in classrooms differs from that of workplace practices which are “embedded” and “differ significantly from the writing processes of individuals modeled in traditional pedagogy” (p. 268). The classroom also does not provide students with the structure necessary to assign roles and responsibilities to one another. This lack of workplace-like structure often results in students simply dividing up the work (Bremner, 2010), using the division of labor model of collaboration discussed earlier by Thompson (2001). Whereas workplace collaborators often make larger use of the hierarchical and dialogic mode of collaboration (Bremner, 2010).

The divide between classroom and workplace practices is still very much a concern for the professional and technical writing classroom and the differences tend to be “implied rather than explicit” (Bremner, 2010, p. 127). This can largely be attributed to the context in which the writing takes place. Some researchers (Spilka, 1993; Sutliff, 1999) advocates for an increase in student internships and partnerships connecting the classroom and the workplace. This is further
supported by Whiteside’s (2003) recommendation that “advisors, instructors, and professionals in business and industry should strongly consider the powerful nature of industry-academe partnerships” (p. 314). These interorganizational collaborations could work to provide more context and experience to student writers from the industry side as well as information, support, and feedback from the classroom.

Theoretical Foundations

In line with the majority of research surrounding collaborative writing, the present research is based within the understanding of social constructionism. The prevalent view laying foundation to early collaborative writing research and continued to contemporary research is Vygotsky’s (1978) theory that knowledge is socially constructed (Ede & Lunsford, 1990). In addition to Vygotskian theory, Bakhtin’s theories of heteroglossia, polyphony, and the dialogic also influence the present research study. In line with social constructionism, heteroglossia, polyphony, and the dialogic nature of language, the present research approaches collaboration and the perceptions therein under the direction of Achievement Goal Theory (AGT). As stated by Wolters (2004), AGT proposes that “students’ motivation and achievement-related behaviors can be understood by considering the reasons or purposes they adopt while engaged in academic work” (p. 236). In relation to this study, AGT can be said to state that students who understand and realize the necessity of developing a collaborative skill set as being imperative within the workforce will see a positive impact in their motivation and achievement in developing said skills. The following sections will discuss these theories and their relationship with the present research.

Social Constructivism and the Nature of Language. Stemming from Vygotsky’s (1987), social constructivism is globally concerned with the development of meaning as being the central feature of human activities. Ultimately, the goal of learning from a social constructivist perspective is to construct and reconstruct meaning, knowledge, and context
through discourse communities (Green & Gredler, 2002). Focused more specifically on collaborative writing in relation to social constructivism, social interaction is understood to be ground zero for the development of meaning and understanding (Lock & Strong, 2010). The development of meaning and understanding is further advanced in collaborative settings under Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which is understood to be the “zone in which an individual is able to achieve more with assistance than they can manage alone” (Wells, 2010). Collaborative writing works to provide the collaborators with an opportunity to not only further the understanding of the subject matter, but also to increase their learning from other group members understandings while also doing the same for these group members.

Building from Vygotsky’s (1978) research arguing that reflective thought is social conversation internalized, Bruffee (1984), in his seminal article “Collaborative Learning and the ‘Conversation of Mankind,’” determines that to the extent that thought is, in fact, internalized conversation, it logically requires us to understand the nature of conversation in order to understand how we think. Additionally, in order for us to think better as individuals we must first learn to think better collectively (Bruffee, 1984). Building on these assertions and tying these principles to writing and collaboration, Bruffee (1984) aptly states that, “Writing is a technologically displaced form of conversation” (p. 641). The initial composition of what we write is ultimately developed in our minds prior to our actually composing it and these thoughts are developed from internalized social conversation. Speaking directly to writing teachers, the influence of this theoretical foundation is directly related to the modeling practices evidenced in previously discussed classroom practices (Burnett, 1990; Cullinan, 1987; Grimm, 1986). In order to enable students to develop the skills necessary to read and write in a specific manner, instructors should make sure that the conversations taking place surrounding these practices of reading and writing are as similar to these practices as possible. This principle carries directly over to collaborative writing practices. In order to provide students with the best opportunity for
developing these skills, modeling these practices to imitate actual collaborative practices in the classroom and maintaining the level of collaboration is what is necessary.

This social constructivist view of language, according to Bruffee (1986), is contrasted in composition studies by view that language has a social context. Under a social context view language is created in the mind and shared with others in expressions of ideas. This view places the origin of thought is within the individual. On the other hand, the social constructivist view in composition studies states that a “writer’s language originates with the community to which he or she belongs” (Bruffee, 1986, p. 784). The overarching argument Bruffee (1986), and this research study, is the understanding that knowledge is not “individual, internal, and mental” (p. 775) but is, instead, a social creation.

Examining this view that language and ideas are socially constructed within the community that he/she belongs, Nancy Rule Goldberger reflects on her experience collaboratively composing Women’s Ways of Knowing. Goldberger writes

> Of all the many memories of our collaboration, one particular experience always comes to mind when I am asked to describe what it was like. I am sitting before my new computer. I have Blythe’s or Jill’s or Mary’s words before me and the marginal commentary on the text from the other two by my side as well. My task is to rewrite, but first I must type the words from my colleague into my word processor. I decide to edit as I type. What astonishes me is the process that evolves; I take someone else’s words (someone I respect and trust and who trust me), slowly read her text, try to understand her intention behind her choice of words, try to place myself in her place so that I feel inside her mind and heart, search for her meaning before I impose new words or meaning of my own, imagine what might be so important to her to say that I must take care not to lose her meaning. Only then do I allow new words to flow from my fingers—the words are mine, yet hers as well. it was this slowed-down process of reading—attending—typing that led me to an understanding of a friend and colleague in a way that I had not attained in conversation of in the initial reading of the text. I felt so close to her, inside her, that I could almost feel her generate ideas, make jokes, become digressive. I knew her in a new way. (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 197, p. xv)

Goldberger, after spending hours and hours working with her colleague, is taking her words and while editing, having an internal conversation with her colleague and the language she ultimately works to incorporate is developed and informed by her relationship with her community. This is
contrasted by a the social context view in which language is created and shared in expression of ideas. Despite the community not being physically present, they are present in mind and text, both of which form a socially constructed prose.

Collaborative learning—including peer review, group-writing, and conferencing—are, under a social constructivist view, an apparatus for students to use in order to learn how to participate in the conversation of their peers (Thralls & Blyler, 1993). Furthermore, the link between collaboration and the ability of students to transfer from a classroom setting to a professional setting and the research supporting this (Farkas, 1991), is supported by a constructivist view of language. The research surrounding workplace collaborative practice yields conversation and knowledge about the practice and, thus, works to expand the conversation and, ultimately, influence and inform the pedagogical practices surrounding collaborative writing.

Achievement Goal Theory (AGT). Achievement Goal Theory (AGT) works to understand the reasons why an individual engages in achievement behavior (Graham & Weiner, 2012). Realizing the purpose or reasons behind an achievement or task has been shown to increase one’s learning in the related area (Pintrich, 2000). These goals, referred to in Educational Psychology as Achievement Goals are understood as "the purposes or reasons an individual is pursuing an achievement task (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). It has been noted by researchers that students bring different goals with them into the classroom and the positive impact of initial motivations (achievement goals) on subsequent learning (Wolters, 2004). Working to develop an understanding of the value students place on collaborative learning, the present research aims to understand the value that students place on collaboration both during their education and the role that it will play upon their joining the professional workplace.

AGT has evolved from work in the 1980’s (Elliott & Dweck, 1988; Ames & Archer, 1988) describing it as a dichotomous framework consisting of two opposing goals:
• The Mastery Approach Goals: Characterizes those who seek out challenge and escalate efforts when tasks become difficult.

• The Performance Approach Goals: Characterizes those who see their ability as threatened in challenging situations, which they tend to avoid. (Graham & Weiner, 2012).

Realizing that the mastery approach is not necessarily the opposite of the performance approach and, at times, can even be displayed simultaneously in learners (Elliott, 1999), AGT moved to divide the performance approach into two different approaches.

• The Performance-Approach Goals: Characterizes those who desire to display their ability by outperforming others and the feelings of pride that accompany that success.

• The Performance-Avoidance Goals: Characterizes those who desire to avoid displaying low ability by doing worse than other and the accompanying shame that is elicited by their failures. (Graham & Weiner, 2012).

Further detailing these goals, current scholarship in AGT further develops the characterizations by dividing the mastery approach into two different approaches similar to that of the performance approach (Elliott & McGregor, 2001; Pintrich 1999). The current scholarship argues that there are found principal goal orientations.

• Master-Approach: Describes students who are highly focused on learning as much as they can while working to overcome obstacles to learn as much as they can.

• Master-Avoidance: Describes students who work to learn, however they do so in order to avoid a failure to learn as much as possible.

• Performance-Approach: Describes students who work to demonstrate their ability to learn relative to their peers or want to show their learning publicly.

• Performance-Avoidance: Describes students who work to avoid looking less able than others or lacking in ability. (Wolters, 2004).

These four goals differ, theoretically, along two axis, “the definition of competence (i.e, developing mastery vs. displaying ability) and valence (i.e., an association with something positive and desired [approach] vs. negative and unwanted [avoidance]” (Graham & Weiner, 2012, p. 379). The necessity of having goals when working towards a task, research has shown, has been related to measures of learning (Belenky & Nokes, 2009). However, the research is also quick to note that there is less known about how perception and motivation work with cognitive processes to resolve these achievement gains.
As one would assume, the mastery-approach goal orientation has shown to lead to a larger increase in positive learning outcomes than have the other goal orientations (Somunguogul & Yildirim, 1999). Students who assume that collaboration skills are a necessary component of their success in the workforce, it is hypothesized, will be more focused on learning and internalizing the skills. In researching and observing students perceptions regarding collaborative writing in the professional writing classroom and building a correlation between the research conducted on achievement goals, an understanding of the reasons students fall in other, less ideal goal orientations will be found.
Chapter 3: Methodology

In the previous chapter I developed the theoretical framework upon which the present study was built and I identified some of the current gaps within contemporary collaborative writing research. In addition to these gaps, I also discussed the need for further exploration into collaborative writing research. Building on the information provided in Chapter 2, this chapter will detail the various methods used to gather, analyze, and interpret the data.

The focus of the present research is to explore student and instructor perceptions of collaborative writing at the undergraduate level in two different professional writing courses. The grounded theory research conducted within these two courses was initially guided by the following large, over-arching question of inquiry: How is collaborative writing perceived by students in professional writing courses?

In order to sufficiently explore and answer the question, a mixed-methods approach informed by Creswell (2013) was used to gather data utilizing a combination of surveys, interviews, and classroom observations. Specifically, data was gathered from the following sources:

- Surveys administered to students during the third week of the semester;
- Surveys administered to the students during the fifteenth week of the semester;
- Face-to-face interviews with students during the fourteenth and fifteenth week of the semester;
- Face-to-face interviews with instructors during the sixteenth week of the semester; and
- Field notes from classroom observations throughout the semester.

Building on the research study conducted by Ens (2013) which utilized quantitative and qualitative techniques in a mixed-methods approach to report on student and instructor perceptions on collaboration at the graduate level, my research was conducted in a similar manner. However, where Ens broadens the survey to include a number of disciplines in graduate education, the current research focuses on undergraduate students enrolled specifically in one of
two professional writing courses and their respective instructors. In addition to detailing the mixed-methods approach for gathering data, this chapter will also discuss the methods used in coding and analyzing the data using a grounded theory approach.

**Design**

This study uses both qualitative and quantitative techniques for gathering data following a constructivist grounded theory design (Creswell, 2013 & Charmaz, 2014). The constructivist grounded theory design was used as opposed to the more traditional grounded theory design from Glaser & Strauss (2009) as the former allows for acknowledging the “subjectivity and the researcher’s involvement in the construction and interpretation of data” (Charmaz, 2014). As previously discussed, this study makes use of a number of data-gathering methods, some of which are left open to the interpretations of the researcher—largely the classroom observations—and employing a constructivist grounded theory design allows for and justifies these interpretations within the methodology. The procedures and methods for gathering this data is detailed in the sections that follow. Following the constructivist grounded theory model put forth by Charmaz (2014), the specific methods for this research study will be discussed.

**Research Questions**

This research was guided by the following research questions:

1. How is collaborative writing perceived by students in professional writing courses?
   - How do students’ perceptions—either positive or negative—regarding collaborative writing affect their motivation for developing effective collaborative writing skills?
   - How do instructor of undergraduate professional writing courses as The University of Texas at El Paso pedagogically approach and implement collaborative writing in their courses and what language, if any, is used to discuss collaborative writing in the classroom?
• How can student perceptions and motivations regarding collaborative writing work to inform and guide the development and implementation of classroom practices surrounding collaboration?

Once the research questions were developed, the selection and recruitment of study participants and sites began.

**Recruitment and Sampling of Participants**

During the Spring 2015 semester at The University of Texas at El Paso I worked with two Rhetoric & Writing Studies (RWS) professional writing courses—Professor Grant’s Workplace Writing course and Professor Lee’s Technical Writing course. These courses were chosen as the research locations as they were both courses being instructed by individuals who had taught the respective course on numerous occasions and have experience teaching the course. Additionally, while both of these courses are focused primarily on professional writing, each works towards a different professional writing practice with its own specific goals and outcomes. With the research focused on professional writing, using two different courses provided the opportunity to gather a wider range of student feedback as the disciplines represented in each course varies as each course is found in different degree plans. Professional writing courses were specifically targeted for this study as opposed to first-year composition courses in an effort to provide a better opportunity for the student participants to have had previous collaborative writing experiences in their past university course work. With the professional writing courses being primarily junior level courses, the student participants have been afforded the time to have, hopefully, been exposed to some instances of collaborative writing in their previous coursework and developed some perceptions of the practice. Additionally, the approach to teaching these courses varied significantly with different teaching

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2 “Professor Grant” and “Professor Lee” are pseudonyms.
styles being represented by the two instructors as well as the classrooms themselves being situated on opposite sides of the technological spectrum as later discussed. The approaches used by these instructors, while drastically different, worked to provide students with the skill necessary to internalize the subject matter, either Workplace Writing or Technical Communication, albeit using very different pedagogical approaches.

The participants for this research study are those students who enrolled in one of the two professional writing courses. The students in these courses did not register for the courses knowing they would participate in a research study, rather participation in the research study was requested during the third week of classes. The students within these courses come from a variety of backgrounds and majors including, but not limited to, Engineering, Biology, Math, and Health Promotions; a more detailed discussion of this data is discussed in Chapter 4. By working with this broad yet representative range of students I was able to build an understanding of the perceptions and experiences which reflect the university’s population of students and what perceptions this population brings with them in regards to collaboration.

Registration for these courses at The University of Texas at El Paso is capped at 24 students per course. The actual total enrollment for these two courses was 29 students with 17 enrolled in Professor Grant’s course and 12 enrolled in Professor Lee’s course. A breakdown of all of the total participant counts is provided below in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Beginning of Semester Surveys</th>
<th>End of Semester Surveys</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
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<tr>
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<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Writing</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Survey Data Collection

Two different surveys were administered to the students in each of the professional writing courses: one early in the semester (during the third week of classes) and one near the end of the semester (during the fifteenth week of classes). The surveys were handed out in hard-copy by the researcher at the end of class. Both surveys are provided in full in the Appendices.

The first survey administered to the student participants consisted of 24 questions. Questions were presented to the respondents in the following response formats: select appropriate response, true/false, open response, and Likert scale. Close-ended questions (e.g., multiple choices questions) asking the respondents to select the appropriate response comprised the majority of questions in order to maximize the response rate. However, a few open-ended questions were also utilized in order to generate a more detailed response and to develop respondent interest (Gillham, 2008). Demographic and profile information collected in the first survey included the students’ majors and/or fields of study, classifications, ages, and genders. These demographic questions were designed to detail the participants taking part in this research study and their backgrounds related to collaborative writing.

The second survey administered to the student participants consisted of 12 questions. Questions were presented to the respondents in the following response formats: select appropriate response and open response. The majority of the questions were designed to inquire specifically about the students’ practices and perceptions of collaborative writing throughout the semester and open response questions were used to generate more detailed responses. A total of 25 students completed the first survey and a total of 16 students completed the second survey. The drop in student responses on the second survey is due to a few of the students dropping the course during the semester and students who chose to not complete the survey.

Interview Data Collection

In addition to the questionnaires administered to the student participants, interviews with volunteer student participants were also conducted. All students who agreed to complete the
initial questionnaire were asked to take part in an interview as well. Of the 25 initial questionnaire participants, six from each course volunteered and took part in the interviews. The interviews were conducted during the fourteenth and fifteenth weeks of the semester—near the end of the course.

As suggested by Charmaz (2014), an interview guide was developed prior to the interviews themselves to guide the questioning during the interviews. The guiding questions--initially developed and approved by both this research study’s research proposal and the university’s Institutional Review Board--can be found in the Appendices. Guiding questions were developed with the majority of the probing questions being open-ended and served to have the participants explore the topic of collaborative writing. Additionally, the number of questions were limited to keep the interviews under 30 minutes in order to maximize student participation.

Student interviews were conducted outside of the classroom with Professor Lee’s students being interviewed in a nearby conference room and Professor Grant’s students being interviewed in the next door classroom. With collaboration being the central focus of the study and working to generate as much discussion and elaboration on the questions as possible, when possible students were interviewed in groups. All students were able to be interviewed by me in five groups with the exception of one student who was interviewed one-on-one.

In addition to student interviews, both Professor Lee and Professor Grant agreed to be interviewed at the end of their courses. While both instructors initially agreed to the interview, only Professor Grant was able to be interviewed for the study. Unfortunately, Professor Lee abruptly left the university at the end of the semester and was not available to be interviewed. Professor Lee did not respond to emails after the end of the semester.

Just as an interview guide was developed for the student interviews, a guide was also developed for the instructor interviews. Guiding questions for these interviews were also open-ended to allow for exploration of the topic. The guiding questions for these interviews can be found in the Appendices.
Both the instructor and student interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. Express Scribe was used to playback and initially transcribe the interviews. The transcriptions were then moved to a collective research folder in Microsoft OneNote. A total of twelve students and one instructor participated in the interviews.

**Classroom Observation Data Collection**

I conducted five random observations of each course. Technically, six observations were completed in Professor Lee’s course; however, on one of the observation dates no students attended class and another date was selected to make up the observation. The course observations were conducted over the course of the semester from the third to fifteenth week of classes. Observations were conducted in both classes in what Creswell (2013) labels a “Nonparticipant/observer as participant” Creswell details the role as:

*The researcher is an outsider of the group under study watching and taking field notes from a distance. He or she can record data without direct involvement with activity or people (Creswell, 2013, p. 167).*

During the observations, I had no contact with the students nor instructor and sat quietly observing in the back of the classrooms. Outside of administering the surveys and conducting the interviews, I had no direct contact with the students.

All field notes were taken using the following format:

- Header: Course, instruction date, number of students present; and
- Descriptive Notes: Bullet points describing events, practices, and student interactions listed chronologically during class.

Field notes were initially composed in Microsoft OneNote in quick, bulleted, chronological lists. After the observations, I added the observation notes to a table and added information to
elaborate on the points noted during the observation as necessary. The coding and analysis of the data will be discussed in the next section.

**Data Coding and Analysis**

Once all of the data collection was completed I was left with a total of 41 surveys, 13 interviews, and ten observations. Grounded theory coding was utilized in order to move beyond the concrete statements provided by the students and instructors across the data sets to begin, as Charmaz (2014) writes, “making analytic sense of stories, statements, and observations” (p. 111). Not all of the data was coded. The close-ended questions from the surveys were all counted, totaled, and added to an Excel spreadsheet. However, the open-ended questions from the surveys were treated the same as the observations and interviews in coding.

Interview transcriptions, observation notes, and open-ended survey responses were entered into MaxQDA, a qualitative data analysis program, and coded within the program. The coding began with the interviews followed by the observation notes and concluded with the open-ended survey responses. Initial codes were developed using a combination of codes derived from the aim of the research questions while others were developed as the coding progressed and trends emerged in the data. For example, during an interview with Mark and Tim who were enrolled in the Workplace Writing course, when asked how they would define “collaborative writing,” Tim responded with, “…working as a group in order to write a paper, or, hmm, just collaborating in a single project in order to, hmm, present or develop an idea.” This information was initially coded as “Collaborative Writing Defined” (CWD). After the initial coding, twelve codes were created and used, as follows:

- CWD: Collaborative writing definitions
- CWN: Collaborative writing necessary
- GrFCW: Grade focused collaborative writing
- NegativeP: Negative perception of collaborative writing
- PositiveP: Positive perception of collaborative writing
- TCN: Issues surrounding time constraints
As the coding of the data continued, further trends emerged and the initial twelve codes, while encompassing a vast amount of information, needed to be further narrowed. For example, during the initial coding it quickly became apparent that there were commonalities within the students’ definitions of collaborative writing—from collaborative writing as group work to collaborative writing as peer review. With this in mind, further codes were developed to account for these commonalities. With the addition of further, more descriptive codes, Tim’s statement regarding his definition of collaborative writing was further coded as being “Collaborative Writing as Group Work” (CWGW) underneath the previous CWD group. The second round of coding was expanded and utilized the following code groups:

- **CWD**: Collaborative writing definitions
  - CWPR: Collaborative writing as peer review
  - CWGW: Collaborative writing as group work
  - CWO: Collaborative writing as other
- **CWN**: Collaborative writing necessary
  - CWFS: Collaborative writing necessary to further develop skills
  - CWOC: Collaborative writing necessary for other courses
  - CWE: Collaborative writing necessary for employment
- **PositiveP**: Positive perception of collaborative writing
  - PPP: Positive perception regarding peers
  - PPG: Positive perception regarding grades/grading
- **NegativeP**: Negative perception of collaborative writing
  - NPP: Negative perception regarding peers
  - NPG: Negative perception regarding grades/grading
• CWDiff: Collaborative writing difficulties
  o CWDwP: Collaborative writing difficulties with peers
  o CWDwA: Collaborative writing difficulties with assignment
  o CWDwI: Collaborative writing difficulties with lack of instruction
  o CWDwT: Collaborative writing difficulties with time constraints
• PreInst: Previous collaborative writing instruction
• NoPreInst: No previous collaborative writing instruction
• NegativeEx: Negative experiences with collaborative writing
• PositiveEx: Positive experiences with collaborative writing

The second round of coding used a total of 18 codes, some free standing with others being grouped within larger coded categories. One of the larger difficulties I faced in the coding is that numerous statements from students and instructors fit a number of different codes. For example, Priscilla, a student in Professor Lee’s Technical Communication course recalled, “…the worst thing is to get together…like right now I’m working in a group project and it’s really hard that everybody gets together, even in the weekends some people say, ‘No, I don’t have time, I work,’ or they have something else to do.” The information provided in this statement was coded with NegativeEx, CWDwT, CWDwP, and CWGW. Once both rounds of coding were completed, connections and trends among codes were considered. These trends and connections will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Limitations

As previously discussed, I was unable to interview Professor Lee. While this interview would have helped provide further insight into the study, the primary goals of the research are on the student perspectives. Additionally, Professor Lee’s course provided very minimal amounts of actual collaborative writing outside of the peer reviews and class workshops.

In developing the coding for this research I faced the following limitations:
• Collaborative writing was discussed with students enrolled in two professional writing courses. These students may not be representative of all of the issues, ideas, and perspectives surrounding collaborative writing.

• Participants were only able to relate their thoughts on collaborative writing in an on-the-spot manner and were not provided time to deeply consider the questions and their responses to their collaborative writing practices and experiences.

• Participants may have been unwilling to be critical of the current course’s issues with collaborative writing due to the researcher, and interviewing, being present in a number of lectures—though this issue seems to be rather limited.

Further discussion on these limitations and the need to address them is provided in Chapter 5.
Chapter 4: Results

This chapter details my findings of the present research study. As has been discussed in previous chapters, the impetus behind this study largely stemmed from my experiences surrounding undergraduate collaborative writing and, more specifically, the lack of instruction on how to collaborate to effectively produce a piece of writing. This project provided me with the opportunity to talk with a number of students and hear what they had to say regarding their experiences with collaborative writing both in the class they were currently taking as well as in their other past and present courses. During one such interview, a student who I gave the alias of “Elizabeth,” provided a wonderfully comical and accurate analogy of collaborative writing that summed up my experiences, and, as this chapter will elaborate on, the experiences of other students. Elizabeth remarked that collaborative writing is, “like when you are little and they throw you out into the playground and it’s like, you know, do whatever it takes to survive type of thing, right?” While not all students, as the results will show, shared Elizabeth’s feelings on collaborative writing, it is certainly reflective of my experiences. Building on experiences and descriptions from students like Elizabeth, this chapter will discuss the results from the present research study across both of the student surveys, student and instructor interviews, and the classroom observations. After discussing the individual data sets, all the data will be discussed in combination as well as what insights the results provided as a whole.

By and large, the data gathered show that the majority of students do understand the value of possessing effective collaborative writing skill sets. While this value was largely present in the students’ discussion within the interviews as well as the surveys, this did not necessarily correlate with the students having a positive perception or even positive experiences with collaborative writing. For example, during an interview, Tim, an Accounting major in Professor Grant’s Workplace Writing course, relayed his fear of collaborative writing assignments stating, “…I tend to get scared most of the time since I’m a very shy person…I struggle a lot trying to communicate myself with the remainder of the group…I’m scared that I won’t manage to pick up the slack.” Despite Tim’s fears and concerns with his ability to communicate his ideas or produce the work necessary for his team, he was clear about the necessity for these collaborative
writing skills for his future career aspirations as a lighting designer. When asked what role he felt collaborative writing would play in his future, Tim stated bluntly, “I see collaborative writing being the only thing I do. Maybe not fully writing, but in presentations going to cities and giving the best presentation…creating the best experience for people to enjoy.”

The sections that follow will profile students from both Professor Grant’s and Professor Lee’s courses. Additionally, the results of the study will be discussed in relation to the following research questions previously discussed in the Chapter 3.

1. How is collaborative writing perceived by students in professional writing courses?
   - How do students’ perceptions—either positive or negative—regarding collaborative writing affect their motivation for developing effective collaborative writing skills?
   - How do instructor of undergraduate professional writing courses as The University of Texas at El Paso pedagogically approach and implement collaborative writing in their courses and what language, if any, is used to discuss collaborative writing in the classroom?
   - How can student perceptions and motivations regarding collaborative writing work to inform and guide the development and implementation of classroom practices surrounding collaboration?

Classroom Settings

Each of the observed courses were instructed in different classrooms and with different teaching styles. The setting and teaching style of each course played heavily on the students’ collaborative writing experiences. The following sections, working from the field notes gathered by the researcher, work to provide an understanding of the setting as well as the teaching that took place in each of the observed courses.

The following sections work to provide an understanding of the setting as well as the teaching that took place in each of the observed courses working from the field notes gathered by the researcher.
Professor Lee’s Technical Writing Course. Professor Lee’s RWS 3359: Technical Writing course is held in one of the older buildings of the university, a retrofitted dormitory that now houses the university’s English department. The classrooms here are what I consider to be the "traditional" college classrooms: desks in rows pointed forward, a lectern and desk at the head of the class for the instructor, and a pair of dry erase boards on the wall at the front of the room. Professor Lee's room—rendered in Figure 1—is just like this. The classroom sits on the third floor of the building with windows on the right and left side of the class flanking the long tables used in place of the traditional classroom desks giving the room a more professional/workplace feel. The room has three more windows at the front of the classroom bordered by white boards that also provide room for the drop-down projector screen. The only electrical outlets available for students are two at the very back of each side of the room which heavily influences the students' choices in seating as the classroom does not provide computers for the students. Rather, a number of the students bring their laptops to class with them. The classroom does, however, provide ample room for student-student and student-instructor interactions and discussions. For example, with the chairs not being attached to the desks, the students are able to easily move around the room to work closely with one another.

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3 An overhead view showing the layout of Professor Lee’s Technical Writing classroom is provided in the Appendices.
Professor Lee works from a conventional lecture most days. As there are no computers provided for the students and only a few bring their laptops to class, the majority of class time is spent with the professor lecturing over concepts and principles of Technical Communication with the students taking notes by hand in spiral notebooks. Each day, Professor Lee puts a Microsoft Word document on the classroom’s projector. This document is presented in outline form and details the topics of lecture for the day. For example, during one of the observations, Professor Lee lectured over use of “Active and Passive Voice.” The document provided on the projector provided definitions of each with numerous examples showcasing the effective and ineffective usage of each within technical documentation. During the lecture, Professor Lee works to ask questions and engage the students; however, little to no participation from the
students is present. Referring back to the active and passive voice lecture, upon completing his discussion, Professor Lee asked the class, “Everybody familiar? Anybody want to explain the difference between active and passive voice?” which is met with no answers or participation from the class.

The students within Professor Lee’s course are very isolated from the rest of the students in the class. The majority of students sit in groups of two with some sitting by themselves. There are never more than two students sitting side-by-side unless they have been asked to work on something as a group. On the first day of observations, I made a note in the margins of my field notes that said, “Class has a very separated feeling to it, not a lot of unity of the class. Very spaced, very walled.” As the results of the interviews and the survey will later show, this has a dramatic effect on the students’ perceptions regarding collaborative writing, specifically when defining collaborative writing.

The course did not require the students to complete any assignments collaboratively as collaborative writing has been defined by this study, that is, two or more individuals working jointly with one another, using a variety of methods, to create a single document or project with a common, shared goal, for which all individuals are equally accountable. Rather, collaborative work was seen in some instances of peer review and group discussion. However, the students largely worked independently and would only work with their peers in the days immediately leading up to an assignment’s due date. On these days, the students would often bring a copy of their current draft and read over another student’s draft providing feedback as they deemed necessary. The students often chose to work with those that sat nearby them and, when they opted to move closer, would wait until the very last minute to do so. Others, chose to only exchange copies of their work and then returned back to their isolated seats. While the students reviewed their peers work, Professor Lee would occasionally walk around the room and ask the students questions, but would generally remain at the front of the room reading through the course’s textbook. Once the students were done with reviewing one another’s work, they would simply return the commented copy to the author without any discussion. This was a typical day of peer review. In a very similar manner, the group discussions tasked the students with
discussing their assignment topics with one another. This happened only twice during my observations and went on for about 10 minutes each time. Professor Lee’s behavior during these discussions was the same as during the peer reviews, occasionally walking around the class and asking the students questions, but he remained largely at the front of the class.

The collaborative writing aspects, as defined by this study, of this course were very minimal. However, half of the students in the course responded that they were required to complete collaborative writing assignments and the majority—63 percent—of the students felt that the class had furthered their abilities to write in a collaborative environment. Justifying his response, one student added, “Now am able to see different points of view.” With the instances of peer review and discussion, this explanation is understandable. On the other side, one student noted that they did not feel this course furthered their abilities to write in a collaborative environment stating, “I don’t think this course has improved my ability to effectively write in a collaborative because these students are usually quiet and not helping that much.” These stark differences in experiences and views on the courses practices were displayed, largely, across the class as a whole with the majority of responses on the surveys being almost perfectly divided down the middle. These results will be discussed later in the chapter.

**Professor Grant’s Workplace Writing Course.** Using a very different approach from that of Professor Lee’s course, Professor Grant’s RWS 3355: Workplace Writing course was held in very a different setting—rendered in Figure 2. The class meets in one of the University’s newer building which serves as the location for the majority of undergraduate students ‘general coursework classes. The classroom is long and narrow with desks lining each

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4 An overhead view showing the layout of Professor Grant’s Workplace Writing classroom is provided in the Appendices.
side of the room and one row of desks facing one another dividing the room down the middle. Each of the desks has an Apple iMac on it for the students to use during class. There are no windows in the classroom. At the front of the room is a desk with an Apple iMac for the instructor to use as well as a wooden lectern. There is only one dry-erase board in the room at the front of the class. Above the dry-erase board is a drop-down projector screen which, if in use, hides the board. None of the student desks face the front of the class, rather the desks lining the sides of the room face the walls and those in the middle, dividing the room, face each other. This room is heavily focused on providing students and instructor with the technology they need in
order to work in class as opposed to the classroom used by Professor Lee which places the focus on listening. A diagram of the classroom is provided below in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Professor Grant’s Workplace Writing classroom

Similar to the room used by Professor Lee, Professor Grant’s room also does not provide students with many options for outlets to power their personal devices should they need to. This is, presumably, not included as the students are provided with computers to use. While a few of the students were observed bringing their own laptops to class, the majority made use of the classrooms computers.

Professor Grant works with a mixture of lecture and student activities for the majority of the classes meetings. A normal day begins with a brief introduction to the day followed by a
topic-specific, multimedia lecture. Often times Professor Grant includes numerous videos and images to further illustrate the concepts being presented and continually asks the students probing questions about the subjects being discussed. Similar to Professor Lee’s course, Professor Grant did not assign a large amount of writing projects where the students were tasked with submitting an assignment as a team—the only assignment where this was required was the final assignment for the course which also included a team presentation. However, where Professor Lee only used peer reviews and discussions a few times during the semester, Professor Grant’s course tasked the students with doing this nearly every day they met. After the day’s lecture, Professor Grant tasked the students with a short activity that needed to be completed collaboratively. For example, during one day’s discussion on effective letter composition, the students were tasked with reading over a sample letter and collaboratively rewriting the letter to reflect the information provided in the lecture. While the students worked on these activities, Professor Grant was actively walking around the classroom and interacting with the students and, at times, encouraging the quieter students to get more involved in the discussion.

Professor Grant’s pedagogical practices developed a very communal feel in the classroom. When questions were posed to the class, students were quick to participate and share their thoughts and, at times, produced much more discussion than the allotted class time allowed for. Additionally, beyond having the students work with one another in class daily, the students were also required to work with different peers. While the students generally work with whomever they were sitting next to, randomly Professor Grant would have them work with other students which they had not worked with before. The final teams that the students worked with for their aforementioned collaborative assignment were not chosen until the assignment was introduced—roughly a month before the end of class—at which time the students were allowed to create their own teams. By this time the students had worked with a number of their peers and developed a comfort with working together.

This inclusion of what I like to refer to as consequence free collaboration (i.e, collaborative activities that are not graded and for which the students abilities to effectively collaborate does not affect their grade) gave the students an opportunity to practice and learn
how to work with one another before they were required to do so for an assignment that would be graded. Throughout the course, Professor Grant worked to include ways that the students could go about working with one another and providing feedback on each other’s work. For example, during one activity Professor Grant explained her tactics for providing feedback to the students while she graded and discussed her usage of a “compliment sandwich” where something bad is stated in between the positives. While explaining this, the information is relayed in a way to showcase how the students could use this when reviewing their peers’ work. This instruction, ultimately, led to a very positive outlook on collaborative writing from the students with 100 percent of the students stating that the course provided them with a better understanding of how to effectively write in a collaborative setting.

Student Discussions

The experiences, both past and present, of the students in this study were the primary point for data collection. In order to develop an understanding of how the students’ experiences with and perceptions of collaborative writing influenced their practices both survey and interviews were conducted. In the sections that follow, I work to provide an account of a few of the participants of the study as this case study was largely qualitative and the stories and context that the students bring with them are very much a part of their current understandings of collaborative writing. These profiles will introduce students from both courses and relate their experiences with collaborative writing as they described them during the study.

5 The transcriptions provided within this chapter have been left as they were relayed to me by the participants. At times, the language is choppy and repetitive. I have opted to not edit these responses in an effort to remove any potential bias that may result unconsciously in my editing the responses for clarity. Ultimately, I feel that this provides a more accurate and real view of the participants’ opinions.
Robert. When I think of Robert, I see a quiet and calm student who was always on time and ready to listen to the day’s lecture. Robert was a junior Business major taking Professor Grant’s Workplace Writing course. I do not believe I ever saw Robert walk into class as he was always sitting at his desk at the front of the class when I arrived for my observations. While Robert was majoring in Business, he admittedly did not know what he planned to do with his degree and simply stated, “I don’t know yet” when asked about his future plans. Robert is the only student I interviewed in a one-on-one setting and, while this was not planned, it seemed to encapsulate the demeanor that Robert displayed throughout my observations. After I had gone through the first round of surveys and made a few cursory notes, nothing really stood out to me about Robert. However, during our interview I began to notice a perspective on collaboration that I was somewhat familiar with and, at times, can remember even directly relating to: Robert understood the necessity of collaborative writing skills, but often times kept his opinions and thoughts to himself.

After my interview with Robert (and also the second round of surveys), I went back and looked over Robert’s first survey responses again under a new lens. When asked

*Why did you choose to take this course (please choose all that apply)?*

A. Advised it would be helpful for my chosen career path
B. Required by my degree plan
C. Interested in the subject matter
D. Would like to further my writing skills
E. Other (please list):

Robert was one of only three students who responded that he chose to take the course both because he was advised that the course would be helpful for his chosen career path *and* because he wanted to further his writing skills. The vast majority of students stated that they chose to take
the course because it was required by their degree plan. During my interview with Robert, he reaffirmed his responses on the survey by stating that he enrolled in the course because, “my advisor thought it would help me out with my business writing ‘cause I’m a Business major.” While Robert’s responses here are informative, I view his responses as an object of trust from Robert and this is evidenced in his response during our interview. Robert clearly states that his advisor felt that this course would aid him in furthering his business writing skills. In turn, Robert trusted this advice and internalized this information leading him to believe that he needed to further his business writing skills as he responded on the first survey. Robert’s willingness to trust in and follow those who are advising and teaching him is a trait that, as will be further illuminated, allows him to place his learning and advancement into a needed context and trust that those advising him are doing so in his best interest.

Robert’s position on why he took the course falls well in line with his perceptions surrounding collaborative writing. During our interview, Robert recalled on his previous experiences with collaborative writing while in high school as he noted that he had no previous experience with it during his time at college. He said

*Back home in Mississippi, we, uhh, a couple guys, well football players...tend to be lazy when it come to, uh, doing collaborative writing. It’s like they, in a group, was lazy and the only thing I hate about doing collaborative writing is people in a group, you know?*

While his experiences with collaborative writing and his peers are perceived by Robert as being negative ones as he recalls not being able to rely on his peers to do their parts, this did not translate to a larger negative perception on the value of collaborative writing as a whole. Robert’s experiences with collaborative writing and his perspectives on his past practices can also be seen in his responses to the first survey. When asked what level of difficulty he has encountered when he has been tasked with writing with others, he notes that the practices have been somewhat difficult and the division of labor has only been somewhat fair. Yet, despite these experiences from his past and before the work of the present semester has really began, he is clear that he feels that collaborative writing is a valuable and necessary part of his education and will be a marketable skill when he is later looking for employment. It’s clear that the negative
experiences that he had experienced did not translate to negative perceptions regarding collaborative writing for future practices. Rather than recall the experience as a whole as being negative, the negative memory is placed with the people he has shared this experience with and has left his perceptions of the practice unobstructed.

A number of collaborative projects were assigned to Robert and his team over the course of the semester by Professor Grant—from presentations to team writing projects. After working with his team and Professor Grant over the course of the semester, the experiences Robert discussed in both the final survey and interview were very different from his high school experiences, even in the language he uses to describe the practices. In recalling his high school experiences, Robert stated that collaborative writing is “people in a group.” However, when asked at the end of the course if the course had provided him with a better understanding of how to effectively write in a collaborative setting, he agreed that the course had done so and expanded on this by stating that it did so “because we learn how to do the work as a team.” The distinction from discussing these collaborative endeavors as being just “people in a group” to “work as a team” highlights a shift in his perceptions regarding the practice. Additionally, Robert himself noted that his views on collaborative writing have changed over the course of the semester stating, “I like it more because we have a lot of fun and now I know how to have fun in a collaborative writing setting.” While a large amount of Robert’s shift in perspective could be attributed to moving from a group that did not work well together to, perhaps, one that did, I believe that this shift is also largely due to Robert’s ability to find and share his voice, ideas, and perspectives with the group.

During our interview, I asked Robert what he thought was bad about collaborative writing and, in one of his most descriptive responses, he said that it was his unwillingness to disagree with his peers on most topics.

*I mean sometimes you gonna see, I’m like uh, what do you call it, um I’m not gonna speak out and, um, like I’m not gonna say shy, but I like to be in the back sometimes, you know I’m not gonna say my opinions sometimes and, umm, you know that’s...that’s the only reason why I like, that’s the only part of collaborative writing I don’t like, you know. I like, ‘cause, I’m kinda like a timid person and I’m quiet you know, and, uhh, when it comes to me I might disagree with something, but I’m not*
gonna say it most of the time. But sometimes, if it sticks out that much to me, I’m gonna say something.

While this description is being relayed at the end of the course, Robert echoed a similar sentiment in the survey administered at the beginning of the semester by simply answering what he finds the most difficult about writing collaboratively as being, “togetherness.” It seems as though Robert’s statement regarding the negatives of collaborative writing describe his past bad experiences with collaborative writing as he explains that a large part of his positive experiences this semester were due to his ability to comfortably talk and work with his likeminded peers coupled with the responsibility Professor Grant placed on all members of the team.

I know that Professor Grant made it, uh, clear that everybody gotta work, you know, everybody gotta pitch in in some way or, uh, I’m not gonna say get the boot, but they gonna get uh a worse grade you know.

Additionally, in response to being asked what his experiences with collaborative writing during the semester were, Robert stated it “has been fun because most of the people in class are willing to do the work as a team,” and

In this course, uhh, I guess we got a lot of Business majors and stuff like that, so um, it it’s been fairly, you know, easy to communicate with the guys in this class and people in this class, ‘cause you know, they, most of the people are the same class, you know, and uh, all of us, I know that in my group, um, we doing this project now, ‘uh, all of us are Business majors so, you know, it’s easier to uh talk with someone you know.

By having the ability to work with peers that he knows and takes other classes within his Business major coupled with a clear directive from Professor Grant regarding peer contributions, Robert’s experiences with collaborative writing were improved and this had a direct reflection on his perceptions of the practice over the course of the semester. While Robert was initially supportive and understanding of the need for collaborative writing at the beginning of the semester, by the end of the semester, his responses were much more enthusiastic and descriptive of his practices. Both the beginning- and end-of-semester surveys asked a simple true or false question that read, “I feel that I need to further practice and develop my collaborative writing skills.” Robert answered both times with “true.” However, on the end-of-semester survey he
wrote, “but it’s getting better” in the margins. Additionally, the importance of having a voice within the team is one that is very important to Robert. When asked what he thinks should be included in a collaborative writing curriculum, he is clear on the need for students to be able to state their opinions.

Me, uh, personally, like I just said, you know, me, uh, if a teacher, well a professor or a teacher come up and said, everybody, like growing up, you know, everybody should state their own opinions in a group, you know, it would’ve helped me out ‘cause I’m kinda like, a person, like I said, I like to sit back and, umm, in a group and, uh, sometimes just listen instead of speaking. Yeah, if I grew up and they was telling us that, you know, state your opinions, state your opinions, state your opinions, you put your input into the group, you know, instead of me just, you know, doing my stuff and, I’d rather had that sho I can just have my opinion in my head and I just say it like no hesitation.

Additionally, Robert stated that he would like to see more inclusion of collaborative writing within his course work and added that he felt so because, “practice make perfect. Although we did a lot of practicing, I would like to do more presentations.”

Another interesting aspect of Robert’s perceptions and experiences with collaborative writing is his discussion of the peers that he works with on the projects. When recalling his experiences in high school, Robert relates his experiences through a lens of the peers he was working with (football players) and categorizes them as being “lazy” despite himself also being a football player. However, in discussing his experiences in his Workplace Writing course, he notes that working with peers of the same (Business) major was hugely beneficial. Professor Grant’s choice to group students by major was a beneficial one, at least in Robert’s experience.

This is not to say that Robert’s experiences with collaborative writing in Professor Grant’s course were all positive. Robert related that one of the difficulties he experienced during the semester was organizing the project and team member’s individual duties. “The least successful part of the project was organizing on what each person should do.” While this is an honest critique, it is also one that showcases Robert ability to analyze these practices and understand what aspects to focus on for future collaborative writing projects which is a huge move from his negative perceptions on his “lazy” peers from previous projects. In fact, Robert
even relays one of the ways he will be able to utilize the skills he learned in Professor Grant’s class as knowing to “keep my team happy even though the work may be tough.” Overall, Robert is very aware of his future with collaborative writing within his chosen major, “Business is most of the time gonna be a group…and I think this type [collaborative] writing is definitely going to help me being part of a group.”

Under the guidance and instruction of an instructor who placed a large value in team efforts and collaborative writing, Robert’s experiences were able to be shifted from relating negative experiences to hopefully aspirations for future collaborative writing projects. Additionally, Robert’s ability to use his voice and share his opinions with his peers resulted in a much more fruitful collaborative endeavor and resulted in Robert’s further understanding of the benefits surrounding collaborative writing. In fact, the last question Robert answered for me asked what he felt could be done to better his experiences with collaborative writing to which he responded, “Collaborative writing should be a chapter in each book that includes writing. This is a vital part of school and work.”

Jessica and Thomas. Building on Professor Grant’s choice to team the students of similar majors together, Jessica and Thomas were teammates who, while they do not share the same stated majors, do share very similar majors—Jessica was a sophomore Accounting major and Thomas was a junior Finance major taking Professor Grant’s Workplace Writing course. Despite both students initially stating they were not interested in interviewing with me for the study, both, over the course of the semester, changed their minds and ended up taking the time and shared their experiences and perceptions about collaborative writing with me at the end of the semester. Both Jessica and Thomas sat at the front of the class on opposite sides of the room from Robert, and both displayed very different demeanors than that displayed by Robert. Both students were very vocal in class and were among those that always responded when questions
where posed by the instructor as well as always asked questions when they needed ideas or
instruction clarified. Additionally, they always appeared to be focused and on task with the days’
instructions and very motivated to not only get the work completed, but to get it completed
correctly.

Echoing the most common response to why they were enrolled in the course, both
students responded that they were in the course only because it was required by their degree
plan. In the survey administered at the beginning of the semester, both students responded that
they felt that collaborative writing was a valuable and necessary part of their education.
However, only Jessica stated that she had worked on collaborative writing projects in her
previous course work at the university. Thomas, however, later further explained this response as
being due to transferring to the university from the local community college where he had
worked on collaborative writing projects in his coursework there. Both students felt that
collaborative writing skills would be marketable skills when they were later looking for
employment; however, only Jessica felt that she needed to further practice her collaborative
writing skills. Thomas, from the beginning of the course, was confident that he did not need any
further practice and maintained this view throughout the course—a view that was only held by 3
other students in this study. Thomas’ view on his need to further develop his skills could,
however, be related to his past experiences with collaborative writing projects.

Thomas’ responses to questions over the course of the semester are largely focused on
his interaction and experiences working with peers—both positively and negatively. When asked
at the beginning of the course what he felt was the most difficult aspect of writing
collaboratively, Thomas responded, “Agreeing with peers.” Additionally, during our interview
when discussing his past collaborative experiences in his community college courses he stated

I used to go to [local community college] over there. Well you know you got your
good experiences and you got your bad experiences. But, I mean it was usually that I
would do pretty much everything and, you know, ‘cause the other guys would just
slack it off, but this time, today right now especially, I probably screwed up these
guys [his team].
Jessica laughs and says, “It’s all good.”

Thomas responds, “Big time, it’s my turn to be that guy. Sorry guys.”

Thomas’ past experiences with team members who don’t contribute as much as he felt they should have left him with a negative perception surrounding collaborative writing. However, over the course of the semester, Thomas was able to reflect on his practices and take note of the difficulties of working with peers and the fluctuation of responsibility that can be seen from team to team or project to project. Despite the fact that at the end of the semester, Thomas still did not feel that he needed to further develop his collaborative writing skills, he did, however, state that the course provided him with a better understanding of how to effectively write in a collaborative setting as well as changed his views on collaborative writing. As a result of his experiences in the course, Thomas states that in future collaborative writing projects he will, “take the audience more into consideration.” From his initial focus on peer interactions, Thomas’ views have slightly shifted towards a focus on the product that the project is producing.

While Thomas tends to largely focus on his interaction with his peers, Jessica’s discussions are very geared towards the product being produced. At the beginning of the semester, Jessica’s survey responses show that she is largely happy with the way she has been graded and represented within her collaborative writing projects in the past. This is likely due to her taking charge of the projects she has worked on in the past. In response to what she felt was the most difficult aspect of collaborative writing in the first survey, Jessica stated, “Coming up with the topic myself and at times the format that the instructor asks for.” Despite stating she feels that the purpose of collaborative writing projects is to work with peers, Jessica is more focused on the completion of the assignment and fulfilling the requirements as opposed to working with her peers.

Jessica is fairly positive about her past experiences with collaborative writing despite admitting to having team members who have not always been that helpful. Describing her past experiences with collaborative writing Jessica says

*For the most part they’ve been good experiences. Um, I have had some, I guess some, sour flavors out of my, out of my experiences. But overall, they have been*
pretty good. I mean, hmm, at the end of the day, hmm once your get into more of like, I guess your junior classes it starts getting a little bit more serious so you do want to start getting a better, uh, people I guess more responsible I guess compared to like your freshman, sophomore courses when people are just like all, “I don’t even need to take this class” kind of thing. They got, they start getting a bit more serious, more useful. You start getting, I guess, a little more mature minds I guess. That’s how I would put it.

When discussing her past experiences, Jessica doesn’t allow the fact that her team mates have not always been helpful or, as she states “useful,” to create a negative experience for her. Jessica relates the positive feeling she has that she has because she has noticed that within her upper-division courses her peers have begun to take the projects more seriously, implying that she has always been taking the projects seriously. In fact, Jessica states that her courses during that semester were very much collaborative in nature.

I’ve had, out of my six classes, three of them have actually had to involve group projects. I have to say this one is one of the best ones. Hmm my other class, which is a business course, everybody was actually pretty responsible, but it was hmm, I guess a little more, there was less communication. But hmm, obviously we had more time to do it, so we were still keeping on track. And the other one, I guess that was the worst one that I had just because it was like a week before it’s like, “Okay, we are gonna do this, we are gonna do this, ” and like we read chapters like we said, okay you can do this, I can do that, I guess I’ll take over the PowerPoint just because nobody was being responsible. But at the same time, they did turn the stuff in on time, so I was able to have everything together by the end. Buy I did have to do the tweak ups. So I guess it was the worst experience that I’ve had this semester, but hmm this was the best one obviously.

Jessica’s discussion here shows her focus on the assignment whether her peers are being “responsible” or not. She recalls that despite her peers saying they were going to do things, she still needed to complete the PowerPoint herself because “nobody was being responsible.” Jessica places the responsibility to complete these assignments on herself, not her team. She states that “they did turn the stuff in on time, so I was able to have everything together by the end. But I did have to do the tweak ups.” At times, it feels as if Jessica feels her peers are working for her and playing smaller roles to help her get the project completed and that it’s not a equal, collaborative endeavor. This viewpoint has led Jessica to have a somewhat negative viewpoint on
collaborative projects. When I asked her how she felt when collaborative writing projects were introduced by the instructor, she again focused on the responsibility of her peers.

*When you don’t know the people, you don’t know the group, you are just like “God dammit! I’m stuck in another group work!”*

Despite Jessica’s insistence that she needs to further her collaborative writing skills, she does not reference this need when discussing her experiences. Rather the need for further responsibility is placed on her peers. As discussed earlier, during the interview Thomas apologizes for being the person in the team that “screwed up” and did not do his share—what Jessica would call not being responsible. However, Jessica is quick to dismiss Thomas’ lack of responsibility with the project saying, “It’s all good.” This could be related to the positive experience Jessica has had working with this particular team; however, it could also be due to the fact that Jessica internalizes these difficulties and, from past experiences, compensated for these issues by just completing the work herself and not heavily relying on her peers. Additionally, Jessica’s answers on the survey administered in at the end of the semester state the largest issues with the collaborative writing assignments in the course were the lack of time to complete the assignments. This fits well if Jessica felt as though she was completing the assignments largely by herself.

**April, Jared, and Priscilla.** As I discussed earlier, the discussion and participation within Professor Lee’s Technical Writing course was minimal. Most of the students either sat by themselves or with a friend and rarely responded to questions posed by Professor Lee. The interviews went very well and both sets of students that I interviewed were happy to take time and discuss their views on collaboration with me. Priscilla, Jared, and April were not team members during the semester as Professor Lee did not assign any collaborative assignments for a
grade. However, they did, at times, work with providing feedback on each other’s work, and they all agreed to interview with me together.

April, the oldest of the three, was a junior Health Promotions major who was hearing impaired. During the semester, a sign-language interpreter would accompany her and translate Professor Lee’s lecture for her. The translator also accompanied her to the interview and provided a translation of her responses to me. April responded on the first survey that she agreed that collaborative writing was a valuable and necessary part of her education, yet she did not enjoy collaborative writing and, during the interview, related her apprehension when an instructor introduces a collaborative project.

*I get depressed. I get disappointed. If the teacher gives us our lecture specifically in, like, ‘cause I’m in Health Promotions and the other person is in Health Promotions too then that works.*

April displays a negative perception of collaborative writing based on her past experiences with the practice. However, in a similar viewpoint as Robert displayed, she feels that working with other students who share her major provides a better experience when working collaboratively. Additionally, April relates her negative views on collaborative writing as being due to issues with scheduling time to meet with her team.

*I used to research projects in Chemistry and it’s hard time to get together with the interpreter, with the students, the interpreter schedule and student’s schedule don’t harmonize.*

While a number of students related their issues with scheduling time for their collaborative projects, this issue is compounded for April as she also needs to schedule this time with an interpreter. This difficulty in scheduling time results in April largely making use of email to discuss the project and work with her team. However, this has also led to problems in communicating with her peers.

*I remember the paper says, “Required email one day before.” I told the group, “You have to email on day before.” They said, “Yes, I did that already.” “Are you sure?” “Yes, I did it.” Fine. We got to class and talked to the teacher to get the points are*
deducted because it wasn’t on time before, so we communicated, there wasn’t communication there.

A difficulty in scheduling and a lack of communication were common issues students across both courses discussed. Similarly, Jared, a Kinesiology major also taking the course because it was required by his degree plan, relayed his experiences with collaborative writing in his other course work as lacking communication between the team members. Like April, Jared believed that collaborative writing was a valuable part of his education; he also did not enjoy collaborative writing. Despite not enjoying the practice, Jared also admitted that he felt he did need to further practice his collaborative writing skills as he felt it would be a marketable skill when searching for employment in the future. While Jared displayed a positive perception about the necessity and value of collaborative writing skills, his negative past and present experiences have influenced his overall view on the practice.

When asked about his collaborative writing experiences within Professor Lee’s course, Jared bluntly stated, “I think it’s sometimes a waste of time.” However, Jared doesn’t feel this way because of the practice itself; rather he places this negative perception based on his perceptions of his and his peers’ knowledge.

It’s better to work with the professor. He’s more knowledgeable. Umm...plus sometimes your partners don’t bring the work so you just gotta like borrow your and just wait. It’s good, all right, they give you good ideas sometimes. But, umm, like for me I don’t know what to tell them, right? Like, what to do right. I’m not knowledgeable enough to be able to do that.

Jared’s discussion here is focused primarily on peer review as collaborative writing as he views his and his peers’ roles as being focused on providing feedback to one another on work that they have done independently—a practice that was primarily used within his class with Professor Lee. This is further evidenced by the fact that Jared states he would rather have feedback from the professor. While Jared admits that his peers do provide useful feedback “sometimes,” he also does not place any value on his or his peers to be helpful to one another as they are all working to learn the content of the course. This view on the value of peer feedback was also echoed by Priscilla.
Priscilla, a sophomore majoring, like Jared, in Kinesiology, explained that she did not value her collaborative writing experiences in Professor Lee’s course as she did not think her peer’s feedback was as valuable as the professor’s.

_The workshops that we had were not too much helpful since I didn’t like the way my classmates criticized my papers, I think they do not have the same critical thinking that the professor would have when giving a grade for the paper._

While Priscilla stated that she did think collaborative writing skills were important and that she did enjoy collaborative writing, her statement here brings the value of the feedback directly to what all three of them (Priscilla, Jared, and April) largely focused on, the grade. Both Jared and April also clearly stated that they were largely focused on the grade the assignment would receive. Responding to his feelings when being assigned a collaborative writing project, Jared stated, “I would, um, starting thinking about how’s the grading going do to be? ‘cause that’s what matters the most, you know.” Similarly, April stated the entire reason for working with groups was to get a better grade. Recalling working with a team for a Chemistry project, April stated, “Then, we decide just to go ahead for it and to get a better grade, we get together so we get a better grade, not make the group better, focusing on the grade mostly.” The focus on the grade is understandable as their success or evidence that they have succeeded in the class is done so by _earning_ a passing grade. In fact, in recalling the most and least successful aspects of collaborative writing during the semester, Priscilla states that the most successful facet as, “we got a good grade.” This common view and focus on the grade is heavily tied to the student’s views on what the purposes of collaborative writing are.

Jared responded on the first survey that he didn’t know what the purpose of collaborative writing was as opposed to individual writing and by the end of the semester, during our interview, defined collaborative writing as, “just work along with people and share ideas, um, divide the work.” Through the course of the semester, Jared had moved from having an uncertainty about collaborative writing to having developed an understanding of collaboration as a way to develop ideas which is reflective of the practices that he experienced in Professor Lee’s
course. However, the division of work in relation to collaborative writing was explained by Jared in response to his work within Kinesiology courses he was concurrently taking.

Well, right now it’s, uh, I’m in, uh, Kinesiology class and they’re making us do a, uh, writing project and it’s just hard to get together, you know, ‘cause they all have their own agendas so we haven’t been doing so good, so we’ve just divided the work for everybody and then just, we’re gonna try and meet up in the same day to put everything together, but it’s just, it hasn’t happened yet.

Jared’s team within his other courses are working with the project by dividing up the work individually in hopes to bring it all together on the same day that the assignment is due—an approach I have often seen used by students in my own courses. The students are focused more on getting the assignment completed than they are on working together for the assignment. They realize that they need to complete the assignment, but may not be sure on how to best accomplish this which, in turn, leads to choosing a divide and conquer approach. A part of the collaborative writing project is missing for these students: they do not know what they need to do to effectively collaborate with one another. They do not have the direction they need to do what is expected of them. Both Priscilla and April responded on the final survey that this was a missing and very much needed aspect of the course.

Priscilla: “Instructors should focus more on giving the students a better understanding of what collaborative work is.”

April: “Professor often set up group to work together because they think we know how to finish or help other [on their] assignment.”

This lack of instruction on effective collaborative writing was evidenced in a majority of the student responses from Professor Lee’s course—a stark difference from the discussion provided by the students at the end of Professor Grant’s course. The students within Professor Grant’s course overwhelmingly recalled the amount of instruction they received on collaborative writing over the course of the semester. This, in turn, correlated with the students having a much more positive perception on future collaborative endeavors.
Responding to the Research Questions

The purpose of the first survey was to provide the demographics of the students within the course, including the students’ majors, classification, gender, and age. Additionally, this survey was designed to provide an understanding of where the students stood on their understanding of collaborative writing at the start of the course with questions inquiring about the participants’ beliefs and experiences with collaborative writing. In what follows, the demographics represented within the courses will be discussed as will the results of the study in relation to the research questions.

Twenty-four students across both courses participated in the first survey. Of these 24 students, thirteen were enrolled in Professor Grant’s Workplace Writing course and eleven were enrolled in Professor Lee’s Technical Communication course. By a small margin, both courses were predominantly male and predominately in the 18-25 years of age group. In Table 2 below, the breakdown of the age, gender, and classifications are provided.

Table 2: Age, gender, and classification of student participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Technical Writing</th>
<th>Workplace Writing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 or above</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Technical Writing</th>
<th>Workplace Writing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Technical Writing</th>
<th>Workplace Writing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additionally, the students within these two courses came from a variety of disciplines ranging from Kinesiology to Industrial Engineering. In Table 3 below, the breakdown of the student majors within these two courses is provided.

Table 3: Field of study/majors across student participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Technical Writing</th>
<th>Workplace Writing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biomedical</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Finance</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Information Systems</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Promotions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Engineering</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinesiology</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Science</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown above in Table 3, Kinesiology and Accounting were the most common majors within these courses with Professor Lee’s Technical Writing course having a large presence of Kinesiology majors and Professor Grant’s Workplace Writing course having a large presence of Accounting majors. This can largely be attributed to both of these major’s degree plans requiring the respective course. These course requirements are also reflected in the students’ responses regarding their reasons for enrolling in the course.

As mentioned within Robert’s discussion, the majority of students, both in the survey and interviews, stated that their primary reason for taking either Professor Grant’s Workplace Writing course or Professor Lee’s Technical Writing course was because it was required on their degree plans. Of the 24 students registered for these courses 58 percent (16 students) responded that they enrolled in the course because it was required for their degree plans. The second most common reason for taking the course was equally because the students were advised it would be
helpful for their chosen career path or because they would like to further their writing skills with both responses garnering 18 percent of the responses each. Only 3 percent of the responses stated that the students were enrolled because they were interested in the subject matter and one student, Crystal, responded “Other: It is administered by [the researcher] and I trust he has my best interest at heart and wants to see me succeed.” However, it is important to note that though I was not administering the course, I had previously been Crystal’s instructor in another class during a previous semester. Additionally, as discussed within Robert’s discussion, a few of the students opted to choose more than one reason for enrolling in the course. These five students and their reasons for taking the course are as follows

Table 4: Students who stated they chose to take the course for multiple reasons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Samuel</th>
<th>Robert</th>
<th>Crystal</th>
<th>Priscilla</th>
<th>Ivan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advised it would be helpful for chosen career path</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required by my degree plan</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>⬜</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would like to further my writing skills</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested in subject matter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Building on the data gathered and the insights that the participants provided, the research questions will be discussed in the sections that follow.

**How do students’ perceptions—either positive or negative—regarding collaborative writing affect their motivation for developing effective collaborative writing skills?** At the beginning of the study the students within both courses largely stated that they felt collaborative writing was a valuable and necessary part of their education. Additionally, the students largely felt that collaborative writing skills would be a benefit to them when searching for employment upon graduation. Of the students who completed the survey at the beginning of the course, only
three students—all enrolled in Professor Lee’s Technical Writing course—stated that they did not think collaborative writing was a valuable and necessary part of their education. These initial results from the first survey show that the students do have a positive perception of the importance of collaborative writing and their need to develop these skills in order to be competitive in the job market.

While this positive perception for the need of collaborative writing was present, it did not correlate with all of the students enjoying the practice of collaborative writing. This indicates that positively perceiving the need for collaborative writing skills does not, necessarily, result in enjoying the practice itself. Across both courses, roughly half of the students (55 percent) stated that they enjoyed writing collaboratively while the other half (45 percent) did not. This representation was also roughly the same within each course.

However, while roughly half of these students stated they did not enjoy writing collaboratively, the majority—84 percent—felt as though they needed to further practice and develop their collaborative writing skills. In order to understand this disconnect between the positive awareness of the skills and the need to develop them, yet the students’ lack of enthusiasm for actually practicing writing collaboratively, I looked at the students’ experiences with collaborative writing and how they felt in regard to these experiences.

In contrast to my personal experiences, the majority of students—66 percent—stated that they had not been assigned collaborative writing projects in their previous coursework at the university. This could be due to a number of factors from the student not being aware of their collaborative writing activities to working collaboratively yet not on a writing project. Additionally, the students could have transferred their coursework from a community college as was the case with Thomas. Of those students who stated that they had taken part in a collaborative writing activity in their past coursework at the university, the majority described their experiences as meeting with a group that provided feedback on something they had written and writing a document as part of a team. Additionally, a large percentage of these students—38
percent—also stated that they had participated in face-to-face, online, or telephone discussions regarding a jointly written product. These students also described their experiences with collaborative writing.

Although I do work myself, I always like to double-check my work with professionals, like the professor or the employees at the writing center. -Jessica, Workplace Writing

Writing is not my thing so I always struggle with, but overall, I’ve always had good instructors that understand and make it easier. -Mark, Workplace Writing

Collaborative writing has been very helpful in my communication class. We worked in a group of four which let one another have someone else’s input on our assignment. -Michael, Technical Writing

From Jessica’s understanding the benefit of collaborative writing to Michael’s views on the helpful nature of his peer’s input in his communication courses, these statements made me question why there wasn’t a stronger correlation between the participants understanding the necessity of collaborative writing and enjoying writing collaboratively. Yet, when I looked at only those students who had stated they worked on collaborative writing assignments at the university, there was a much stronger correlation. Of these eight students, six of them stated that they enjoyed writing collaboratively indicating that they had had positive experiences in the collaborative writing they had completed prior to the current course. The two students—Doug and Sandra—who stated that they did not enjoy writing collaboratively despite having done so in prior courses described their experiences as

C.S. (Computer Science) Software Engineering I and II was a team-based, year-long course which involved a lot of collaborative writing of documents, reports, and analysis. - Doug, Technical Writing

Writing collaboratively is a hard task, since I prefer doing work or project on my own. It is difficult because sometimes my classmates are not responsible or because we can’t agree and how we are going to do things. Of course, not all experiences have been bad, but I do prefer working on my own. - Sandra, Technical Writing

While Doug did not relate any negative experiences within this description, Sandra relates having had experiences where she has had issues with peers who have not held up their end of
the workload. Similarly, when questioned as to what he felt was the most difficult aspect of writing collaboratively, Doug responded

*Dividing work evenly. Meeting with peers. Having team members finish work on time. At times, having team members do their work at all.*

Both of these students have had negative experiences with collaborative writing that has influenced their current perception of the practice. While they still acknowledge the necessity of the skill set, the experiences they have had have led them to not enjoy the practice. This lines up with the common critiques of collaborative writing across all of the participants. Together with issues finding time to meet with their teams, dealing with team mates who fail to do their part on the assignment was the most common response to the difficulties with collaborative writing. The codes NPP (Negative Perception Regarding Peers), CWDwP (Collaborative Writing Difficulties with Peers), and CWDwT (Collaborative Writing Difficulties with Time Constraints) were the most common negative codes found within the participant interviews. For example, during our interview, when asked what he felt were the negative aspects of collaborative writing, Tim, a student in Professor Grant’s Workplace Writing course, stated

*some of the negatives about collaborative writing out...outside of just you never know who you are going to get. If you're gonna get the slacker in the group, and...gonna have to pick up*

These were the most prevalent issues and negative perceptions regarding collaborative writing. Students, largely, tended to view the division of labor in collaborative writing as being mostly fair. Additionally, students also agreed that they were satisfied with how their work was acknowledged within the team’s final product and that they were comfortable with including their names on the finished products.

From the data gathered, it is clear that there is a direct correlation between a students’ view that collaborative writing is a necessary skill and the students’ understanding that they need to further develop this skill. However, this does not necessarily translate to a student enjoying collaborative writing assignments which can largely be attributed to difficulties working with their peers and scheduling. Yet, there was a clear correlation between students developing a
positive perception of collaborative writing after they experienced collaborative writing practices within these courses. Each of the courses had two students who at the beginning of the course expressed that they did not feel they need to further develop their collaborative writing skills and did not feel as if collaborative writing skills would be a marketable skill when looking for employment. All four of these students, at the end of the semester, changed their answers on the final survey to show that they now do feel they need to further develop their collaborative writing skills and do feel as if collaborative writing skills would be a marketable skill when looking for employment.

This correlation is an important one as having students understand the necessity of a skill and an understanding that they need to develop this skill places them within the *mastery-approach* goal orientation which describes students who are highly focused on learning as much as they can while working to overcome obstacles to learn as much as they can. And, this goal orientation, as discussed within Chapter 2, has been shown to lead to a larger increase in positive learning outcomes that the other goal orientations (Somounguogul & Yildirim, 1999). This goal orientation provides the instructor of the class the opportunity to teach effective collaborative writing skills and have a student body who will work to master and internalize these skills as best as they can as they feel it will ultimately be a useful and valuable skill for them in the future. However, it is up to the instructor to provide the content and the instruction required for the students to develop these skills. In the next section, the instructors’ approaches to collaborative writing and the language they used to frame this practice will be discussed.

How do instructors of undergraduate professional writing courses at The University of Texas at El Paso pedagogically approach and implement collaborative writing in their courses and what language, if any, is used to discuss collaborative writing in the classroom?

The approaches to collaborative writing within these courses was drastically different. Where Professor Grant focused heavily on having the students work with one another on multiple tasks over the course of the semester culminating in a collaborative final project, Professor Lee relied
solely on peer review as collaborative writing. These approaches were also noted by the students during the interviews, both in positive and negative ways. This is mostly evidenced in the times immediately prior to the students being left to their collaborative projects.

I observed three separate days in which Professor Lee’s course peer reviewed their work—this was the only time the students were asked to work with one another. However, Professor Lee was clear with the students at the beginning of class stating, “We won’t be doing much collaboration in the class. You do have some workshops.” This proved to be true and also reflected the amount of discussion that collaborative writing received within the course. On one occasion the topic for the day was set as, “Working in Teams”; however, despite introducing the day’s topic as being focused on teams, the lecture simply focused on Active v. Passive Voice and using clear and concise language. No discussion of writing in teams took place.

This was also the case on the three peer review days. The first of the peer reviews, during the third week of the semester, focused on the students’ peer reviewing their resumes. The students were asked to bring in their resumes and they would “workshop” them. At the beginning of the day, prior to the students being given time to workshop their resumes, Professor Lee focused his lecture on two different articles—both focused on the formatting of a resume. After working through the formatting guidelines, Professor Lee informs the students that if they need an example, they can “check the back of the book.” Once the brief lecture on format was concluded, the students were allowed to workshop one another’s resumes. The students opted to work in groups of three and four and, since this was the first time they had been placed together, spent a large amount of the time getting to know one another. Questions like, “What is your major?” and “Where do you work?” were common across the class. During the workshop, Professor Lee occasionally walked around the class and reminded students to focus on the resumes. The students finished their reviews 15 minutes before the class was scheduled to be completed at which time Professor Lee told them they could go if they were done. All of the students promptly left.
This was how peer review worked in Professor Lee’s course. The students were told what they needed to do, but they were not told how to accomplish this. It could be argued that by showcasing formatting rules for resumes prior to the resume workshop, Professor Lee was working to show the students what they could focus on when reviewing their peers’ work, but this connection was never given to the students. The students were not shown or told what they needed to do when they broke off into teams; rather, the students were only told that they were going to “workshop” their resumes. How the students chose to do this was up to them. This lack of instruction on the peer reviews was noted by the students in the end-of-semester surveys and interviews.

The class was split down the middle when asked if they were required to complete any collaborative writing assignments during the semester. Similarly, the class was also equally divided when asked if they felt the class provided them with a better understanding of how to effectively write in a collaborative setting. For example, April, who stated that they were required to complete collaborative writing assignments, stated that she did not feel that the class provided her with a better understanding of how to effectively write in a collaborative setting remarking that she felt this way because she was not provided with “enough information to improve the assignment.” When looking at the reasons that students did feel that the course provided them with a better understanding of collaborative writing practices, the responses all focused on aspects of the content that they themselves were able to apply to collaborative writing.

We read some articles that discussed how this could help and how to deal with other people. -Stephanie

We’ve learned about communication techniques that I assume would be useful in collaborative writing. -Kenneth

Somehow we talked about diversity in team groups and that explains a lot. -Jared

These descriptions of the benefits towards developing collaborative writing skills are starkly different than those provided by the students in Professor Grant’s Workplace Writing course. But, the amount of collaboration, approach, and language by Professor Grant were also very
different from that of Professor Lee’s course. On every day that I observed Professor Grant’s course, the students were tasked with some form of team activity. The activity differed from day-to-day and was always focused on the topics being discussed at the time.

On one of the days that I observed Professor Grant’s course the topic was focused on composing negative and sensitive letters. The class began with discussion on peer reviewing each other’s work, referencing the next class period where the students would be provided with time to review one another’s negative letters. While not directly telling the students what to do when they peer reviewed one another’s letters, Professor Grant explained how they approached reviewing others’ writing. For example, Professor Grant explained how they made use of a “compliment sandwich” where a critique of one’s writing is placed between a compliment as well as what could be done to positively edit the text to make the change. After providing these examples, Professor Grant moves on to lecture more on the assignment and then tasks the students with editing a sample negative letter. Professor Grant tells the students, “I want you to read it and work together when correcting it.” While the students are working, Professor Grant works around the classroom asking the students what they have found and what edits they are suggesting. After the students have completed the edits, the class is brought back together and collectively discusses the edits that each group has made and the teams reasoning for the changes.

By example and providing the students with an opportunity to work on reviewing compositions prior to the students being tasked with doing this on their peers’ work provided the students with a solid understanding of what was expected from them and how they should approach the task. These practices and the collaborative writing development that this provided the students was noted by the students in the end-of-semester surveys and interviews.

One hundred percent of the students in Professor Grant’s course stated that they were required to complete collaborative writing assignments during the semester and felt that the class provided them with a better understanding of how to effectively write in a collaborative setting. In contrast to the justifications Professor Lee’s students made in regards to the ways the course
accomplished this, the students in Professor Grant’s course did not need to work to find out how the course helped develop these skills.

*It has shown how working in a group you have to take into consideration everybody’s schedules and make time to get together. It’s good to break up work and get different people’s views on the subject.* - Mary

*Brief throughout the semester we have learned several techniques to effectively write in a group setting.* - Ana

*We have gotten a lot of opportunities in which we were able to collaborate between each other.* - Tim

The students’ views on collaboration are no doubt due to the frequency in which it was assigned as well as the instruction the students were provided with over the course of the semester. This frequency of discussion and focus on collaboration could be, in part, due to Professor Grant’s perspective on collaborative writing which is very similar to the issues and concerns shown by the students. When asked for their perspective on the role that collaborative writing plays in undergraduate education, Professor Grant remarked on the benefits as well as the problems that often plague team writing projects.

*So, in a very general level, I think that, you know, collaborative writing can be beneficial, right? Because everyone is bringing their expertise to the table and so forth, but I think it can also be challenging because people have very different writing processes and I think at the undergraduate level, uh, in my experience, whenever I’ve, uh, assigned a collaborative writing project, like the final in that class, students tend to take a piece, write their piece, and someone kind of mashes it all together which is not the way, you know, it should be done, I don’t think. And, not the way that I’ve done it in professional settings or seen it done, you know, like in a published piece you would then try to edit for continuity and not just the style, but like, even content, you know, so you are not repeating. You know one of the benefits would be that you’d get to check each other’s work and make sure that, you know, things are cited properly and so forth. And that doesn’t always happen. So, on the one hand I feel like it could be a good exercise for students. One the, in reality, thought, I think it often, uh, ends up being...they see it as being too challenging and too difficult and they just want to do it themselves. And then again, when they don’t like separating it from group work, right, so, uh, there is always somebody who doesn’t do their part, there is always somebody who, you know, it’s kind of difficult to work with. There is always, you know, the person who wants to take over and do it all themselves. So, I mean, I think it’s a good exercise because maybe, they’ll get that, the experience under their belts so the next time they go into the project they know, or a similar kind of project.*
Professor Grant echoes the difficulties of working with peers, an issue that was also present in the students’ responses. Additionally, Professor Grant recognizes that the way the students are often approaching collaborative writing projects is not reflective of the ways in which it is done in a professional setting and works to remedy this. When asked about their opinion as to how to best approach instructing students for collaborative writing when it is unknown what their specific needs in the workplace would be, Professor Grant states

*I...you know, and I think it kind of depends on what their workplace is like. Uh, some of the students in our courses, uh, are, are going into social work, right, and so they are going to be doing a lot of case work and things like that. Now, I know from my own kind of volunteer experiences that a lot of times this is going to be a collaborative effort among a number of people who are going to be contributing to the same report, or that type of thing. I think they are going to use it, you know, in pretty much whatever they are doing.*

Again, Professor Grant recognizes that the students will need collaborative writing skills, despite not knowing the specifics of what they will be doing in the workforce. Yet, an emphasis on skills that the students can use and adapt to their future situations is focused on.

Both Professor Lee and Professor Grant spent included aspects of collaborative writing in their classroom; however, these collaborative writing aspects did not coincide with the initial definition of collaborative writing provided by my research study. In the next chapter, Chapter 5: Implications & Conclusions, the third research questions will be addressed as will the aforementioned initial, contextual definition of collaborative writing.
Chapter 5: Implications & Conclusions

This research project was truly a beginning to an exploration of as well as an act of collaborative writing. From the initial conceptions of this project to the enlightening coding and analysis process, I have been consistently challenged and introduced to ideas that I never could have planned for. From developing my research questions, the knowledge that has been gained from every corner has been both, at times, incredibly frustrating and rewarding. Luckily, I have not experienced the same feelings that I did regarding my collaborative writing experiences that prompted this exploration. I have been lucky to be guided and advised by not only my immediate support structure, but also by the insight gathered across my data collection. However, as with any project, there are a number of things that have grown beyond their initial conceptions. In this chapter I will discuss the conclusions I have drawn from the present research and what implications these conclusions will have on my own, and others, pedagogical practices. Additionally, I will address implications for future research that have developed as a result of this study.

While not directly focused on collaboration, one of the lessons I have learned is that one’s current practices often dictate the ways in which current practices are viewed. The students that I interviewed all related their past and present experiences with collaborative writing in reflection of their current experiences. Those students that were having difficulties with their team members reflected on the difficulties they experienced with peers in the past and noted these difficulties as their primary issues with their collaborative practices. This is an important lesson to learn. While, at times, I may become increasingly frustrated with my writing, I need to be aware of this and not let it dictate my views on my past and present work. The rest of this chapter will focus directly on the conclusions drawn from the research as they directly related to the aim and goals outlined in the second chapter of this dissertation.

The Spectrum of Collaborative Writing

One of the unexpected outcomes—at least unexpected by me at the beginnings of this research project—has been the shift in my views pertaining to collaborative writing and what
that term actually describes. In Chapter 2 I defined collaborative writing as being “two or more individuals working jointly with one another, using a variety of methods, to create a single document or project with a common, shared goal, for which all individuals are equally accountable.” Looking back at this definition, I find it to be rather limited in light of the experiences shared by the student participants. This also holds true in regards to the other definitions provided in collaborative writing research as discussed in Chapter 2 (Allen et al., 1987; Bosley, 1989; Ede & Lunsford, 1990). While my views have shifted over the course of this endeavor, I felt it necessary to keep this definition as is for a few different reasons. First, while this project is an exercise in research it is also a learning process for myself and should, in my opinion, showcase a growth in my understandings of the concepts that I have spent so much time with. The writing completed for this project has taken place over quite a large amount of time and, as such, I feel should reflect the changes in my understandings. Second, my initial narrow definition also stands as a point of departure. I, just as the student participants that contributed to this study have done, brought along my own perceptions of collaborative writing and this initial definition illustrates this point. Just as a number of the students I interviewed for this study had their perceptions of collaborative writing shift over the course of the semester in response to the practices and materials they encountered, I witnessed my own perceptions shift in response to the new information and experiences that I encountered.

It is this shift in my and the participants’ views on what actually constitutes collaborative writing that has led to the development of what I have termed the *Spectrum of Collaborative Writing*. I have learned, and the present research has shown, that collaborative writing is not a practice that can be defined by a narrow definition like the one that I initially provided. Collaborative writing practices are much more fluid—they can appear to be one practice here and another practice there—and are made up of a multitude of writing practices and can be used, as necessary, within writing projects as needed. Just as Bruffee’s (1984) research suggests, collaboration can be broadly stated as even the practice of writing itself. For example, this dissertation which, I would argue, most deem as an individual work produced by an individual—not a collaborative one. However, over the course of working on this project I have discussed
this project with a number of people whom have shared their thought and opinions with me and I have worked closely with my director in discussing ideas and prose. Some of the discussions I have had with friends and colleagues have made its way, in some form, into my writing while other have not. However, all of this discussion has influenced my writing and approach towards this project. With that in mind, in Chapter 1, I questioned whether or not the writing that was produced during my tenure as an undergraduate could actually be considered collaborative writing as the practices experienced there did not fall within the practices that I had come to know as collaborative writing. Looking back, I would agree that these projects were collaborative writing projects. However, the level of collaboration that actually took place or that I took part in was not as high as I had expected.

Both courses provided the students with definitions of what collaborative writing is and what the students ultimately defined collaborative writing as being was dependent on which course they were enrolled in. Professor Lee’s students defined collaborative writing largely as peer review and idea generation whereas Professor Grant’s students defined collaborative writing as being the process of working with others in multiple ways to generate a final product. These definitions are developed from what the students experienced in their respective courses. The fact that what students defined collaborative under the experiences they had during the semester is important to note and a large impetus behind the development of the Spectrum of Collaborative Writing. With this range of definitions and experiences, both of which encompassed some form of collaborative writing, students need to be aware of the levels of collaboration and what the benefits and downfalls of each level are. By showcasing the different types of activities that can constitute collaborative writing, the understanding that students leave the class with will be a much broader one and ultimately provide them with a better understanding of how and when to utilize specific practices within the Spectrum. The diagram below showcases the levels of collaboration as they can be understood to fall with the Spectrum of Collaborative Writing as the product of this dissertation.
Beginning on the left-hand side of the diagram *low-level collaboration*. This is made up of activities that do not require a large amount of contribution from participants other than the writer themselves. This can be things like conversations about the topic, discussions with peers and colleagues, or, as mentioned earlier in regards to this dissertation writing, my discussions with my friends, colleagues, and director. While the individuals I discussed this project with did not have a part in the actual composition of the document, they did contribute to the development of the ideas that shaped it and, without their participation this document would not be what it is today. This level of collaboration is largely what Bruffee (1984) discussed in *Collaborative Learning and the ‘Conversation of Mankind’*. Moving across the spectrum to the right-hand side of the diagram, the level of contribution from participants’ increases.

In the middle of the spectrum we see larger contributions from participants in the *mid-level collaboration* activities. I have placed peer review in the center of the scale; however, as the present research has shown, what exactly constitutes as peer review is not a singular practice and can take multiple forms. Peer review can be activities like that seen in Professor Lee’s course where the students were asked to read over one another’s writing and provide feedback as they see fit; peer review can be students working with each other on the same document and helping each other develop new ideas as seen in Professor Grant’s course; peer review can be my multiple discussions with my director and the feedback I received on my writing while composing this dissertation. Ultimately, while all of these activities can be understood as a form
of peer review, the level of contribution from the participants varies. As such, where peer review falls on the spectrum in not singular, but rather a sliding scale dependent upon the level of contribution.

Moving to the far right-hand side of the diagram is high-level collaboration. At this point, the level of contribution from each participants is very high with each of the participants working towards the development of the document. This can be understood as being co-authored documents and documents that have been composed in a real-time collaboratively between authors. Belenky, Clincy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1997) provide a great description of this level of collaboration in reflection to their Women’s Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind.

In collaborating on writing this book we searched for a single voice—a way of submerging our individual perspectives for the sake of the collective “we.” Not that we denied out individual convictions or squelched our objections to one another’s points of view—we argued, tried to persuade, even cried at times when we reached an impasse of understanding—but we learned to listened to each other, build on each other’s insights, and eventually to arrive at a way of communicating as a collective what we believe.

Belenky et al. (1997) continues to say that the text they produced did not have sections that could be attributed to each author, rather the book was a product of their joint efforts. Within this level of collaboration all of the authors contributed a high amount to the composition. As a result, all of the authors have a high level of ownership of the document.

In conjunction with the level of contributions from collaborators, the amount of ownership collaborators have over the composition can also be indicative of where the activity falls on the spectrum. While participating in low-level collaborative discussions and conversations with friends, family, and colleagues, these individuals do not have a high-level of ownership of the document. On the other side of the spectrum, the authors of Women’s Ways of Knowing (1997) all have a high-level of ownership on the document. Falling on the middle of the spectrum, peer reviews activity collaborators have a mid-level of ownership. For example, in working with my director on editing and content of this dissertation, the ownership my director
has on this document is greater than that of those who I have had discussions with but is less than had this research been composed jointly.

In looking back at the definitions of collaborative writing discussed in Chapter 2, Farkas’ (1991) four-point definition is very similar in concept to spectrum in that it worked to provide a multifaceted view of collaborative writing. The four point definition of collaborative writing Farkas (1991) are as follows:

1. Two or more people jointly composing the complete text of a document
2. Two or more people contributing components to a document
3. One or more persons modifying, by editing and/or reviewing, the document
4. One person working interactively with one or more persons and drafting a document based on the ideas of the person or persons (p. 14)

In his definition, Farkas (1991) works on developing an understanding of what constitutes collaborative writing beginning with what I termed high-level collaboration on the spectrum and working incrementally down to the final point which falls under low-level collaboration. In the diagram below, I have mapped out where the four points of Farkas’ (1991) fall on the spectrum.

Spectrum of Collaborative Writing

Figure 4: The Spectrum of Collaborative Writing with Farkas’ (1991) 4-points of Collaborative Writing included.

While the points provided by Farkas (1991) are similar to those provided in the spectrum and account for multiple levels of contribution and even for simultaneous use of the points, the points themselves do not provide an understanding of the benefits associated with the different levels of
participation. With the implementation of the spectrum as a pedagogical tool, working in conjunction with the present research’s finding that students adopt the definitions of collaboration that they are exposed to within the classroom, students will be exposed to the different aspects of as well as the advantages and disadvantages associated with each aspect of collaborative writing. This is further supported by the wide range of collaboration exhibited in the workforce and the students need to be able to adapt to multiple styles of collaborative writing as opposed to becoming familiar with one aspect of the process. Paretti, McNair, & Holloway-Attaway (2007) note that providing students with the larger, overarching knowledge of process leads towards increased competence in the related skill.

Current research in education suggests that students develop and transfer competence to new environments not simply by mastering facts and skills, but by learning the metaknowledge and conceptual framework surrounding those facts and skills” (Paretti, McNair, & Holloway-Attawat, 2007, p. 330).

It is this understanding of “metaknowledge” and the “conceptual framework” that the spectrum aims to provide for the students in the professional writing classroom. With these foundations, students will be able to transfer and utilize collaborative writing skills in the workplace as it is enacted in the workplace they find themselves in, no matter if the organization makes use of a hierarchal, dialogic, or asymmetrical mode. Building on the focus on pedagogical practices and applications of collaborative writing in the professional writing classroom, the next section will respond to the final research question in relation to the results of my research and the information provided in the literature review.

How can student perceptions and motivations regarding collaborative writing work to inform and guide the development and implementation of classroom practices surrounding collaboration?

The overarching goal of the Spectrum of Collaborative Writing is to help build a bridge between the current gap of collaborative writing practice dividing classroom and workplace practices. The experiences the participants within this study discussed regarding their experiences with collaborative writing fell, for the most part, across the whole of the spectrum.
The majority of participants described experiences falling in the middle of the spectrum stating that they had experienced collaborative writing where they had met with a group that provided feedback on something that they had written. However, these experiences dictated what the students felt made up collaborative writing.

However, I argue, providing and explaining the spectrum within the classroom will provide the impetus for both a discussion on collaborative writing as well an explanation of the types of practices that can be utilized for specific contexts. Understanding the contexts in which specific aspects of collaborative writing can help build a bridge between the usage of collaboration in the classroom and in the workplace, a divide noted in the research (Duin, 1991; Rheling 1994). Furthermore, the students overwhelmingly felt that collaborative writing skills would be marketable skills for them and also largely agreed that they needed further practice with collaborative writing. With this positive perception of the need and value of these skills, the students are in the optimal frame of mind (mastery-approach goal orientation) to work towards mastering these skills.

Introducing and discussing multiple aspects of collaborative writing can also work to complement and contextualize the usage of other aspects of collaboration like peer review. As Carter (1982) noted that peer review alone has no significant effect on improving student writing. This could be due, in part, that students are not comfortable with providing their peers with negative feedback presumably because they are compensating for their own reading and writing inadequacies (Flynn, 1984). A negative aspect noted by students in Professor Lee’s course was that they would prefer to get feedback from the instructor as opposed to their peers. For example, Jared noted that he was unsure of how to respond to his peers writing.

Like for me, I don’t know what to tell them, right? Like, what to do, right? I’m not knowledgeable enough to be able to do that.

These types of student concerns were alleviated in Professor Grant’s course by working to provide ways and strategies for providing effective feedback and the examples of the “compliment sandwich” and how providing feedback on writing can be approached. This is supported by Flynn’s (2011) assertion that students might not be able to provide useful feedback
without training. This is also demonstrated as an effective practice in Grimm’s (1986) guidelines for peer review and Fosmire’s (2010) usage of *Calibrated Peer Review*. The methods for providing students with strategies for effective peer review are plentiful; however, it the actual implementation of these strategies in the classroom that is required to benefit the students and keep them from feeling like the “blind leading the blind” (Grimm, 1986, p. 92).

Another of the frequent negative perceptions the students discussed was the fear of being graded unfairly and having to work with peers who did not pull their own weight. These concerns were partly alleviated in Professor Grant’s course by having the students work together on ungraded projects that worked to build the students rapport with one another as well as their interpersonal skills. The students were allowed to work and interact with one another, learning one another’s strengths, weaknesses, and communication styles. The usefulness of this was further increased by having students work with random peers on similarly, grade-free assignments week to week. As a result, by the time the students were tasked with choosing their teams and working together on an assignment that was graded, they were comfortable with the entire class and were able to choose to work with those that felt they worked best with. This strategy of allowing students to work together prior to having to produce large projects together was also demonstrated by Davis & Estey (1997) at Boston University College. However, the early assignments were still graded, just not on the scale of the final project. While this technique of developing student interpersonal skills and familiarity with one another worked well to alleviate the students’ concerns regarding their peer’s work habits, it also, as a result of this, alleviated their concerns on grades as they were all working with like-minded peers of their choosing.

Though one of the classes—Professor Grant’s—provided the students with a much larger opportunity for collaborative writing, this did not affect their positive perceptions regarding the value of collaboration and the need to further develop their skills. The responses from both classes presented identical percentages of students expressing positive perceptions at the end of the class in response to the value of collaborative writing—75 percent— and the need further develop their collaborative writing skills—100 percent. This further evidences the fact
that the students are aligned with the mastery-approach goal orientation and is especially true for the students in Professor Lee’s course. Despite the lack of collaborative writing presence in the course, the students were willing to overcome these obstacles to learn as much as possible—a key characteristic of the mastery-approach goal orientation.

Ultimately, it is up to the instructor to provide the students with the curriculum that is necessary for the students to be able to effectively develop their collaborative writing skills. One of my favorite responses came from one of Professor Lee’s students, April. In our interview she displayed her feelings towards the lack of guidance and instruction on collaborative writing and how it could best be implemented. In frustration, April said

> Well, to be honest, I don’t think it’s going to work because most teachers, so just do this and do that we’re there working. If we do ask, keep asking the teacher, you have to keep asking the teacher and we’ll get some improvement in communication. If there’s not communication, then it’s just following what the instructions said. Yeah, it’s better to have more instruction, like you said, more detail. Using communication to understand to get on the same level.

Despite her initial belief that it would not work, April comes around to feeling that with more instruction and interaction with the instructor, she would be able to further develop her skills. I find this to be both enlightening and saddening at the same time. It is great to see the students positive view on how instruction can change to better help her; however, it is disappointing to hear that her experiences have largely been affected by a lack of communication from her instructors.

Overall, the students’ attitudes and perceptions are where they need to be for instructors to develop the students’ skills. It is up to the instructors to work to provide the best opportunity for the students to do so.

**Closing Thoughts**

At the beginning of this dissertation, in a night of frustration and with a complete lack of inspiration, I typed out the two quick sentences, “Writing is not something that comes naturally
to me. Writing is a difficult and painstaking process for me.” Those two lines, in some odd way, jump-started my brain and led to the first 6 pages of Chapter 1 flowing out as if they had always been in the back of my brain. It was a rare moment. Those two simple sentences now ring more true for me than they did when I initially wrote them. However, the insight I have gained from this process has been wonderful. I met with students who were incredibly optimistic about what they were working on, I tore myself out of the solitary walls that I occupied while writing and shared and collaborated with others, and, most importantly, my understandings of collaborative writing changed and grew.

This research project has sparked a number of new interests in collaborative writing for me and were, at times, difficult to push aside and maintain focus. For example, a few of these interests are the ways in which collaborative writing is discussed within professional writing textbooks and the link between motivation, perception, and social cognition within Educational Psychology and how it can be utilized within collaborative writing education. In my initial inquiry into perception, and for the purposes of this research study, I defined perceptions as “the interpretation of view that is held regarding someone or something.” Upon researching perception and motivation within Education Psychology, I am very much interested in further researching these aspects as they are discussed in relation to students’ ability to learn and transfer concepts and practices.
References


Employers’ perspectives on the basic knowledge and applied skills of new entrants to the 21st century U.S. workforce. United States.


Appendix A

The following survey was administered to the student participants in both courses at the beginning of the semester (during the third week of classes).

UTEP IRB Reference Number: 690320-1

Collaborative Writing Survey
(Part 1)

In an effort to learn more about students’ thoughts surrounding collaboration at The University of Texas at El Paso, you are being asked to share your opinions confidentially. Your individual answers will not be shared with anyone outside of the research team.

This survey deals with collaborative writing. For the purposes of this survey, collaborative writing is understood to be any instance when you have worked with your peers during your coursework to research, write, edit, and complete a written project.

Thank you for your time and input.

Levi Martin
lrmartin@utep.edu

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability and be as descriptive as possible where applicable.

Please provide your UTEP email address. This email address will not be used for identification purposes at any point. Your email address will be given a participant number that will be attached to your data. The list of email addresses with associated participant numbers will only accessible to the research team. Additionally, if you agree to participate in an interview later on in the semester, this email address will be used to contact you.

Your UTEP email address:

1. What is your field of study/major?
2. What is your classification (please circle the appropriate answer)?
   a. Freshman
   b. Sophomore
   c. Junior
   d. Senior
   e. Graduate
3. What course are you enrolled in (which course is this survey being administered during)?
4. Why did you choose to take this course (please choose all that apply)?
   a. Advised it would be helpful for my chosen career path
b. Required by my degree plan
c. Interested in the subject matter
d. Would like to further my writing skills
e. Other (please list):

5. What is your age?
   a. 18-25
   b. 26-30
   c. 31-40
   d. 41-50
   e. 51-60
   f. 60 or above

6. I identify my gender as
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Transgender
   d. Other (please list):

7. I believe that collaborative writing is a valuable and necessary part of my education.
   a. True
   b. False

8. Which of the following technologies have you used? Which do you use on a regular basis? Please select all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technology</th>
<th>Have Used</th>
<th>Use on a Regular Basis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Smart Phone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wikis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microsoft Word</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google Docs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple Pages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Collaborative Writing Software</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. If you listed that you use other collaborative writing software, please list those that you use (If you did not list other collaborative writing software, please leave this section blank):

10. Have you written collaboratively in past courses here at UTEP?
    a. Yes
    b. No

11. If so, please describe your experience(s) with writing collaboratively. If not, please leave this section blank.

12. Which of the following describes the kind of practices that you have experienced while writing collaboratively? Please select all that apply.
    a. Met with a group that provided feedback on something that I had written
    b. Wrote a document as one of many authors
    c. Edited others’ text on a Wiki
    d. Contributed text to a Wiki
    e. Participated in face-to-face, online, or telephone discussion regarding a joint written product
13. What do you feel was the purpose of writing collaboratively as opposed to writing individually?
   a. To work with peers
   b. To develop interpersonal communication or language skills
   c. As an alternative to traditional assignments
   d. To improve the quality of learning
   e. Not sure

14. How would you rate the fairness in the division of labor in the collaborative writing experiences you have had?
   a. Not at all fair
   b. Barely fair
   c. Somewhat fair
   d. Mostly fair
   e. Completely fair

15. What level of difficulty did you encounter in writing with others?
   a. Difficult
   b. Somewhat difficult
   c. Mostly smooth
   d. Smooth
   e. Completely problem free

16. How much instruction have you been given in the past on effective collaborative writing?
   a. None
   b. A little
   c. A fair amount
   d. A good amount
   e. A great amount

17. When writing collaboratively, what do you find the most difficult?

18. I enjoy writing collaboratively.
   a. True
   b. False

19. Do you feel that you will need to write collaboratively in your future profession?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Not sure

20. Thinking about your experiences of collaborative writing, please give each statement a number related to the following guide:
   1=Strongly Agree
   2=Agree
   3=Undecided
   4=Disagree
   5=Strongly Disagree
   a. My collaborative writing experiences have been enjoyable.
   b. I have been satisfied with how my work was acknowledged.
   c. I was comfortable with including my name on the finished product.
   d. I felt as though the writing was mine.
21. I feel that I need to further practice and develop my collaborative writing skills.
   a. True
   b. False

22. I feel that effective collaborative writing skills will be a marketable skill when looking for employment in the future.
   a. True
   b. False

23. Do you feel you have received adequate instruction in order to effectively write collaboratively?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Somewhat

24. Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview? The interview would last roughly 30 minutes. It would be conducted in person at a time and date that would be acceptable to you.
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Not sure, I would like more information on the interviews

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your time and feedback is greatly appreciated.
Appendix B

The following survey was administered to the student participants in both courses at the end of the semester (during the fifteenth week of classes).

UTEP IRB Reference Number: 690320-1 Spring 2015

Collaborative Writing Survey
(Part 2)

In an effort to learn more about students’ thoughts surrounding collaboration at The University of Texas at El Paso, you are being asked to share your opinions confidentially. Your individual answers will not be shared with anyone outside of the research team.

This survey deals with collaborative writing. For the purposes of this survey, collaborative writing is understood to be any instance when you have worked with your peers during your coursework to research, write, edit, and complete a written project.

Thank you for your time and input.

Levi Martin
lrmartin@utep.edu

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability and be as descriptive as possible where applicable.

Please provide your UTEP email address. This email address will not be used for identification purposes at any point. Your email address will be given a participant number that will be attached to your data. The list of email addresses with associated participant numbers will only accessible to the research team.

Your UTEP email address:

1. Have you been required to complete any collaborative writing assignments in this course?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Yes, but it was optional
2. This course has provided me with a better understanding of how to effectively write in a collaborative setting.
   a. True
   b. False
   i. Why do you feel this way?
3. Now that the course is coming to an end, have your views on collaborative writing changed?
a. Yes. How so?
b. No
4. Has this course furthered your ability to effectively write in a collaborative environment?
a. Yes
b. No
   i. Why do you feel this way?
5. Please describe your experiences with collaborative writing in this class this semester.
6. I feel that I need to further practice and develop my collaborative writing skills.
a. True
b. False
   i. Why do you feel this way?
7. I feel that collaborative writing skills will be a marketable skill when looking for employment in the future.
a. True
b. False
   i. Why do you feel this way?
8. I would like to see more inclusion of collaborative writing instruction and practice in this course.
a. True
b. False
   i. Why do you feel this way?
9. How do you see being able to utilize the collaborative writing skills you have learned in this class in the future?
10. If you worked on a collaborative writing project in this class, please describe what you feel worked best during this project. If you did not work on a collaborative writing project in this class, please say so.
11. If you worked on a collaborative writing project in this class, please describe what you feel was the least successful part of this project. If you did not work on a collaborative writing project in this class, please say so.
12. Based on your experiences with collaborative writing in this class, what do you feel could be done to better your experiences and education on collaborative writing?
Appendix C

The following questions were used to guide the interviews with the student participants.

**Student Interview Questions**

1. What is your name?
2. What is your field of study/major?
3. What is your classification?
4. Why did you enroll in the professional writing course?
5. Describe your experiences with collaborative writing.
6. Describe your feeling towards collaborative writing.
7. Describe your experiences with collaborative writing during this course.
8. Describe any instruction on collaborative writing you have received in the past.
9. Describe any instruction on collaborative writing you received during this course.
10. What do you feel is good about collaborative writing?
11. What do you feel is bad about collaborative writing?
12. What do you think could improve collaborative writing instruction and practice within your course work.
13. What role do you think collaborative writing will play in your future career?
Appendix D

The following questions were used to guide the interviews with the instructor participants.

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**Instructor Interview Questions**

1. What is your field of expertise?
2. What is your rank?
3. What is the total number of years you have been employed by UTEP?
4. How many years have you been teaching courses at the university level?
5. How many years/semesters have you taught this specific course?
6. What are your attitudes towards collaborative writing?
   a. In undergraduate education?
   b. In the workplace?
7. Have you written collaboratively professionally?
8. How do you approach collaboration in the classroom?
9. Do you assign collaborative assignments in your courses? If so, why?
10. What are the purposes of the documents you assign students to write collaboratively?
11. How do these assignments differ from those you assign individually?
12. How do you evaluate collaborative writing?
13. What types of feedback do you get from students on their collaborative writing assignments?
14. Do you feel students are generally excited or disappointed when hearing about collaborative writing assignments?
15. Have your collaborative writing assignments changed/evolved in the time you have been teaching? This course? How so?
Appendix E

The following diagram shows the layout of Professor Lee’s Technical Writing course.
Appendix F

The following diagram shows the layout of Professor Grant’s Workplace Writing course.
Vita

Levi Martin was born and grew up in El Paso, Texas and graduated from a local high school in 1999. He earned his BA from The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) in Print Media Journalism in the fall of 2008. Upon earning his BA, he was admitted to the Rhetoric & Composition MA program at UTEP. He received his MA in the fall of 2010 and continued on to the doctoral program in Rhetoric & Writing Studies at UTEP.

While pursuing a doctoral degree, he held several positions within the university, presented in various academic conferences, and provided leadership for several student organizations. He worked as an Assistant Instructor in the Rhetoric and Writing Studies Undergraduate Program (RWSUP) and an Assistant Director for the University Writing Center (UWC). Currently he is working as a Lecturer for RWSUP.

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This thesis/dissertation was typed by Levi Martin.