

In Search of an Identity:  
A Study on FYC Students' Preference of Course Labels and Identities

by

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an exploration of various identity labels available for first-year composition (FYC) students that tend to classify them into categories which may or may not relate to the students' perception of themselves. If there remains a gap between self-identification and institutional labeling then students may find themselves negotiating unfamiliar spaces detrimental to their personal goals, expectations, and understanding of their writing abilities. This may trigger a rippling effect that may jeopardize the outcomes expected from a successful FYC program stipulated in the WPA Outcomes Statement.

For this study I approached 5 sections of mainstream FYC and 7 sections of ESL/ international FYC with in-class questionnaire based surveys. The 19 questions on the survey were cued to address students' concern for identity and how course labels may or may not attend to them. With feedback from 200 participants this study endeavors to realize their preference for identity markers and definitions for mainstream and ESL sections of FYC. The survey also checks if their choices correlate and in some ways challenge ongoing research in the field.

The survey reports a marked preference for NES and English as a second language speaker as prominent choices among mainstream and ESL/ international students, respectively, but this is at best the big picture. The "truth" lies in the finer details – when mainstream students select NNEs and / or resident NNEs the students demonstrate a heightened awareness of individual identity. When this

same category of resident NNEs identify themselves in ESL/ international sections of FYC, the range of student identities can be realized as not only varied but also overlapping between sections. Furthermore, the opinions of these students concur as well as challenge research in the field, making clear that language learning is a constant process of meaning making, innovation, and even stepping beyond the dominant mores and cultures.

## DEDICATION

For  
Mammi, Mum, and Pakhi

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## ACRONYMS

AE- American English

EIL- English as an International Language

ESL- English as a Second Language

FYC- First-Year Composition

IRB-Institutional Review Board

L1-First Language

L2-Second Language

NES- Native English Speakers

NNES- Non-native English Speakers

SL- Second Language

TESOL-Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

TOEFL-Test of English as a Foreign Language

WE- World Englishes

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is an exploration of various identity labels available for first year writers that tend to classify them into categories which may or may not relate to the students' perception of themselves. If there remains a gap between self-identification and institutional labeling then students may find themselves negotiating unfamiliar spaces detrimental to their personal goals, expectations, and understanding of their writing abilities. This may trigger a rippling effect that may jeopardize the outcomes expected from a successful first-year composition (FYC) program stipulated in the WPA Outcomes Statement, 2001.

In the United States, first-year composition (FYC) is offered at universities to ensure that all incoming students attain a basic level of understanding and applicability of academic use of English, which in turn would develop their critical reading, thinking, and writing skills. Given the large number of incoming freshman, for instance, the Writing Programs at Arizona State university “serves over 10,000 students annually” (About us), the task is challenging, to say the least. The students themselves constitute a heterogeneous body. This heterogeneity is streamlined via placement practices that elect them into mainstream or ESL/ international sections of FYC.

At this point, I would like to focus on the heterogeneous nature of the student body realized through enrollment statistics and strategically labeled for administrative convenience. Elaborate statistics on students who come into FYC classrooms would help establish the premise that pedagogical practices must

embrace multiple identities and voices. In the same vein, the statistics will also confirm that institutionally determined labels must not be viewed as a priori to students' personal understanding of their selves. The following two sub-sections will explore these two criteria (i.e. enrollment statistics and student diversity) in order to create foundation for the research delineated in this document.

### **Enrollment statistics**

Between 2000 and 2009, undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions increased by 34 percent, from 13.2 to 17.6 million students. Projections indicate that it will continue to increase, reaching 19.6 million students in 2020...

Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander enrollment each increased more than five-fold from 1976 to 2009; accordingly, the percentages of students who were Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander increased. In 1976, Hispanics and Asians/Pacific Islanders represented 4 and 2 percent of total enrollment, respectively, compared with 13 and 7 percent, respectively, in 2009. While American Indian/Alaska Native enrollment increased from 70,000 to 189,000 students from 1976 to 2009, these students accounted for approximately 1 percent of the total enrollment in 2009.

(Undergraduate enrollment)

The above statistics generated by the U.S. Department of Education reveal the ever growing number of undergraduates who must complete FYC courses to meet

their graduation requirements. There are a couple of important pointers here: (a) FYC is a requirement for graduation; and (b) once again, the diversity of the student population in the U.S.

There has been much debate (Goggin and Miller, 2000, provides a succinct overview and discussion on the “Great Debate”) on FYC being a required course. Researchers such as Crowley (1991) state that it is nothing short of a fallacy to mandate all undergraduates to take FYC courses. With the sheer volume of undergraduates entering the school system, sustaining FYC calls for huge academic investment. Often the administration has to depend on part-time composition instructors, adjuncts, and graduate students to teach these courses. Coupled with the view that “Freshman English is often characterized as “remedial” even by English faculty” (p. 157), the system rests heavy on those who administer it, teach it, and also undergraduates who have to pass the course(s). Williams (1995) also takes up cudgels against the system in place with a call for an end to “the ghettoization of nonnative speakers (NNSs) in separate remedial courses.” (p. 157)

On the face of it, FYC does not present itself as a course one would be interested to teach or enroll into. Instead it is a gatekeeping mechanism that ensures only those who can “master a highly idealized version of the written dialect of a dominant class” (Crowley, p. 159) are privileged to continue in the university system. Williams (1995) makes a case on the perception of ESL sections of FYC as remedial by presenting survey based data gathered from 78

colleges and universities in the U.S. Results show that teaching assistants and other part time instructors shoulder major amount of teaching responsibilities. Further, most of the instructors for FYC come with less than one year of teaching experience. There are two important inputs I would derive from Crowley's and Williams' discussions – (a) FYC courses are not remedial and (b) they must therefore, benefit from optimum support by the administration. Once again, the focus is on course labels and how misinterpretation of these labels can affect teaching practices and an overall discouraging impression for the students enrolled in these courses.

On one level, FYC can be perceived as a chimera with the promise of remediating students into writers prepared for all genres of writing within a quarter or a semester or a year. Unfortunately, this myth has seeped into the society at large that believes in the remediating powers of a short, time bound course. But I also realize that a remodeled version of FYC can introduce one to various genres of writing and the multitude of voices that inform a text. In other words, I agree that one can learn how to write by taking writing courses. At the same time, as humans we are mediated by various social, cultural, economic, physical, and psychological factors and conjoined with one's interest in particular discourse communities, universities must offer more clarity in expectations and flexibility in course curricula. Hence, "reconceptualists" propose "replacing first-year composition with writing intensive courses... freshman writing seminars... linking them with general education content courses... reforming [the course] through specifying a content for it." (Miller and Goggin, p. 96; also see Bamberg,



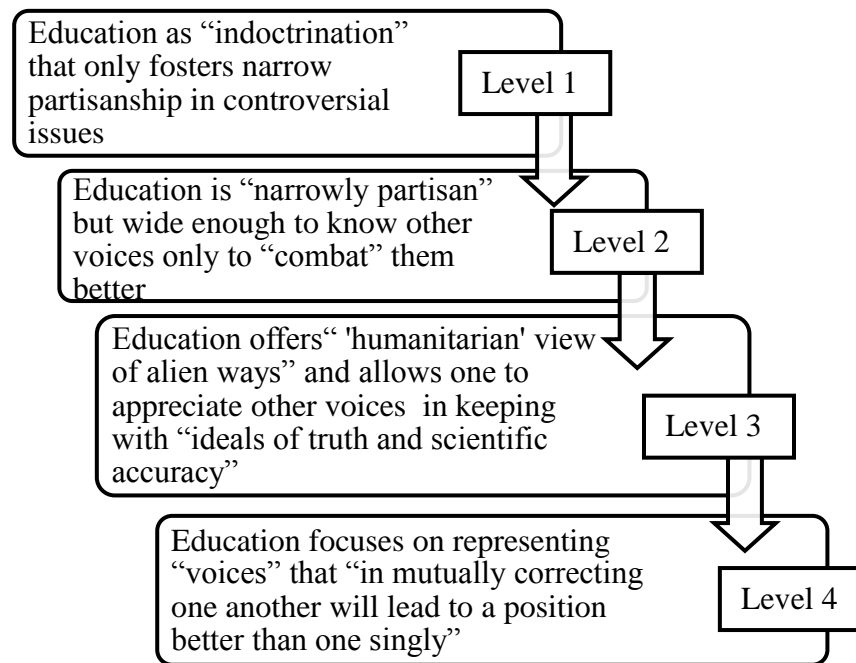
1997) These are only some of the ways to reorient FYC. This study does not intend to take up the challenges of alternative propositions noted by Miller and Goggin (2000). Instead I choose to remain within the existing administrative frame with the view that research does not need to focus on course labels, but the content of the course and how it is delineated. Attending to the FYC course content will also ensure that learners feel encouraged to present their unique perceptions while engaging with an assortment of identities and their literacy practices.

### **Student diversity**

The numbers on student enrollment quoted at the beginning of the previous sub-section presents a composition classroom as multi-ethnic, multilingual, multicultural and therefore, multidimensional in its scope and ready for a multimodal approach to teaching. Each student can be imagined as a cultural artifact that can be unraveled in competent ways to make the FYC experience relevant in real world situations. The current trends in internationalization of higher education (Canagarajah, 2006; Donahue, 2009; Fraiberg, 2010; Horner & Trimbur, 2002; Horner, NeCamp & Donahue, 2011) can offer time relevant criteria for pedagogic restructuring of FYC (discussed in detail in chapter 5). Before suggesting a pedagogic improvisation it is important to focus on the current state of affairs: (a) what are we doing in writing classes at present?; and (b) what direction(s) should we pursue? To answer these questions I bring into context a theory of composition proposed by twentieth century rhetorician

Kenneth Burke. Studying his theoretical propositions is vital to this study because it helps streamline interpretation and categorization of student responses gathered through the questionnaire based survey. So, for instance, the concern for multiple voices and identities is essential to Burke’s view on education. This study also focuses on student voices, how they define and position themselves within the FYC community, as well as their understanding of course labels, which are primarily identities offered by an institution.

Burke’s “Linguistic approach to problem of education” (1955) conceptualizes an “education ladder” (p. 283; Figure 1) that offers interesting insights into how education is conceived step-by-step while keeping in mind that it is only a “preparatory stage in life, not a final one” (p. 287).



**Figure 1.1: Burke’s “education ladder” (pp. 283-284)**

I present Burke's theorization of education in a tiered structure to highlight a sense of progression. From narrow partisanship the theoretician underlines the importance of other "voices", from a "humanitarian" endeavor to one that is ready to critically challenge the self to accommodate the other. The end goal of education is not just an eclectic mix of social values rather, in the formation of a mosaic that participates in the other and transforms the individual and related communities into new, albeit complex altered selves. These newer identities are in a constant flux and acknowledge changeability as essential to "the spirit of absolute linguistic skepticism" (p.288) which in effect, defines education.

Burke's theoretical constructs can be applied to various aspects of FYC, for instance, curricular objectives set by the administration, pedagogical norms in practice, and the diverse student body that needs to maneuver a set academic discourse. I would contend that in its current curricular practices FYC is situated in between levels 3 and 4 of the education superstructure. Researchers, administrators, and instructors recognize the importance of approaching issues from multiple angles, that a "humanitarian view" must appreciate the complexities of diverse opinions. But in order to completely cross over to level 4, appreciation of difference must also accommodate transformation and acceptance of altered realities. This objective shift is an individual effort, which according to Bakhtin correlates with oneself, "the one thinking actively – and as the actually performed act of my answerable thinking that such a system comes to participate in the actual architectonic of the actually experienced world, as one of its constituent moments..." (p. 58). This moment, however, is not just a product of

empathy or a “humanitarian view of alien ways” (Burke, p. 283). Instead it involves “objectification” followed by “*return* into oneself”:

And only this returned- into- itself consciousness gives form, from its own place, to the individuality grasped from inside, that is, shapes it aesthetically as a unitary, whole, and qualitatively distinctive individuality. And all these aesthetic moments – unity, wholeness, self-sufficiency, distinctiveness – are transgredient to the individuality that is being determined: from within itself, these moments do not exist for it in its own life... They have meaning and are actualized by the empathizer, who is situated *outside* the bounds of that individuality, by way of shaping and objectifying the blind matter obtained through empathizing. (pp. 14-15)

Therefore, to shift into level 4 of Burke’s “education ladder” the individual writer needs to be prepared for an exhaustive critical upheaval of his/her self. With ever-growing numbers of students from varied socio-cultural and economic strata, campuses across the nation are already equipped to initiate young writers towards a Bakhtinian transformation. The context of meaning making, theoretical, and practical support will fall under the purview of administrators and instructors of first-year writing. Thus, Burke and Bakhtin’s theoretical concepts inform three primary concerns of this study: (a) concern for student identities; (b) concern for developing students’ distinct individuality; and (c) concern for the “other” that promotes critical understanding.

The WPA Outcomes Statement for FYC enumerates the expectations for administrators, instructors, and students. The steering committee of the outcomes group offers that the core standards are based on “theory as well as practice, on a keen sense of languages as well as an appreciation for difference, on a willingness to foreground possibility and to take a risk.” (Harrington, Malencyzk, Peckham, Rhodes & Yancey, 2001, p. 322) It is intended that all first-year students appreciate “difference” and in effect are open to multiple voices that are not always agreeable. However, the disciplinary “division of labor model” proposed by Matsuda (1998, 2000) reveals that distinctions based on first language and second language, or mainstream and ESL/ international binaries can infringe on the applicability of the Outcomes Statement. If the goal is to prompt students to critically “use writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating” (Harrington et al., 2001, p. 324) then, it is essential that they experience it first-hand.

According to the enrollment statistics, U.S. colleges and university campuses are a mix of Hispanics, Asians, Pacific Islanders, American Indians, and Alaska Natives along with other mainstream and international students. This cultural diversity fundamental to the student body must find ways to interact in academic spaces afforded by writing courses. Although researchers (Braine, 1994a, 1994b, 1996; Carson, 1992; Carson & Nelson, 1996; Harklau, 1994; McKay, 1981; Silva 1993) have indicated the relevance of separate mainstream and ESL sections of FYC, but it is equally imperative that newer inter-connections (such as the proposition for “cross-cultural composition” in Silva,

1994 and Matsuda & Silva, 1999) and pedagogical revisions allow students categorized by various course labels an opportunity to interact and cultivate their individual critical repertoire. After all, in order to be proficient critical thinkers one must endure the challenges of diversity.

I conclude this section with answers for the two questions that rose earlier and let me add that these answers will further evolve as the discussion progresses in this study. The questions: (a) what are we doing in writing classes at present?; and (b) what direction(s) should we pursue? To answer the first one, I would posit that as administrators and instructors, we are in a moment of flux. The teaching practices for FYC are increasingly showing awareness of the many identities that come together and negotiate their individualities in the classroom. There are means to explore writing through these channels of negotiation, ones that students are ready to undertake. But, there is a sense of reluctance too. It is convenient to acknowledge multiple perspectives in writing without the concern for facing some of them first-hand. In short, we are writing about different viewpoints of an issue while overlooking the diversity apparent in our midst – diversity of languages, cultures, and writing contexts. So, what does one do about it? I would say, indulge this diversity.

Recent research focuses on language differences (Bawarshi 2006), cross-cultural literacy (Eck, 2008; Lu & Horner, 2009, Matsuda, 2006), multiliteracies (Schwartz, 2008), hybrid courses (Gouge, 2009; Hawisher, Selfe, Guo & Liu, 2006), translingual approach (Horner 2001, 2006; Horner & Trimbur, 2002;

Horner, Lu , Royster & Trimbur, 2011; Trimbur 2006), multicultural/ multilingual composition (Canagarajah, 2006a, 2006b; Costino & Hyon, 2007; Dasenbrock, 1999; Donahue, 2009; Fraiberg, 2010; Horner, NeCamp & Donahue, 2011; Jordan, 2005), and teaching of world Englishes (Kubota, 2001; Matsuda, 2002; Matsuda & Friedrich, 2011; Matsuda & Matsuda, 2010). Such calls for interdisciplinary reorientation of writing courses need to become part of classroom practices and herein lay answers to the second question.

### **Research questions**

This study stems from a personal identity crisis as an international graduate student institutionally characterized as an ESL writer, a label which is anomalous to nineteen years of my literacy experience. Such an incongruity may not have directly affected my graduate work at the U.S. university, in fact it provided me a veritable scope for research. However, as a graduate student I felt inhibited when characterized as an ESL learner because in India (my home country with myriad academic contexts) I grew up learning English much like a NS. My family's socio-economic position afforded access to educational institutions where English was taught as a first language. As a language learner, I perceive the difference in Indian and American contexts as a matter of culture. The socio-cultural realities of the two countries and the mix of languages are different. This may account for dissimilar rhetorical strategies and word choices, but that should not discount one

literacy practice over the other. If at all, the two must coexist and benefit from the newer perspectives, which may be seemingly unrelated, but would effect a Bakhtinian transformation – one that constructs the critical other.

Moreover, research stemming from individual ideological conflicts is not uncommon (for instance, Canagarajah 1999, Chiang & Schmida, 1999, Williams, 2003). In fact, such research validates the social nature of ideologies. The “unconscious and material” manifestation of ideology “can enable a deeper understanding of social life and human agency for textual/ discursive change” (Canagarajah, 2010, p. 176). Canagarajah’s theoretical propositions also address the concern for multilingual students as “political ideologues” with the underlying assumption that if only one could keep political bias out of literacy practices, life could be less cumbersome. Canagarajah (2010), however, offers that:

If writing practice is embedded in social practice...the conflicts multilingual students experience in their everyday life will generate ideological reflection. The tensions between their vernacular and the global language of English, cultural conflicts between the local and the global, and economic disparities- all experienced at the most personal level- can develop a sensitivity to politics. (p. 179)

Hence, when I (the multilingual) was assigned to instruct mainstream and ESL/ international sections of FYC in the U.S., I instinctively realized my classrooms as sites for cross-cultural negotiation. As a researcher, on one hand, I felt enriched by the experience and on the other, it made me question the



constructs of identity that are superimposed on individuals who may not be consciously prepared or, willing to assimilate into well-trimmed course labels.

Therefore, not only the students, even the course labels stood out as ideologically drawn institutional frames, only partially indicating the complexities at hand. My primary research questions approach the concern for student identities and course labels that pack them into conventional models - ill-equipped and limiting for the learners. The research questions are as follows:

1. Given the variety of course labels and identities available for FYC, which ones do students prefer? How do these students define and differentiate between mainstream and ESL sections of first-year composition?
2. In what ways do their understanding of course labels and identities relate with or challenge the ongoing research in the field?

To answer these questions I adopt a qualitative research design where in-class questionnaire based surveys were distributed to more than two hundred FYC students in mainstream and ESL/ international sections of a large North American university. The student anecdotes and choice(s) of identity markers inform the discussions and implications outlined in this study. It must be noted that a third objective has also been pursued which attends to the current pedagogical practices for FYC classes and how English as an international language (EIL) can offer useful ways to reorient the curriculum. However, this objective is explored in the last chapter, as part of implications because the survey did not indicate students to offer direct feedback on the concept or usefulness of EIL. Nevertheless, the

inferences drawn from related questions prompted me to reflect on EIL as a possible way to engage language learning tactics prevalent in mainstream and ESL/ international sections of FYC.

### **Overview of the dissertation**

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. The present chapter offers a backdrop to the research topic and lists the research questions. The second chapter reviews relevant research in the field to ground the reasons behind pursuing this study. The third chapter on research methods describes in detail the style and format of the survey conducted in FYC classrooms. It elaborates on identity markers in use and language dynamics, critical to the readings offered in this study. The method for collecting data is analyzed, its applicability and usefulness to the research agenda as well as its limitations. The fourth chapter reveals the findings of the study in relation to the research questions proposed in the introduction. The final chapter discusses the implications of the study in light of the research findings. It also considers ways to improve the FYC experience for both mainstream and international students, to inform current pedagogical practices, and offer scopes for future research pursuits.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter I review literature that develops the background of the study. The previous chapter reflected on enrollment statistics for undergraduates entering U.S. universities, the diverse nature of this ever-growing population, and how educational objectives for writing courses need to co-opt newer strategies in the curricula. Studying these three criteria are important for this study in order to establish that heterogeneous groups of students have much to inform and offer to the pedagogical motives of FYC courses. Critical thinking, reading, and writing, one of the key tenets of FYC, flourish if student identities and the socio-cultural baggage that each one of the identities purports become part of the pedagogical process.

As an extension of this discussion the present chapter looks at research on: (a) placement practices of first-year writing; (b) various course labels and identities that populate FYC; (c) the concept of “internationalization” of first year writing pedagogy, and (d) the opportunities propositioned by the field of world Englishes towards curricular revisions. The four sub-sections relate and build on one another in an attempt to narrow down to the primary research focus of this project, that is, mainstream and ESL/ international students’ preference for course labels and their understanding of these labels as identity markers vis-à-vis what the research in this area has to offer. I attempt to optimize this discussion by considering how the concept of “internationalization” and the field of world Englishes can inform the teaching practices while meeting institutionally

determined course goals and objectives for FYC primarily because the two areas of research are concerned with diversity – in population, voices and therefore, pedagogical contexts. This discussion, however, gets explored through literature review in this chapter and the implications are explored in-depth in Chapter 5. I also try to connect the extensive content of the literature review with current institutional position and practices of the north American university (NXU) where data for this study was collected.

### **Placement practices**

I begin this sub-section with Braine (1994a, 1994b, 1996) because his studies put together the arguments that researchers (Carson, 1992; Carson & Nelson, 1996; Harklau, 1994; McKay, 1981) often relate when proposing the merits of ESL sections for ESL/ international writers. Braine (1994a) proposes that ESL students should ideally be placed in FYC classes dedicated to their writing needs. He acknowledges that “expert” ESL writers apply writing strategies such as planning and revising much like “expert native- speaker writers”. Similarly, inexperienced writers, both ESL and native speakers reveal improper planning and lack of cohesion in their writing. Nevertheless, in support of his arguments, Braine refers to Joseph’s (1992) study that interviewed ten teachers about their experiences with ESL students in mainstream classes. The teachers observed that,

- ESL students were “reluctant” to speak up in class or during conferences and clarify any doubts

- they had to spend more time explaining to ESL students because of differing proficiency levels than native speakers, who found it “tedious”
- ESL students had sentence level issues
- chance of miscommunication because of ESL students’ different “English dialects”
- ESL writers may organize papers according to rhetorical strategies prevalent in their L1s, unfamiliar to the instructor.

Apart from teacher response postulated above, Braine also notes that placing ESL writers with basic writers may affect their self-confidence. After all, ESL writers are successful students, while basic writers “have usually experienced years of failure” (p. 44). As for the notion that ESL classes may be viewed as remedial, Braine offers that realization of a challenging curriculum will quash such doubts. And finally, ESL writers interact with native-speakers in all other classes so the question of segregation does not arise.

In similar terms, Harklau (1994) argues that there are both advantages and disadvantages of being in mainstream or ESL classes. For example, mainstream classes offer plentiful authentic linguistic input and interactions for learners. But it was also found that the structure of the mainstream classes offered very few extended interactions and very little explicit feedback or instruction. ESL classes, on the other hand, offered more feedback for linguistic production and provided learners with linguistic rules and principles so they could monitor their production. However, the downside of ESL classes was that students as well as

their parents would often stigmatize these classes as “easy” or “remedial”. The ethnographic study maintains that instruction in mainstream classes can be more responsive to ESL students’ needs by raising both administrators’ and instructors’ awareness and sensitivity to the special needs of these students. ESL instruction, on the other hand, can be responsive to the needs of students who would eventually move to mainstream classes by adopting a content-area approach to instruction. That is, ESL teachers would be working more closely with their colleagues who have expertise in different subject areas.

Braine’s two other studies (1994b, 1996) build on the same set of arguments. The interviews conducted with ESL students for one his studies (1996) reveal that being comfortable with their accents and rhetorical strategies are pre-requisites for success. ESL sections of FYC can offer such anxiety free spaces where students can fulfill their writing requirements with the aid of an “understanding” and “caring” instructor. Silva (1993, 1994) acknowledges that L2 writing is different from L1 in many important aspects, from planning and organization of the textual matter to stylistics and rhetorical fluency. He also notes that L2 composing process is “more constrained” but the output is much “simpler” and “less effective”. Silva (1994) goes on to experiment with cross-cultural composition.

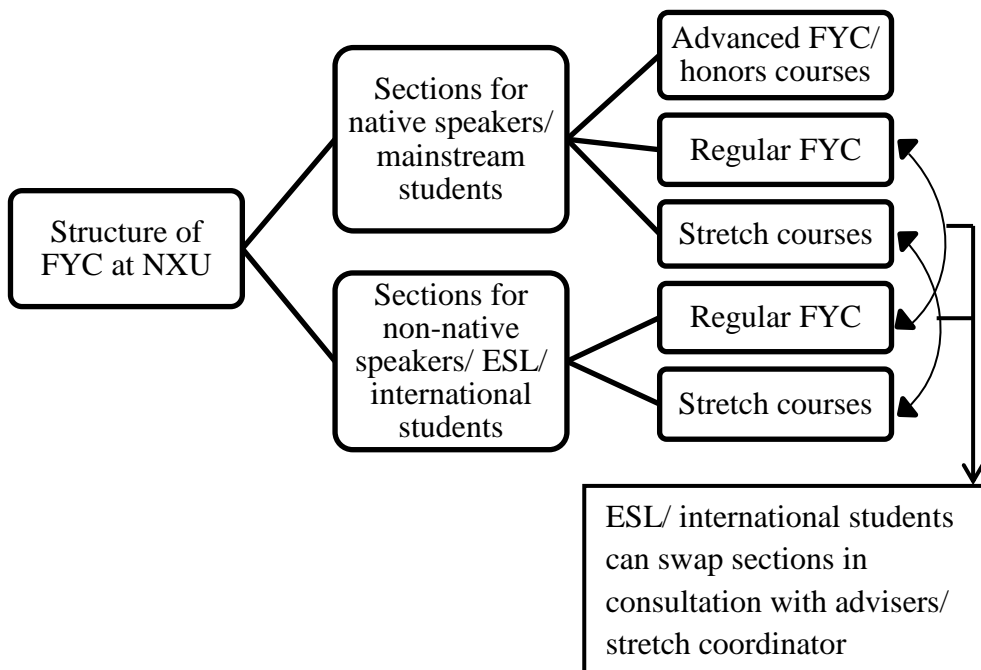
While Braine has the best interests of ESL students in mind, it is still difficult to ignore that his arguments seem to orient ESL students within a deficit model. ESL students are lacking in competency and voice - they are “reluctant” to

talk in class, in groups and even during one-on-one conferences - therefore, the teacher cannot, in ordinary circumstances, reach out and understand them; because their peers may laugh at their lack of proficiency so, they should be separated into sections that cater to their special needs. This would also make sure that no one's time is wasted in "tedious" tasks such as helping fellow learners who speak difficult to understand "English dialects", and use different rhetorical strategies.

Silva (1994) takes a much more balanced approach. Much like Braine, he suggests placement options for ESL/ international students that include mainstreaming them, placing them with basic writers, creating separate ESL sections, and adds a fourth option of cross cultural composition. While each one of these options have pros and cons that do not make them ideal propositions yet Silva favors ESL sections and more so, cross-cultural composition as better alternatives. It is interesting that in spite of multiple pointers on the differences in L1 and L2 composing processes, Silva along with Matsuda and Reichelt make a strong case for cross-cultural composition (Matsuda & Silva, 1999; Reichelt & Silva, 1995-1996). Before analyzing the prospect of cross-cultural composition in detail, I would like to relate the discussion with current placement practices at NXU.

Figure 2.1, given below represents the placement options for mainstream and ESL/ international students at NXU. Both mainstream and international students are offered regular and a stretch version of FYC. The regular FYC

student has to take two semesters (i.e. 6 credits) of the course. The stretch version is three semesters worth of first-year writing practice. Students with lower test scores are placed in these sections. There also exists a third option, advanced FYC or honors courses, limited only to mainstream students. It is important to note that ESL/ international students are allowed to swap sections (that is, regular ESL/ international FYC to regular mainstream FYC and vice versa) in the first two weeks (this is an extension on the one week withdrawal deadline for all other students) depending on what they decide to be the best fit for their writing needs in consultation with their academic adviser(s) or the stretch coordinator, in case of the stretch courses.



**Figure 2.1: Structure of FYC at NXU**

This added advantage for ESL/ international students, however, is a recent development, one that was put into practice after the questionnaire based study for



this dissertation was conducted with FYC students. The merits of this option are undeniable as it allows some flexibility within current placement practices at this institution. This tactic partly ensures that students do not face the brunt of a wrong decision made for them by the administration, a concern shared by researchers (such as, Blanton, 1999; Costino & Hyon, 2007; Goen, Porter, Swanson, & vanDommelen, 2002; McKay & Wong, 1996). In fact, this strategy can also be viewed as an off-shoot of cross-cultural composition, another placement option, which offers newer ways to view and practice teaching in FYC courses.

Cross-cultural composition (Matsuda & Silva, 1999; Reichelt & Silva, 1995-1996; Silva, 1994) was explored at Purdue university. The classes were designed to include approximately equal number of NESs and NNESs. At the beginning of the semester some NESs and NNESs were concerned about the multicultural aspect of the classroom. For instance, some of the NNESs were worried about their performance and coping strategies when competing with NESs. Remarkably, all of them reflected on their successes at the end of the semester with a poignant reference to the multicultural nature of the classroom experience. The success of cross-cultural composition at the institution makes this placement practice a viable option.

It is interesting to note that while exploring placement practices researchers look at broader identity categories for students such as, NESs versus NNESs, mainstream and/ or basic writers versus ESL and/ or international students. But the reasons for categorizing them in particular sections or, the notion behind

coming up with innovative placement practices is to ensure that students as well as instructors are situated in a mutually beneficial setting. That a need based curriculum of FYC can be put into practice. Given this justification there remain a few concerns: (a) student identities can go beyond the broad categories mentioned above; (b) ESL should not equate with international; (c) teachers need to be sensitive towards student needs, ESL or otherwise; and (d) all FYC classes must teach writing with multilingual audience in mind, not a monolingual one.

Addressing these concerns will add to a compelling argument on looking at student identities that populate FYC classrooms - an objective for this study, and sensitizing pedagogical practices towards a cross-cultural approach to teaching to empower student writing as an exploration of pluralism that defines the world today. As an obvious next step, the focus must now shift to research on course labels and identities that populate FYC.

### **Course labels and identities**

It's useful at times to complicate notions of identity, but primary identities operate powerfully in the world and have to be productively engaged.

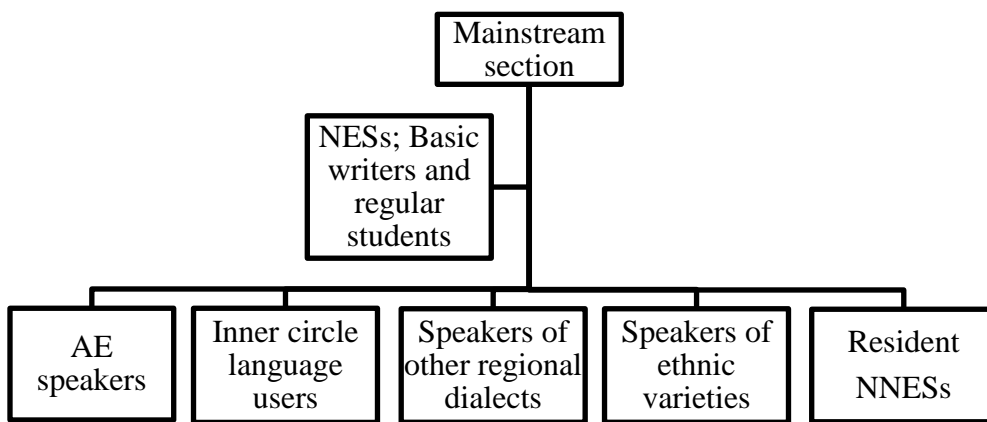
(Gilyard, 2000, p. 270)

I begin this sub-section by refining the broader identity categories like mainstream and ESL/ international into smaller, albeit complex entities (refer to Figures 2.2 and 2.3 below) so that the review of literature that follows can “productively engage” the symbolic and social nature of ideologically driven “notions of identity”. The diagrammatic representation of the FYC sections

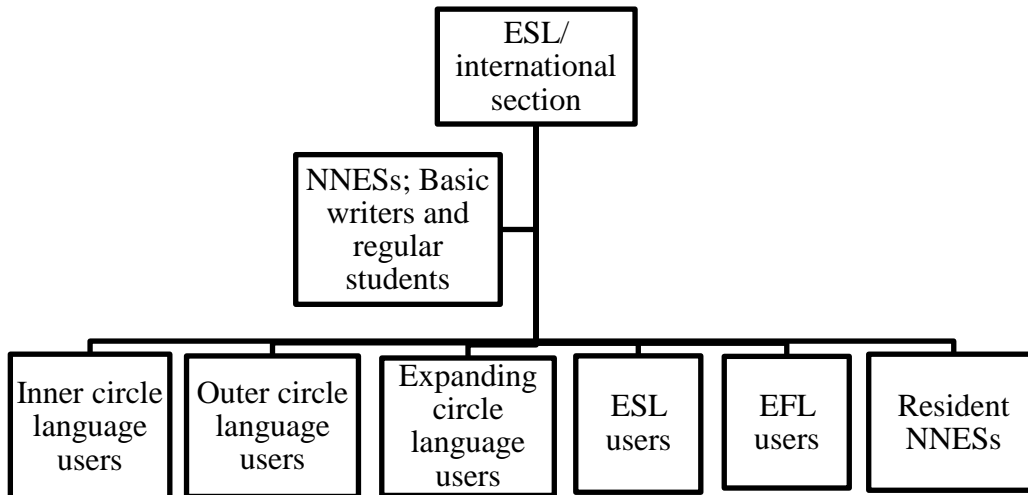
underline the existence of multiple voices and identities that constitute both the mainstream and ESL/ international sections of FYC, also evidenced by the questionnaire based survey conducted for this study.

Mainstream section (refer to Figure 2.2) lists five kinds of student identities – American English (AE) speakers; inner circle language users, that is, students from the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and also the United States; speakers of other regional varieties in the U.S. located in areas such as Boston, New York, Texas and the South; speakers of ethnic varieties like Ebonics; and resident NNEs, also referred to as “Generation 1.5”. This last category of language users is particularly interesting because they figure in both mainstream and ESL/ international sections. The disagreement in appropriate placement option for these students accounts for the fact that the resident NNEs are multilingual students, “primarily immigrants and students from U.S. multilingual enclaves such as Puerto Rico” (Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999, p. vii). So, technically they can be placed with ESL students, but researchers (Costino & Hyon, 2007; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008) have also noted that the students feel uncomfortable because they share cultural knowledge of NESs. If the resident NNEs are mainstreamed then their language abilities, which may not be at par with the rest of the class, would lead to pedagogical and learning issues. The ESL/ international section of FYC also includes inner (for example, non-anglophone Canadians), outer (for instance, students from India, Sri Lanka, Singapore) and expanding circle language users (for example, students from China, South Korea, France, Abu Dhabi), as well as ESL and EFL users.

The figures also emphasize the need for exploring cross-cultural pedagogical practices to understand and balance the needs of this diverse group of students. Research into practices that utilize students’ socio-cultural knowledge will ensure that they understand FYC through the lens provided by the WPA Outcomes Statement (2001) and recognize the “relationships among language, knowledge, and power in their fields” (p. 324).



**Figure 2.2: Student identities in mainstream section of FYC**



**Figure 2.3: Student identities in ESL/ international section of FYC**

The question of student identities has been addressed in research through various motifs. I choose to use the word motifs particularly because the identities are almost imaginatively designed and then suitably treated in classrooms. So, for instance, Canagarajah (2006) claims that “the dominant approaches to studying multilingual writing have been hampered by monolingualist assumptions that conceive literacy as a unidirectional acquisition of competence, preventing us from fully understanding the resources multilinguals bring to their texts.” (p. 589) I would like to point here that multilingualism and multilingual writers exist not only in ESL/ international sections of FYC but also in mainstream sections. This concern for multilingualism informs this dissertation. The questionnaire was cued in a way that students had the opportunity to indicate their multilingual status and/or interests as well as their understanding of ESL, often misinterpreted as synonymous with EFL and international.

Researchers (Bhowmik, 2009; Broughton et al., 1978; Judd, 1987; Moag, 1982; Nayar, 1997; Richards, Platt, & Weber, 1985) have attempted to variously define EFL and ESL to demarcate their contextual boundaries. For example, Bhowmik (2009) defines EFL as “the usage of English in a context in which it is taught as a subject in educational institutions” and ESL as “the usage of English in a context in which English is the primary language for the vast majority of people” (p. 354). While I agree with the definitions because they help set distinct premises for theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical explorations in each field, but they do not reflect other equally potent socio-linguistic contexts. These contexts are not just ideologically determined. They exist in FYC classes tied in with

student identities. Researchers earmark differences in student identities as key areas for reflection and analysis. So, a special issue of the *Journal of Second Language Writing* (2008; henceforth *JSLW*) explores “writing in foreign language contexts” (p. 1) to ensure that second language (SL) writing does not confine itself within the parameters of ESL.

Ortega and Carson (2010) stress on a similar research proposition, what they call the “bilingual turn” and “social turn in applied linguistics”. According to the researchers, “the bilingual turn began with the realization that, just as applied linguistic research can no longer stand on the native speaker as model and norm, so it is no longer tenable to hold monolingualism as the starting point of inquiry... multicompetence is a worthwhile proposal that the research community has available” (p. 50). Further, Ortega and Carson note that the social aspect of language learning is critical because it does not exist as an outside entity. Instead the social experience is “lived, made sense of, negotiated, contested, and claimed by learners in their physical, inter-personal, social, cultural, and historical contexts” (p. 51). Nevertheless, they contend that not much research in L2 writing has focused on issues raised by multicompetence and varied social contexts.

This dissertation answers to this new research direction in two distinct ways. Firstly, the questionnaire based surveys were conducted not only with ESL/ international students, but also in mainstream sections of FYC to raise awareness of the fact that multicompetencies and multilinguals existent in these sections too. This reality of a mainstream section, diagrammatically represented in Figure 2.2,

tends to be blanketed by monolingual and NES constructs. In other words, data on linguistic competencies of all participants was gathered to determine distinct student identities. Secondly, data on student identities fostered the need to consider the “social turn” in language learning. I opted to study the pedagogical practices for ESL/ international and mainstream students from the world Englishes perspective. The reason for this choice and the implications are discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation.

The research objectives pursued by Manchon and Haan (2008) and Ortega and Carson (2010) call for focus on language uses and users other than English. At the same time, one can deduce from their research agenda that such SL users encompass multi-level complexity in their literacy practices. If these SL users enter ESL/ international sections of FYC offered at U.S. colleges and universities then, they add another dimension to this already diverse classroom space. To clarify further, I present a possible socio-linguistic situation in India.

India officially recognizes 22 languages and it is not uncommon for people to travel across states and settle in one with a different regional official language. Obviously, the experience of a young language learner would entail growing up with a mother tongue distinct from the regional official language. As a school-goer the learner would be taught the regional language or Hindi, the national language of India, and English (it would vary when instruction in English starts depending on the status of the school). If this learner decides to pursue higher education at NXU, s/he will most probably be placed in ESL/ international section

of FYC. Admitting such a learner, one who is already a polyglot will surely add to the variety of student identities. At the same time, teaching practices must be flexible enough to accommodate the distinct socio-linguistic background and language learning techniques that such students command. I must also add that these multilinguals frequent classroom spaces in U.S. colleges and universities given that Indian students comprise “the second largest international cohort” according to the *Open Doors* 2011 report published by the Institute of International Education. While China tops the list of international students, South Korea, Canada, and Taiwan take up the third, fourth, and fifth spots respectively. Thus, identity labels such as EFL and ESL do not adeptly reflect the nuances of an educational setting a student may have been part of for many years.

Similarly, the notion of international varies. While IIE classifies Canadian students as international, the same students may be admitted in mainstream sections of FYC in U.S. universities. At the same time, some other Canadians may find themselves in ESL/ international classrooms. Their placements may vary based on test scores, institutional policies, or students’ choice of FYC section. Such complex placement practices abound in FYC classes which makes it all the more important for research to acknowledge and voice the variety of student identities. This kind of data can inform pedagogical practices to bring together and benefit from the differences and also identify and cater to their distinct needs.



This study ensured that participating students had an opportunity to select or state reason(s) for being part of a mainstream or ESL/ international section of FYC at NXU. It gave them a chance to express if they would have preferred to be in another section but were institutionally directed to be in one they were currently enrolled in. The choices and anecdotal evidence also informs any relations that may be established between students' residency status, preference for linguistic label(s) and placement in FYC. Costino & Hyon (2007) offer a relevant starting point that helped conceptualize the theoretical premise, research context, and to some extent, the questionnaire based survey planned for this study. The researchers interviewed nine students with different residency statuses. These students were first enrolled in a mainstream or multilingual section of basic writing and then, came together in mainstream FYC sections. The transcribed data revealed important concerns on the limiting nature of identity labels for FYC students.

The interviewees pointed that they comprehended the two labels - native English speaker and bilingual as characterizing learners who had "strong" competency in English. The category of ESL student was located at the other end of the spectrum, defining "weak" language abilities of the learner. In fact, out of nine, five students were not even sure of the meaning of the label and could react to it only after the interviewer offered an explanation for ESL. Although limited by the number of participants, the study could not establish any correlations between student residency statuses, their choice of course labels, and preference for placement practices.

Moreover, the researchers offer a word of caution on the use of course labels that may not be clear to the language learner, or translate into negative stereotypes. Either of these two situations is better avoided because with the first one, learners would find themselves confused from the very start of the course. As for the second situation, learners will find themselves trapped in stereotypes, viewed by their peers as deficient, and therefore, unbecoming of a positive language learning environment. This notion of a misfit between student expectations and understanding of their own identity versus the parameters of a course label classifying the kind of FYC is reconnoitered by Ortmeier-Hooper (2008).

Much like the Costino & Hyon's (2007) interview based reading of identity labels, Ortmeier-Hooper (2008) discusses the experiences of three immigrant students who self-placed into mainstream sections of FYC. It is interesting that the three participants navigated the course requirements with success and chose to bypass the ESL option as a matter of "liability". From the student expressions it can be safely said that ESL is loaded with meanings beyond standards set by researchers – from ESL as safehouses to earn good grades easily, the participants noted that ESL users "are not maybe as intelligent", and being in an ESL section as "very isolating... it can hurt a teen... an adolescent's self-esteem" (p. 408). The study also suggests that other terminologies such as, bilingual, bicultural, ELL, Generation 1.5, must be used with prudence because each one offers a layer of meaning that may obviate certain identity traits while blanketing many other nuances unique to students and their coping strategies.

Research (Chiang & Schmida, 1999; Costino & Hyon, 2007; Harklau, Losey & Siegal, 1999; Leki, 1999; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008; Starfield, 2002) shows that identity markers are perceived by students in many ways. Some learners may agree with one, misunderstand another, while others may offer diverse and contesting meanings. At the same time, the administration cannot work without classifications. Therefore, researchers agree on including details and descriptions or alternative positions about the preferred course label in order to ensure that students familiarize themselves with broader contexts for their identity and not partial ones. Moreover, recognizing course labels and identity markers as incomplete does not hint at a monolingual persuasion for FYC. Instead the focus is on multiple approaches to understand identities and work with them towards multifaceted curriculum practices. The survey put together for this study takes into account students' nationality, linguistic background, language preferences, choice of identity labels, and their definition of standard course labels to develop a network of relations. It also asks them to offer alternative identity markers that they feel, relate appropriately with their individual identities.

Another aspect that is common between the two articles under focus here is the concern for how ESL learners, immigrants, and resident NNSs blend with the mainstream, their challenges and ideological struggles which may get projected in their writing and not voiced openly (such as the cases of Jane and Sergej reported in Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008; the case of Jan in Leki, 1999). It is interesting, and not surprising, that the participants do not read much into the labels and focus on passing the FYC course to meet academic requirements. It is equally intriguing

that the studies do not consider what mainstream students have to offer regarding these other identities in their midst. More importantly, not much research has focused on the identity politics mainstream students face as a result of differences between their social and academic selves – what Marshall (1997) refers to as “the more difficult markings of class or literacy experience” (p. 231). Given that all learners, mainstream or otherwise, have to consider themselves as students and writers who have to respond to expectations of varying rhetorical situations and audiences, makes for a problematic conception of the self. Marzluf (2006) contends that: “When they write and read, students cannot escape the consequences of identity and culture even as they may resist, belittle the importance of, or attempt to ignore these forces.” (p. 504)

Marshall (1997) posits that instructors must be conscious about this seemingly homogenous group of learners. However subtle, the diverse needs and expectations that they bring to a class should not be overlooked for larger concerns that, for example, an immigrant student would offer. Thus,

... the metaphorical construction that places some students “on the margin” leads us, perhaps unconsciously, to construct most students as being “in the center,” where we assume they share the values, literacy practices, and abilities of the dominant culture. Being already central, these students are positioned as if they were already known, and, therefore, not worthy of our scholarly attention. (pp. 231-232)

To absolve mainstream students of this implicit burden of responsibility, to be perfectly contented with a homogenous label, I chose to conduct the survey for this study in both mainstream and ESL/ international sections of FYC at NXU. This approach allowed me to get a broader understanding of identity labels and offer implications that could be applicable to FYC as a whole and not in parts.

Furthermore, Ortmeier-Hooper (2008) observes that as a researcher her curiosity to understand why ESL students like Jane decide not to share their socio-cultural backgrounds may offer some real and much needed understanding of their mental processes. But the researcher's curiosity may have brought up discussions on identity the student was trying to avoid subconsciously, in an act to mainstream herself with the community at large. The questions that Ortmeier-Hooper seems to hint are: As researchers are we, in some lesser ways, disorienting ESL, immigrant, and Generation 1.5 research participants (and other students like them) and ensuring that they once again realize that their identities are hyphenated for life? And in doing so, are we belittling their efforts at making the "right" moves to mainstream themselves? The answer lurks within the questions – as research continues to proliferate and explore various identity constructs, pedagogical challenges, and ways to improve the system, researchers must continually be aware and spread awareness of the pitfalls of popular identity markers. So, for instance, the overuse of the term Generation 1.5 has according to Schwartz (2004), made it "diluted so that it no longer serves to be very useful in identifying, describing, and placing such students" (p. 43).

Thus, it is essential to focus beyond identity markers, at what Adler-Kassner (1998) calls “the transactional nature of language and culture”, which prompts “a new, more inclusive, notion of ownership” (p. 230). This sense of ownership among student writers may appear to be a matter of natural progression, but they need to be reminded that a conscious appraisal of their own writing is one of the course objectives for FYC. Ownership is the first step towards a critical understanding of “the relationships among language, knowledge, and power” (Harrington et al., 2001, p. 324). This is one of the primary reasons why the survey for this study explores preference for identity labels among FYC students, for identities are ideologically realized constructs of power. With many identities in tow such an exploration sets the tone for delving into the conceptual frame of “internationalization” of higher education and assessing the prospect of EIL.

### **Internationalization of higher education and the prospect of EIL**

The self is not a passive entity, determined by external influences; in forging their self-identities, no matter how local their specific contexts of action, individuals contribute to and directly promote social influences that are global in their consequences and implications. (Giddens, 1991, p. 2)

The process of writing reflects the author’s identity and socio- cultural influences and makes the body of the text rich with meanings. As we prod our way carefully with the knowledge that diversity is a primary feature of FYC classrooms, something that has been established in the discussions so far, we must now face the challenges of diversity. This conversation on diversity is particularly

relevant to this project because my second research question attempts to compare students' understanding of their diverse identity labels (as reflected in their response to the survey questions) with the challenges currently faced by the research community. I begin this sub-section by focusing on Himley (2007) and Marzluf (2006) because they deliberate on diversity to suggest pedagogical reformations.

Himley (2007) brings up the idea of "diversity fatigue". She proposes that over use of the term diversity has constructed staid assumptions around the subject instead of encouraging positive moves. Accordingly, "for many students, diversity has come to mean nothing more than having readings about oppressed groups "shoved down their throats," (p. 451).

Interestingly, this article bases its understanding of diversity from student response in course evaluations. What the research offers in terms of diversity as typical and predictable can be critical to our pedagogical persuasions in FYC. The heterogeneity of student identity in our midst must be explored with "a pedagogy that deploys non- or even dis-identification, indirection, discomfort, and looking "out" first, not looking "in" as key pedagogical moves in a "diversity writing" classroom" (p.450). The goal is to reorient oneself, inform and improve, by studying the "other" and being part of the "other" in order to "perfect one's own" (Burke, 1955, p. 284). In effect, a discussion on diversity takes us to a hybrid zone where dislocation from oneself, only to renew oneself, is the norm. To move in

the direction of an equitable playing field where diversity is not a tacit concern, rather a commitment to social change, researchers have offered varied ways to anticipate the next step.

Marzluf (2006) offers “diversity writing” as a way to encourage students to analyze the political, cultural, social, and other consequences of an issue to realize that difference of thought and action is a byproduct of such human interventions. Himley (2007) develops the concept of “hypervisibility” with the proposition that all writing is “diversity writing” and one needs to move beyond the ordinary in order to jar students out of their comfortable recognition of diversity. Therefore, students need to analyze the atypical. The researcher includes the example of an assignment that charts a conscious move from visibility to “hypervisibility” and subsequent realization of diversity as a call for action.

Discussions on hybridization of monolithic curricular practices are frequently inlaid within the superstructure of pedagogical alternatives that both Marzluf (2006) and Himley (2007) have in mind. Selfe (2009, 2010) promotes “multimodal composing” that packs various semiotic channels of communication to create effective bridges between writers and audiences worldwide. Selfe (2010) advocates “civic pluralism” as a way to handle “differences (in peoples, perspectives, modes of expression, cultures, discourses, languages, identities) [that] can be *productive* rather than *problematic*, especially when they are considered relationally and serve the goal of extending our own limited understandings and lifeworlds” (p. 607). Much like Marzluf (2006) and Himley



(2007), Selfe's concern for orienting solely text based pedagogic practices towards hybrid multidimensional schemes is a way to address diversity, to promote social understanding and action. In fact, multimodal composition deploys "hypervisibility" by letting students participate firsthand, experiment with tools that construct the audio-visual effects around issues to endorse certain ideologically driven content.

Further, Canagarajah (2006) states that "postmodern globalization may require us to develop in our students a multilingual and polyiterate orientation to writing" (p. 587). While Canagarajah reflects on the applicability of world Englishes in composition, Selfe's (2009, 2010) discussions offer technical schemata for making such a postmodern connection. So far, the research review indicates that diverse FYC students can be adeptly handled by realizing "interdisciplinarity" as the norm - "*not* simply a desire to slip the yoke of disciplinarity. Interdisciplinary work—interdisciplinary teaching, learning, and thinking—is work on the boundaries and intersections of disciplines, work that does not transcend but rather transforms our understanding of disciplines" (Nowacek, 2009, p. 494). This brand of teaching and learning affords flexibility, motivation to identify issues, mull over the varied analyses and interpretations, and devise directives for action oriented research. Again, the attempt is to nudge our textbook oriented approach to literacy and more importantly, writing tasks, to include multimodality as an effective rhetorical strategy to explore "interdisciplinarity".

Much research (such as, Bolter& Grusin, 1999; Borton, 2006; Bill & Kalantzis, 2000; Costanzo, 1986; George, 2002; Hawisher & Selfe 1999; Hawisher, Selfe, Guo & Liu, 2006; Kress& van Leeuwan, 1996; Selfe 2009, 2010; Takayoshi & Selfe, 2007; Williams, 2003) is concerned with and continues to extend the boundaries of multimodal composition practices. The ways to develop multimodal schemata for practical use in classrooms is not within the purview of this research project. However, diversity remains a concern, especially in relation to student identities. A secondary premise selected for this project is the potential reach of world Englishes to substantiate curricular revisions for FYC. This aspect particularly struck me because significant amount of recent research focuses on “internationalization”, as discussed later in this section. With the possibility of cross-cultural composition as a placement practice (refer to Matsuda & Silva, 1999), something that students were indirectly asked to comment on in the survey, I decided to critically analyze the perspectives on “internationalization”. The discussion on students’ choices on placement practices will be presented in chapters 3 and 4.

Williams’ (2003) article gives an account of his experience teaching students from world over at a British campus of an American university. He proposes a postcolonial theory based approach to “engage with them in an exploration of the cultural conflicts and power struggles often hidden in a cross-cultural writing classroom” (p. 607). For Canagarajah (2006, 1999; also Pennycook, 1994), this exploration involves key elements of appropriation – “local communities appropriate” (Canagarajah, 2006, p. 588) English to counter

the colonizing powers of the language. Peirce (1995) argues for the concept of “investment” in language learning. This refers to appropriating English to suit the complex and multidimensional personalities of language learners as a means to gaining proficiency as well as developing a personal voice. Add to these perspectives the fact that number of multilingual users of English is already many millions more than NSs (Crystal, 2004; Graddol, 1999), the context of language learning shifts. Canagarajah (2006) points that, “this gives the audacity for multilingual speakers of English to challenge the traditional language norms and standards of the “native speaker” communities” (p. 589).

Within the U.S., recent research stresses on the importance of “internationalization” – for instance, Bawarshi, 2006; Costino & Hyon, 2011; Donahue, 2009; ECK, 2008; Horner 2001; Horner, 2006; Horner & Trimbur, 2002; Horner, NeCamp & Donahue, 2011; Horner, Lu, Royster & Trimbur, 2011; Lu, 2006; Lu & Horner, 2009; Trimbur, 2006. It would be pertinent to mention here that the approach to internationalizing higher education acknowledges the presence of multicultural learners and multicultural contexts of language learning in ESL first-year writing classes. The focus has instead shifted to the mainstream and the need for pedagogical orientation to ensure that the misnomer “English is English” does not misguide learners, especially the U.S. monolingual students (Donahue). Canagarajah (2006) proffers that “in order to be functional postmodern global citizens, even students from the dominant community (i.e., Anglo American) now need to be proficient in negotiating a repertoire of World Englishes” (p. 591).

The next obvious question would be – how should composition classes in the U.S. internationalize their curriculum? Remarkably, curricular revisions could be informed by the field of second language writing, with English learners who have a better sense of appropriating the language for desired results. Another viable possibility is offered by the field of world Englishes. Much research and scholarship is invested in documenting the effects of the spread, and appropriation of English across the globe (for instance, Bamgbose, 2001; Baumgardner & Brown, 2003; Berns, 2005, 2008, 2009; Bhatia 2010; Bolton, 2005, 2010; Bolton & Davis, 2006; Bolton, Graddol & Meierkord, 2011; Brutt-Griffler, 1998; Canagarajah, 2007; Friedrich, 2002, 2010; Jenkins, 2009; Kachru, 1982, 2008; Kachru & Smith, 2009; Kaur, 2010; Kirkpatrick, 2007; Kubota, 2001; Matsuda, 2002; Matsuda & Friedrich, 2011; Matsuda & Matsuda, 2010; Morrison & White, 2005; Nelson, 2008; Pakir, 2009; Phan, 2008; Searjeant, 2008; Seidlhofer, 2009; Widdowson, 1997, 1998; Yano, 2001, 2009). These researchers offer competing ideas to reinforce the central premise that language change is inevitable and therefore, educational institutes must be ready to partake of this constant process of change and reorientation.

According to Phan (2008) language and culture are interrelated and “act as ‘tradition inheritors’, they embed in themselves the most distinctive features of a nation’s spirit and appearance” (p. 28). This interrelatedness shapes the identity of its people, freewheeling and open to change. If this is true, then the multicultural fabric of the American society must mirror in language use and extend itself to first-year writing because most undergraduates have to take this course in some

form. Matsuda & Friedrich (2011) suggest selecting a “dominant instructional model” (p. 337) when working with the framework of EIL. Therefore, if a group of call center executives from India are being trained to handle business calls from American clients, then they need to be prepared to handle American English - linguistic and cultural nuances to understand and respond to client needs.

As far as setting a curriculum for training is concerned, it sounds pretty straightforward, but implementation and execution of it may not be easy. Pre-conceived cultural constraints and language competency (especially accent and pronunciation) may hamper client-executive communication. So, not only the trained executive (speaker), even the client (listener) is responsible to act in tandem. In other words, intelligibility of a communicative situation is mutually established (Matsuda & Friedrich, 2011; Smith & Nelson, 2006).

Coming back to the focus of this project on FYC and student identities, the questions are – what should be the “dominant instructional model” for FYC? Should mainstream sections and ESL/ international sections follow different models? To answer these questions some parameters need to be set based on students’ language skills, recognition of their own identities, understanding of the course labels, and also their age, gender, home country, intended field of study, and their basic educational background. These categories will determine the student population and along with course goals and objectives for FYC, I believe a distinct picture would emerge. Whether consistent or fractured, this information will direct ways to internationalize FYC and answer a call that recognizes that

“traditional approaches to writing in the United States are at odds” (p. 303) with the multilingual realities of the world (Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011).

The questionnaire based survey conducted with FYC students for this study gathered information on all the above mentioned categories. Chapter 3 and 4 will narrate the survey results and then, tally the answers for some directives from students. Chapter 5 will consider the implications for the call on internationalization and the place for EIL in FYC.

To conclude, this chapter mapped how researchers understand and perceive the different student identities in FYC classrooms. The concern and options proposed for placement of first-year students are an off-shoot of their understanding followed by decision on how to address student needs in the best ways. The next sub-section on course labels and identities charted the pattern of student identities and their choices as represented in research, briefly touching on the distinction between EFL and ESL and focusing on multicompetencies and therefore, a multilingual approach of language learning. Other interesting concepts, such as “diversity fatigue”, “hypervisibility”, were deliberated on to finally turn towards internationalization of higher education and the scope of world Englishes, more specifically EIL. The last sub-section, particularly the prospect of EIL will be revisited in the final chapter of this dissertation.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODS

This chapter delineates the research methods and procedures used to collect and analyze data for this study. The chapter follows a top-down approach, starting with the broader context of the university, to the departmental, program, course and finally, focuses on the specific sections of FYC where the study was conducted. Then, the participants of the study are presented to further narrow down the context. Data collection methods and procedures are explained, along with reasons for selecting this methodology. Next, the schemata for arranging the data for analysis is charted and discussed in accordance with the research questions listed in Chapter 1. Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion on validity and reliability of the research design as well as its limitations.

Before I begin discussion on the context it would be pertinent to mention here that the questionnaire based survey conducted for this study at the pseudonymous university, NXU, maintained IRB specific rules of anonymity. Therefore, the survey did not ask students to write their names or mention any personal identity markers. In case, students mentioned any identity markers they were removed or ignored. However, I maintained separate files for data collected from mainstream and ESL/ international sections in order to be able to compare data obtained from the two sections and discuss similarities and/ or differences of student demography, opinions, and choices.

## Context

### *NXU, English department and the Writing Programs*

The data for this project was collected at a large, public research institution in the United States. For the academic year 2009-2010, NXU enrolled more than 15,000 undergraduates in its first- year writing programs, including international students (more than 600 international undergraduates) from all over the world. The numbers attest to the fact that Writing Programs at NXU is one of the largest in the nation. The university offers degrees in arts and sciences, business, education, engineering, journalism, law, nursing and health, sustainability, technology and innovation.

The Department of English at NXU is housed within the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and offers both undergraduate and graduate degree programs. The English department supports research endeavors in various areas such as applied linguistics, rhetoric, composition, creative writing, TESOL, and literature. The Writing Programs is part of the English department. Most undergraduates have to take writing courses to meet their graduation pre-requisites. Hence, the department, especially Writing Programs enjoys a central role, responsible for meeting academic writing needs of almost all incoming undergraduates.

The Writing Programs at NXU offers a range of composition courses – first-year composition courses occupy a central spot with approximately 500 sections of FYC offered each year. Other composition courses such as strategies of academic writing, writing for professions, business writing, are also offered as



selective courses to meet general education requirements or for writing certificate programs. The FYC courses are a mandatory requirement offered in a variety of combinations (refer to Figure 2 in Chapter 2). The regular FYC is two semesters long, the advanced level is one semester of writing course, and then, there is the Stretch option (erstwhile, known as remedial or basic writing) where students have to enroll for three semesters of writing courses.

Mainstream students have all three options available and their decision is primarily based on test scores (for example, SAT). The international students can select between regular and Stretch versions. Their decision is also dependent on test scores (for example, SAT or TOEFL). NXU recently decided to give international students the option to swap sections, that is, from ESL/ international section to mainstream section or vice versa within the first two weeks after classes start for the semester. This decision is however, not a personal one. It is made in conjunction with the Writing Programs and an academic or Stretch advisor who may determine the merit of the request by reviewing the student's writing sample(s).

Although the Writing Programs at NXU maintains separate sections for mainstream and ESL/ international students, it is important to note that the course goals remain the same. So, for instance, mainstream 101 has the same goals and objectives as ESL/ international 101 and the same is true for the second semester of writing courses as well as for the Stretch programs. In spite of the same course goals and objectives, separate placement options are offered for mainstream and

ESL/ international students so that instructors can personalize their pedagogic practices. This study realizes the positive intentions of the administration in having separate sections with same course goals. At the same time, I wondered what students make of this difference. Therefore, the questionnaire based survey was planned to give students the scope to define their identities and voice their understanding of the differences in course labels.

### ***FYC courses***

The FYC courses for mainstream and ESL/ international students, as mentioned above, share the same course goals and objectives. The placement information for mainstream 101 on Writing Programs website is as follows:

This course aims to increase students' ability to develop ideas, to express ideas effectively, and to engage different literacies. It gives special attention to expository and persuasive writing. Critical reading of articles, speeches, and other non-literary texts helps students to understand the rhetorical process, to analyze audience and its cultural contexts, and to foresee the audience's response. During the 16-week semester students will complete three formal written projects. Combined the final drafts of these three projects should result in approximately 5,000 words (this is equivalent to about 20 pages using standard academic format).

Additionally, a final reflection is required. (ENG 101: First-Year Composition)

For ESL/ international 101 the website notes the same placement information with the following additions: “[ESL/ international 101] is the first-semester writing course for students for whom English is a second language... [ESL/ international 101] credits are equivalent of [mainstream 101] credits.” From the placement information it can be deduced that the administration does not distinguish between the basic expectations of the courses with the common 20 pages worth of writing that critically “develops”, “expresses”, and “engages” multiple “cultural contexts”, “audiences”, and “literacies”. However, the book list for mainstream and ESL/ international sections of FYC prepared by the Writing Programs lists different sets of composition readers, except for occasional overlaps. It is recommended that Faculty Associates and Teaching Associates with less than three years of experience or less than nine credits of rhetoric/ composition coursework at the program select books from this list. The more experienced teachers can choose their combination of rhetoric and a reader. There are clear directives against the use of “works of imaginative literatures”. The program also specifies that a rhetoric and non-fiction readings are required for all composition courses.

While most of the information, be it on course goals and objectives or, directives on what should be taught – rhetoric and not “imaginative literatures”, the administration tries to confirm that all students, mainstream and ESL/ international have similar first-year writing experience. The difference between the two kinds of sections is based on the students, which essentially means that the program demarcates a placement procedure based on test score and student

identities. Hence, course labels inform student identities. Further, this interim relation between labels and identities leaves permanent marks (which are not necessarily negative for all students) that students carry with them as part of their FYC experience. This project intends to gather glimpses of students' understanding of this relation between labels and identities and how they may or may not have expected any different.

### *FYC classes for the study*

The questionnaire based surveys were conducted in classes that were strategically selected to ensure that a range of FYC could be accommodated. FYC courses for regular students were targeted primarily because these classes encompass the diversity of student body at NXU. Moreover, the regular sections of mainstream and ESL/ international FYC offer the median group of learners, as if placed between advanced and Stretch courses. Advanced FYC was not included also because ESL/ international students are not offered that option and I wanted to make sure that the data came from a group of students who were administratively determined as at par in their literacy skills. For the same reason, I thought it was important to include Stretch students. The first-year writing experience for Stretch students is stretched over two consecutive semesters and only students from the second Stretch semester were included. In their second Stretch semester these students are institutionally recognized as at par with regular mainstream and/or ESL/ international 101 students.

The final group for the study included FYC composition students from mainstream 101, mainstream 102 (i.e. second year mainstream section), ESL/ international 101, ESL/ international 102 (i.e. second year ESL/ international section), and Stretch ESL/ international 101 (equivalent to regular 101s). Enrollment factors also determined the number of sections considered for the study. So, mainstream sections for the academic year 2009-2010 were capped at 22 students and ESL/ international were capped at 19. The sections either had a few absences or did not have full enrollment and that accounted for varying numbers of mainstream and ESL/ international students. A total of 12 sections of FYC were surveyed mid-semester to ensure that the students were in-tune with the class expectations, course goals and objectives, and had consciously decided to continue with the course (drop-add period had ended after the first week of classes).

The decision to survey a particular section of FYC over another was based on an instructor's initial response and willingness to allow 10- 15 minutes of class time for students to answer the survey questions. I was more interested in classes that met face-to- face over hybrid or online sections of FYC in order to ensure that students were in class, that is, physically situated in an academic context. I do not intend to suggest that hybrid or online format for FYC is informal or does not meet the expected outcomes for the courses. I chose to limit myself to face-to-face classes for a more hands on understanding and feel of the diverse identities that constitute the dynamic class fabric.

Furthermore, my brief presentation of the study, part of IRB protocol, retained the survey's academic nature, indicated that the study was about FYC students like them, and that the study was framed within university and departmental guidelines (no personal information was solicited in accordance with IRB and FERPA norms). Out of a total of 234 students approximately 200 participated in the study, that is, over 85 per cent chose to answer the questionnaire. It must also be noted that not all 200 participants chose to answer each and every one of the 19 questions on the survey. According to the IRB protocol students could choose to skip questions they were not willing to answer. Obviously, this inconsistency affected the results in terms of a clear cut mandate, but the responses pointed at definite directions to address the research questions.

Table 3.1, given below, lists the number of sections for each FYC class where the survey was conducted and the number of students enrolled at the time who had the chance to participate in the survey. Although the total number of

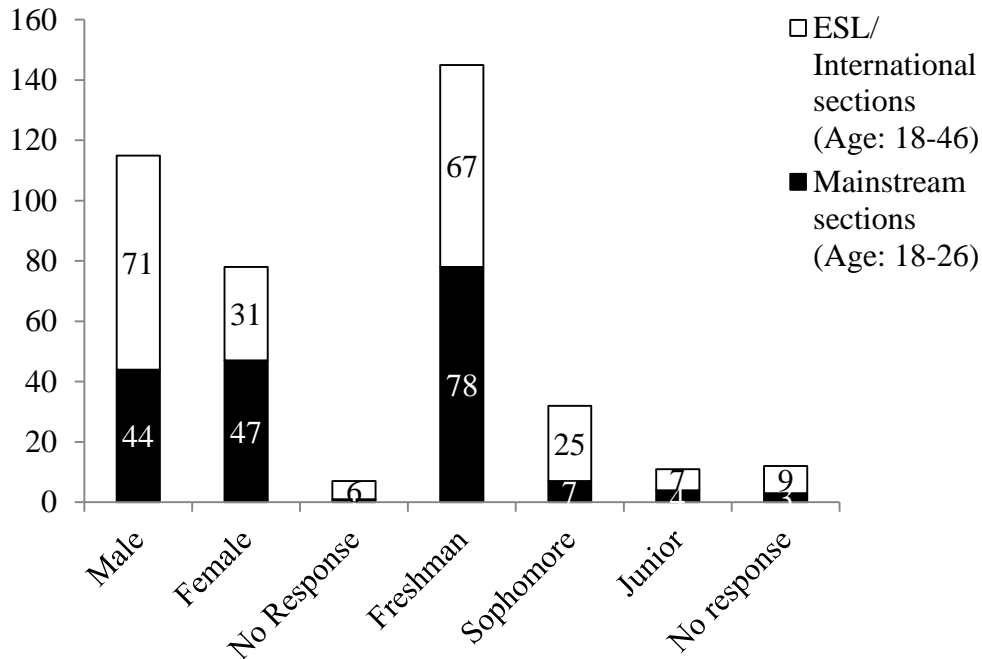
**Table 3.1: Survey data – I**

<b>Courses</b>	<b>Number of sections</b>	<b>Number of students</b>
1. Mainstream 101	1	19
2. Mainstream 102	4	86
3. ESL/ international 101	2	41
4. Stretch ESL/ international 101	1	22
5. ESL/ international 102	4	66
<b>Total numbers</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>234</b>

students who participated in the survey (approximately 200 out of 234) constituted approximately 3 per cent of the total FYC population for the semester (200 out of 7000, approximately), yet the data was representative of the diverse population. Fowler (1988; quoted in Nunan, 1992) notes that “a sample of 150 people will describe a population of 15,000 or 15 million with virtually the same degree of accuracy, assuming all other aspects of the sample design and sampling procedures were the same” (p. 142).

### **Participants**

The participants for the study came from five different sections of FYC offered at NXU – five mainstream sections and seven ESL/ international sections (includes one section of Stretch ESL/ international), a total of 234 students enrolled at the time in these 12 sections of FYC (refer to Table 1 above for enrollment figures). When the survey was conducted in the mainstream sections it received a maximum of 92 responses on a given question. For the ESL/ international sections the number stands at 109. One survey response received from the ESL/ international student group was disregarded because of conflicting information, for instance, the survey reported Arabic as the native language, but “Korian” as the only language spoken by the participant. Therefore, for the purposes of analysis it is assumed that a total of 200, i.e. 92 mainstream and 108 ESL/ international students responded to the survey questionnaire.



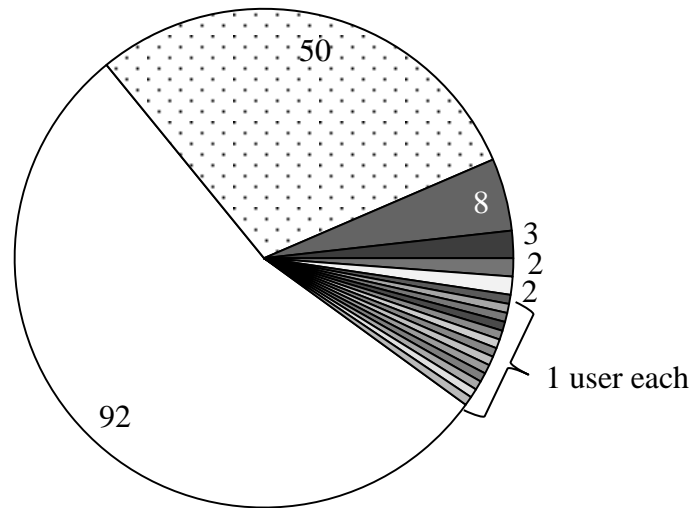
**Figure 3.1: Gender, age and year of study of survey participants**

***Mainstream sections***

The survey reports that there were approximately 44 or 47.8 per cent male and 47 or 51.1 per cent female students in the age group of 18 to 26 in the mainstream sections (refer to figure 3.1 above), enrolled in one of at least 39 different fields of study. There were 78 or 84.8 percent freshman, 7 or 7.6 per cent sophomores, and 4 or 4.3 per cent juniors in the mainstream 101/ 102 group. There were no seniors and 3 students did not answer the question. Out of the 92 participants, 81 or about 88 per cent claimed the United States as their home country, 7 or 7.6 per cent reported other countries (Mexico-2, Antigua, West Indies -1, Denmark -1, Iraq -1, Lebanon -1, and Philippines- 1), and 4 or 4.3 per cent did not respond.



English is the native language for 73 or 79.3 per cent students and 15 or 16.3 per cent claimed other native languages - Spanish (7), Arabic (1), Chaldean (1), Chinese (1), English and Danish (1), English and Farsi (1), Vietnamese (1), Tagalog (1), and English dialect (from Antigua, West Indies - 1). Interestingly, two participants reported that each one of them had two native languages: English and Danish, English and Farsi. Another participant claimed to speak an English dialect, which the student believed was distinct enough from American English to be considered a different language variety. I chose to list this West Indian English dialect as a separate language category realizing the linguistic difference(s) the student must feel. Moreover, this dissertation is based on the recognition of language varieties - English, different dialects and varieties of English, and all other languages of the world. So, it was pertinent to retain this difference. Furthermore, as presented in Figure 3.2 given below, the mainstream 101/ 102 group listed 18 different languages (not including English) in which they claimed various levels of proficiency. The students had the option to select between excellent, good, fair, and not applicable for their speaking, reading, and writing abilities in each one of the languages they mentioned on their response sheet. It must also be noted that 3 or 3.3 per cent mainstream students claimed that they were the most proficient in Spanish.



- English (92)    □ Spanish (50)    ■ French (8)    ■ German (3)
- ASL (2)    □ Korean (2)    ■ Arabic (1)    ■ Chaldean (1)
- Chinese (1)    ■ Danish (1)    ■ Farsi (1)    □ Greek (1)
- Hebrew (1)    □ Hungarian (1)    ■ Italian (1)    ■ Japanese (1)
- Latin (1)    □ Tagalog (1)    □ Vietnamese (1)

**Figure 3.2: Language varieties (with number of users) in mainstream 101/102**

79 or 85.9 per cent students had spent their entire life in the US, 1 or 1.1 per cent had spent only about 2 years in the US and 12 students did not respond. 81 or about 88 per cent students reported that they had attended educational institution in the US and 2 or 2.2 per cent students had not been to school in the US before coming to NXU. Additionally, 78 or 84.8 per cent had completed 12 or more than 12 years of education in the US and 5 or 5.4 per cent had attended middle and high school or just high school in the US. 1 or 1.1 per cent had not received any education in the US until now and 8 or 8.7 per cent students did not respond.

### *ESL/ international sections*

The ESL/ international sections had approximately 71 male and 31 female students in the age group of 18 to 46 (refer to figure 3.1), enrolled in one of at least 33 different fields of study. The ESL/ international sections comprised of 67 or 62 per cent freshman, 25 or 23 per cent sophomores, 7 or 6.5 per cent juniors, and 9 or 8.3 per cent did not respond to the question. The 108 participants came from at least 27 different countries and were native speakers of no less than 20 different languages (listed in Table 3.2 given below). No one claimed the US as their home country or English as their native language. However, when it came to charting proficiency among their choice of languages (native language, English, and all other), 12 or 11.1 per cent claimed to be the most proficient in English. The participants also claimed proficiency in 28 different languages (refer to Table 3.2 given below).

**Table 3.2: Survey data - II**

	<b>Home country</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Languages</b>	<b>Native language speakers</b>	<b>Other language speakers</b>
1.	China	30	English	-	107
2.	Korea	23	Chinese (Mandarin & Cantonese)	31	38
3.	Saudi Arabia	10	Arabic	21	25
4.	India	8	Korean	23	23
5.	UAE	5	French	-	10
6.	Germany	2	Japanese	1	10
7.	Kuwait	2	Spanish	3	10
8.	Taiwan	2	Hindi	4	8
9.	Croatia	1	German	2	6

10.	Ethiopia	1	Italian	1	4
11.	Greece	1	Urdu	2	3
12.	Hong Kong	1	Guajarati	1	2
13.	Italy	1	Russian	1	2
14.	Japan	1	Turkish	1	2
15.	Mexico	1	Vietnamese	1	2
16.	Myanmar	1	Amharic	1	1
17.	Norway	1	Burmese	1	1
18.	Oman	1	Croatian	1	1
19.	Pakistan	1	Danish	-	1
20.	Palestine	1	Farsi	-	1
21.	Peru	1	Greek	1	1
22.	Puerto Rico	1	Hebrew	-	1
23.	Qatar	1	Jeju	-	1
24.	Romania	1	Kazakh	-	1
25.	Russia	1	Malayalam	1	1
26.	Turkey	1	Norwegian	1	1
27.	Vietnam	1	Romanian	1	1
28.			Swedish	-	1

Most of the ESL/ international students had completed high school in their home countries. 13 or 12 per cent reported to have attended high school in the US. This group of 108 students had been in the US anywhere between 0 to 20 years, but only 41 or about 38 per cent had attended middle and/ or high schools or, other educational institutions, such as, AECIP and ESL institutes in the US.

### **Research Design**

This study aims to understand course labels for FYC from the students' point of view and how they identify with the identity markers. The chapter so far has mapped the variety of English language learners in mainstream and ESL/ international sections of FYC who are proficient in at least 33 different languages (including English). The data generated by the study recognizes students'

understanding of mainstream and ESL labels and their opinion on combined FYC sections. They were also asked to self-select identity markers that were at par with their own perception of themselves. I have begun this section on research design by directing attention towards the data in order to highlight that the survey based questionnaire planned for this study generated a range of observations from the students. Moreover, this data involved minimal and only indirect intervention from the instructors and the researcher. That is, IRB protocols were followed in terms of introducing the researchers and the study. The students were requested to participate, nonetheless the voluntary aspect was clearly pointed as well as the fact that the instructor would not have access to any information they provided on their response sheets. I do not claim that the research design followed for this study is perfect – it is not, but the strategy generated ample scope and directions for the research questions outlined for this study.

### *On questionnaire based surveys*

According to Nunan (1992) questionnaire based surveys are one of the most common elicitation techniques in language studies. It allows the researcher to gather data requisite to the proposed research question(s) while maintaining distance from the research participants. As mentioned in the previous section, the survey format was particularly useful for this study because it asked students to indicate their identity preferences as a first-year writing student. It also asked them to define certain identity labels. Given the oft observed notion that identities are socially constructed (see Ivanic and Camps, 2001) as a researcher I was

concerned that adding another layer of personal interviews may indirectly guide students' response and create impressions or, define them "within the very box that they want to avoid" (Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008, p. 410). For example, when asked to define ESL, some students remarked on the questionnaire that they "do not know" what it means. While it would be a prudent measure to give them the full form and then continue the discussion, but such a discussion would overlook the primary observation – some students do not know what ESL stands for. For this study, such an observation answers the second part of the first research question: How do these students define and differentiate between mainstream and ESL sections of first year composition? And the response would be interpreted as – (a) some participants are not aware of the differences between mainstream and ESL sections, which reflects that FYC as a system has faltered in a way to create an informed student body; or, (b) students understand the label but do not relate with it (as evidenced by another question on the survey) and therefore, choose to skip the question. I will return to this finding and others in more detail in chapter 4.

Furthermore, the questionnaire based survey was a competent data elicitation technique for this study because it allowed me to reach a larger group and range of students. This particular constraint was reported by two other studies, Costino & Hyon (2007) with nine participants and Ortmeier-Hooper (2008) with three participants, concerned with a similar research endeavor. The questions for the survey were informed by these two studies. I arranged or, at times rephrased the questions to ensure transition between the ideas. Out of 19

questions on the survey, 12 were open items and 7 were closed questions. The sub-section on data analysis presents the superstructure which guided the findings reported in chapter 4.

Seliger & Shohamy (1989) mention that one of the main problems with questionnaire based studies is the low response rate. I addressed this problem by – (a) conducting in-class surveys, and (b) while maintaining IRB protocol, I briefly underlined the academic nature of the survey and how it related to their FYC experience. For most of the class visits, 11 out 12 times, the instructor was in the classroom, which indirectly showed a sense of solidarity and recognition of the validity of the research being conducted. The instructor for the 12<sup>th</sup> FYC section left after introducing me to the class. These strategies along with students' own interest in the study ensured that 85 per cent attempted the questionnaire. Not all of them answered each and every one of the questions, but the range of response tallied together sufficiently informed the research questions.

### **Data collection**

The data for this study was collected mid-semester within a week's span. This ensured that the students had adjusted into their roles as first-year writing students of particular FYC sections. Moreover, all the data was gathered within a week, which ensured its standard and uniformity. The questionnaires solicited anonymous response and this ensured that the participants were at ease with providing information. Moreover, background information was sought towards the end of the survey. This was another way to ensure that participants had

covered the more important survey questions, which would have given them an understanding of the research project. This would also make them more comfortable sharing accurate background information, such as age, gender, home country.

While preparing the IRB application, I emailed and met with some FYC instructors to discuss if they could afford to set aside approximately 15 minutes of their class time for the survey. The choice of instructors was made to ensure that I covered the whole range of FYC classes offered at NXU and then, the choices were narrowed down based on the class times and availability within a week. In this way, I followed what Nunan (1992) calls a “stratified” sampling procedure (p. 142). Soon after receiving the IRB approval, I arranged for the class visits with instructors who had agreed to indirectly participate in the project. The first class visit was selected for piloting the project. Based on feedback received from the participants on the questionnaire, I slightly altered the content of one of the questions on combined sections for FYC. By including the directive that combined sections will have the same course goals and objectives as mainstream and ESL sections, the students were in a better position to suggest their choice.

For the other 12 class visits I introduced the research idea, distributed the information sheet on voluntary participation as well as the questionnaires. The students were directed to read the texts carefully and make their choice to participate in the project. At the end of 15 minutes they were asked to return the



surveys. It must be noted that the instructors were cordial enough to allow a few minutes extra in case a student had not finished responding to the questionnaire.

According to Seliger and Shohamy (1989), questionnaires with closed questions are considered more efficient. Nunan (1992) comments that closed questions may be convenient for the purposes of analyses, but open ended ones provide more useful information. Keeping these views in mind, I chose to have both kinds of questions, in line with the kind of data that would help address the research questions. The 7 closed questions ranged from determining their year of study to their choice of identity labels. The 12 open ended questions generated a wide range of responses. The insightful, albeit free-form data was read closely to derive common pointers and then, Halliday's (1985) three macrofunctions of language – “ideational”, “interpersonal” and “textual positioning”, provided the over-arching framework for analysis. This structure is discussed in detail in the next section.

### **Data analysis**

After the completed survey questionnaires were collected from the students, I marked each set for the FYC section it came from. First the background information was tallied to determine the characteristics of the research participants. This chapter has already discussed information on their age, gender, intended field of study, year of study at NXU, home country, native language, other languages (that the participants can speak, read, or write), years of education obtained in the home country and the US, and the number of years spent in the US

(refer to Figures 3.1 and 3.2; and Table 3.2). Therefore, question number 1 and questions 10 through 19 on the survey questionnaire generated information that set the tone for the study.

The students' response at this point may not have directly answered the research questions, but they surely authenticated the research agenda in more ways than one. For instance, the fact that 92 students in the age group of 18-26 from the mainstream FYC group were from 10 different native language backgrounds attests to the heterogeneity of these sections. 61 or 66.3 per cent students listed English and at least one more language in which they claimed some level of proficiency. A total of 18 different languages were recognized in this group. This information further narrows down their identity categories and in effect, prompts the first research question that asks them to select their preference for identity labels. Such labels are variously proposed/ referenced in research on first-year writing for mainstream and second language writers.

The data analysis is structured around, as mentioned earlier, the three macrofunctions of language proposed by Halliday (1985) – the “ideational positioning”, which refers to the writer's/ learner's/ survey participant's representation of their self vis-à-vis the world; “interpersonal positioning”, in regards to the writer's authority or lack thereof in relation to their readers, and I would argue the community they are part of; and “textual positioning” which refers to the writer's way of textually representing his/her identity. While Halliday

proposes that only the “interpersonal” function of language constructs identities, I would instead agree with Ivanic and Camps (2001) propositioning that all three “marcofunctions contributes to subject-positioning” (p. 11)

Ivanic and Camps (2001) establish their arguments on analysis of writing samples from six Mexican graduate students at a British university and how their language negotiations reflected the three levels of Hallidayan positioning. It is particularly important to note that the researchers underline the relevance of all three functional stances which affect and become part of a learner’s identity. As far as this study is concerned, I base my observation and analyses of student perception and their construction of individual identities through their choice of labels, their definitions of mainstream and ESL sections of FYC, their choice in favor or against a combined section of FYC along with reasons, and their expectations from the FYC course they were enrolled at the time.

The surveys may not have generated elaborate writing samples, but the phrases, fragments, or sentences that the students jotted down on the questionnaires were reflective of their personal choices and understanding of the social, academic and administrative norms for FYC. In fact, I would argue that the impromptu nature of the survey allowed them limited scope to fine tune and legitimize their thoughts. So, what was selected or written on the questionnaire may have been quick and brief, but in a way more authentic than a well-thought out and revised draft on the topic. Additionally, these notes were a direct result of the survey they had been requested to participate in without any incentives. So, all

of the 200 participants may have chosen not to comment, in fact some of them did not. However, those who did comment felt in sync with the research agenda and/or, felt persuaded to attempt it given the anonymity of the task.

This sort of writing style is similar to making notes and glosses on books, personal or borrowed, which mirror immediate thought patterns. Canagarajah (1999) notes, “the writing of glosses in the margins of textbooks is a widespread student activity that usually passes unnoticed by teachers and researchers. But it is useful in many ways for understanding the motivations and learning strategies of students” (p. 89) I must make clear that data gathered from open ended survey questions are not equivalent to “glosses in the margins of textbooks”, but the fact of anonymity and freedom to decide whether to comment or not, make the two writing approaches somewhat comparable.

The framework for analysis followed in this study, therefore, takes close account of the brief comments along with the other choices on identity and course labels. In this way, I was able to approach the research questions from two vantage points – close ended questions gave direct pointers and the related open ended questions allowed room to interpret those choices. Given below is the overall framework for analysis adopted for this study. It is based on Halliday’s macrofunctions of language and Ivanič & Camps’ (2001) recognition that these positionings come together and inform each other to develop individual identities.

1. Ideational positioning:

- Self-representation through –
  - Choice of identity markers
  - Agreement or disagreement with institutionally ascribed labels

2. Interpersonal positioning:

- Self in association with the other –
  - On students' choice of FYC section
  - Agreement or disagreement with the notion of combined FYC section

3. Textual positioning:

- Self as reflected in writing –
  - On students' reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with institutionally ascribed labels
  - On students' reasons for enrolling in mainstream or ESL sections
  - On students' reasons for agreeing or disagreeing to be part of combined FYC section
  - On students' general expectations from FYC.

This superstructure ensured that the research questions remained at the heart of the discussions to be pursued in chapters 4 and 5. To clarify, the first research question is: Given the variety of course labels and identities available for first year composition, which ones do students prefer? How do these students define

and differentiate between mainstream and ESL sections of first year composition? This question is addressed by the first two components of the research frame, and the discussion is elaborated on and subsequently, moves into the concerns expressed by the second research question on students' understanding of the labels in relation to research in the given area.

### **Limitations**

Every effort was made to ensure that the research design conformed to the parameters set forth by the IRB. The survey was conducted following all protocols and the results were recorded and stored with proper care. Therefore, there are no limitations in that aspect of the research proposal. The limitations I notice regarding the research design has to do with not reaching out to the online or hybrid formats of FYC offered at NXU. However, I must point that there were certain contextual problems – (a) including virtual participants would have necessitated another level of planning and preparation to make the survey available online, a different format which may have resulted in much lower participation rate; (b) I may not have received the IRB exempt status by including online participants because there would be concerns regarding IP address, administering it while keeping up with FERPA laws; and (c) by meeting and conducting the surveys face-to-face in class I was able to get their undivided attention for approximately 15 minutes. This would not be the case for online formats and may have resulted in a lower participation rate. Nevertheless, it would have been relevant to include students enrolled in online or hybrid FYC

classes because they are situated in a space that affords convenience of not needing to worry about class meetings but, they too are placed in FYC classes much like their peers.

The other limitation has to do with the size of the study. It could have been much larger, given that NXU serves approximately 10,000 FYC students annually. More perspectives may have been generated, but again, Nunan (1992) mentions that more than the sampling size the researcher needs to be concerned about balancing the goals, objectives, and implementation of the research design.

Another noticeable limitation could be raised regarding the fact that the questionnaire based survey was the only data elicitation tool used for the study. Other related studies, such as Costino & Hyon (2007) and Ortmeier-Hooper (2008) used multiple tools like interviewing the participants, and looking at writing samples. I agree that these other strategies in conjunction with the survey would have generated an elaborate set of data. In my defense I would offer that the current format was appropriate for the goals set forth for this study. This study did not endeavor to read into student texts to determine their identities beyond what they were willing to offer on their own terms. Moreover, Ortmeier-Hooper (2008) mentions the trap of instituting identities while interviewing students which the individuals may be consciously or subconsciously trying to avoid. Therefore, to compensate for the lack of multiple data collection tools, I chose to

reach out to the maximum number while keeping the other variables (such as including different sections of FYC, conducting the surveys mid-semester in all the classes) under check.

Finally, the survey called for voluntary participation. In line with the IRB protocol, students could decide to answer or skip questions as they deemed appropriate. Not all students who participated in the study attempted to answer all the questions. Obviously, if all 234 students enrolled in the 12 FYC sections had answered each one of the questions then, the survey may have yielded related, albeit more variety of responses. I factored in this freedom of choice by gathering all the information that the students offered in complete or incomplete questionnaires. In fact, at times not attempting a question made alternate realities more evident. Thus, lack of response was not always interpreted as missing information.

In conclusion, this chapter presented the background details on the participants, the context of data collection, the data elicitation tool used for this study, the framework for analysis, along with discussion on reliability and validity of the study. The next chapter on findings takes off from the research framework presented towards the end of this chapter. It brings together the results and addresses the specific contexts of the research questions.



## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter reports the results of the questionnaire based study in accordance to the structure of analysis stipulated in the previous chapter. The findings are presented with an aim to address the research questions earmarked for this study. I begin this chapter by joining the dots as if, the framework is populated with percentages and student anecdotes which leads to discussion and analyses with regard to the research questions.

**Table 4.1: Snapshot of survey results**

<b>Framework</b>	<b>Results</b>	
1. Ideational positioning	FYC students' choice of course labels and identity markers.	
Self-representation through –	<i>Mainstream section</i>	<i>ESL/ international section</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choice of identity markers (first three preferences)</li> </ul>	1. Native English speakers: 81.5% 2. Bilingual: 24% 3. English language learner: 4.3 %	1. English as a second language speaker: 66.7% 2. Non-native English speaker: 43.5% 3. English language learner: 40.7%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreement or disagreement with institutionally ascribed labels</li> </ul>	Agree: 77% Disagree: 6.5% No response: 16%	Agree: 74% Disagree: 13% No response: 12%
2. Interpersonal positioning	FYC students rely on and judge social and academic community members to decide on course choices.	
Self in association with the other –		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On students' choice of FYC section (two or three</li> </ul>	Reasons - 1: To meet graduation requirements – 67.4% 2. Reason 1 + on academic	Reasons – 1. To meet graduation requirements: 43.5%

most common reasons selected)	advisor's suggestion – 25%	2. Reason 1 + on academic advisor's suggestion: 19.4% 3. Reason 1 and/ or 2 + first choice was 101/102 but was advised to enroll in 107/108: 8.3%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agreement or disagreement with the notion of combined FYC section</li> </ul>	Agree: 15% Disagree: 46% Not sure: 30.4% No response: 3%	Agree: 31.5% Disagree: 23% Not sure: 40% No response: 3.7%
3. Textual positioning:	FYC students identify themselves in comparison to the "other" in writing.	
Self as reflected in writing –		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students' definitions of mainstream and ESL</li> </ul>	Mainstream as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"beginner's class"/ "basic college level"</li> <li>"required course for NESs"</li> </ul> ESL as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>class for ESL learners</li> <li>remedial</li> <li>"upper division class"/ "advanced class"/ accelerated class</li> </ul>	Mainstream as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>advanced</li> <li>for native speakers</li> </ul> ESL as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>English not mother tongue/ for foreigners</li> <li>remedial</li> <li>"easier than mainstream"</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On students' reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with institutionally ascribed labels – mainstream and ESL</li> </ul>	Agree because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>true, simple, efficient</li> <li>mainstream as basic writer</li> <li>nonchalance</li> </ul> Disagree because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>focus on language over learning</li> </ul>	Agree because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>true – need to improve English</li> <li>labels do not define people</li> </ul> Disagree because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>does not reflect proficiency in other languages/ defines writer incorrectly barrier between NESs and NNESS</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On students' reasons for agreeing or disagreeing to be</li> </ul>	Agree because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>challenging/ enriching</li> <li>helpful for bilinguals</li> </ul>	Agree because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"more educating"</li> <li>good stimulus/</li> </ul>

part of combined FYC section	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• good for grades</li> </ul> Disagree because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• remedial – slow/ waste of time</li> <li>• useful for foreign students only</li> </ul> Not sure because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• do not understand ESL</li> <li>• may be confusing</li> <li>• depends on professor and benefits</li> </ul>	compete with American students/ get close to native culture Disagree because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• difficult to compete with native speakers</li> </ul> Not sure because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “like mainstream but will take ESL for grade”</li> <li>• “hard to balance”</li> <li>• need more details</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On students’ general expectations from FYC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• better writer/ improve organization/ better arguments</li> <li>• good grades</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improve English/ more experience with academic writing</li> <li>• good grades</li> </ul>

I decided to tabulate the results briefly at the start of the chapter to establish the format of the discussion that follows. The Hallidayan (1985) theorization of how individuals position themselves in language functions and the technical adjustments that Ivanic and Camps (2001) propose create intriguing student identities. The three sections that follow take up Halliday’s macrofunctions of language and interpret them from the perspective of FYC students, newcomers to institutes of higher education, but socially adept at decoding the “other” and in effect their own persona.

It would be pertinent to mention here that the discussions under ideational, interpersonal, and textual positioning address the first research question: Given the variety of course labels and identities available for first year composition, which ones do students prefer? How do these students define and differentiate between mainstream and ESL sections of first year composition? Part of textual

positioning and the subsequent section titled “research focus” attends to the second research question: In what ways do their understanding of course labels and identities relate with or challenge the ongoing research in the field?

### **Ideational positioning of the FYC student**

The ideational function of the language is replicated in the FYC students’ choice of identity labels. The social representation of their identity in relation to the world, social and academic, poses certain challenges to their selection. As made evident in their choices, most students prefer to stay within legitimate and fair assessment and do not risk selecting terms that may have connotations beyond the textbook norms. But surely, that is not true for all. While 81.5 per cent chose NES in the mainstream section and 66.7 per cent for English as second language speaker in the ESL/ international group, there were other selections that broke the norm. At least one (1.1 percent) student chose to present himself/herself as an ESL student and three (3.3 per cent) others as NNEs in the mainstream section. 22 students or 24 per cent selected the bilingual label which is a good number to underscore the diverse student body. Interestingly, I noticed that there were many more bilinguals, a total of 51 out of 92 students had marked two languages they claimed to have some level of proficiency. I could agree with the argument that probably the students were not as confident in the second language to call themselves bilinguals. But I also wonder why one would want to list a language in

a proficiency chart when s/he is not prepared to account for it. Similarly, there were 10 multilinguals by my count in the surveys, but only 2 of them had selected this option for identity labels.

In the ESL/ international section the range of identity labels selected were much more varied. An obvious reason for this shift has to do with the fact that these students are situated in a way much different than the mainstream group. ESL/ international students come to the US prepared to expose themselves to another lifestyle, distinct set of socio-cultural norms and practices. So, when out of 73 (67.6 per cent) bilinguals just 31 (28. 7 per cent) select the option, it makes me wonder if the choice had to do with their recognition of English as the primary criteria for FYC. In other words, these remaining 42 students chose other labels that reflected their individual stance vis-à-vis English more clearly. And I say this because except for bilingual and multilingual, all other labels include English (such as NES, ESL, resident NNES), as if to specify the context of FYC more appropriately. This I recognize could be a flaw in itself. If the system prompts one to overlook other language realities in the face of English, then there is an amount of disservice at work, one that fails to credit and make use of other linguistic contexts when teaching English.

Another observation has to do with resident NNEs. This particular category of students have been under research focus for some time now (refer to Friedrich, 2006; Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008). These students identified themselves as part of both mainstream (2 students) and ESL/

international (9 students) sections of FYC. I understand that they are ideationally positioned in a different way. These students have access to languages, linguistic and social cultures that intermix and create the recognition of languages as dissimilar yet learning them as an analogous process. Knowing one language benefits the other in situating language learning schemes or techniques. Resident NNEs are the privileged few and yet misplaced as easily in FYC.

One of the students who self-identified as a resident NNE comments on his/her course choice as: “It was hard for me to do ENG 101 that’s why I changed to ENG 107”. Evidently, the realization that mainstream 101 is difficult means changing to the next best alternative - ENG 107 or ESL/international 101. This choice is all the more convenient because the course goals and objectives for both the courses are the same and the student can meet graduation requirements with less hardship. As a researcher I appreciate the convenience to switch sections, that students can decide the best course choice for themselves, but what catches my attention is the indirect understanding of ESL/international 101 as the easier alternative for mainstream 101. This student is just one of many others who perceive ESL/ international 101 as easier or a remedial version, better for grades. This discussion will be revisited in the section on textual positioning.

The other related, albeit indirect observation on the student’s comment focuses on the course label. As mentioned before, I agree with the choice the student has regarding selecting courses that address his/her proficiency level. My disagreement is based on the almost synonymous use of the section

ESL/international 101 with easy or remedial course. This establishes the identity of an ESL/ international student as one who needs special assistance, that the same course goals and objectives (same as mainstream 101) need to be met through easier pedagogical methods. To get the students' interpretation of this issue I asked whether they liked being addressed or described by the university as mainstream or ESL and if they would prefer other descriptors. 77 per cent of the participants accepted being called mainstream and 74 per cent as ESL student. The mainstream and ESL students accepted the labels because they aptly described who they are in a "simple" way. Mainstream students who accepted the label offered reasons such as:

- "no need to change an efficient identifier"
- "defines only level not my learning"
- "not academic" label
- "just a title... doesn't define me"
- "University knows best"

The reasons are multifarious and cover a range of opinions – from acceptance of the label mainstream as "true" and "efficient" to a nonchalant "does not matter", from a non-academic label that defines "level not my learning" to complete trust in the university's judgment of their identity. Much like the reasons the interpretations are manifold. The choice of words like "true", "simple", and "efficient" contribute to the definition of mainstream as for the majority, a conventional descriptor that fits one and all, and arguably without prejudice. And

then again, in a manner of self-doubt, some students cautiously point that the term only describes a part of their persona, “doesn’t define me”.

One of the 6 (6.5 per cent) mainstream students who disagreed with the label articulates that they should be called “student” because “why should it matter what my language is, I am still learning the same thing as every other student”. This construction of the “other” is of particular interest because it informs self-identification. The choice of label “student” or as another mainstream participant suggested “an English student” are no doubt universal and may not help the administration justify separate sections for “other” students, i.e., ESL or international. At the same time, these choices refer to the students’ conception of identity in terms that adjudicate them as similar to the majority of the learners. Interestingly, these choices were offered by mainstream students, some of whom still do not feel part of this sense of majority.

The ESL/ international group of students also shared similar opinions and concerns as their mainstream counterparts. Some of them agreed with the label ESL because it was “fair and correct” and the indifferent “doesn’t matter” was followed with “I’m proud of who I am... name not important”. The acceptance of the label in this case is undercut by the conscious recognition of personal identity, which is unaffected by institutional categorization. Various other suggestions such as “college student”, degree specific category like “WP Carey student”, English learner, “international student” and not ESL, “bilingual”, and “writer” were made by this group of participants. For one, the multiple preferences are a direct result



of the fact that this group of ESL/ international students come from across the world. Secondly, they interpret their FYC section according to how they learned English in their home countries. The different learning styles and contexts are as varied as their diverse identities. I list below a few reasons noted by the participants on why ESL is not a competent category:

- “it may make one feel that their English will never be as good as mainstream students”
- it is “a barrier” between NESs and NNESs
- “my home country does not define who I am as a writer”

The first two criteria situate the mainstream and the ESL, the NES and the NNES at two ends of a continuum. The continuum itself is challenged by “a barrier”, an ideological barrier that categorizes but does not converge. In other words, some of these students wonder: Can a NNES ever become a NES? And someone like me, more in tune with the third bulleted suggestion, will ask: When and why did I become a NNES? The third bulleted suggestion also hints at a curious situation – what if a traditionally recognized NES enrolls in a writing class in another country, let’s say, India, does this student retain the native speaker tag? These learners will surely face competitive struggle to fit with Indian English speakers. Should we view this struggle as a new subordinate position for the NES? And going back to the ESL label, is an ESL speaker then subordinate to NES? Much research and literature will denounce this sense of subordination and then again, there is at least one ESL student who questions himself/ herself as a subaltern via this questionnaire. Should we overlook this student’s concern as not

typical? With this question I move into the next section on interpersonal positioning, which brings up more instances on how the sense of the “other” is critical for the students to construct their own identities.

### **Interpersonal positioning**

“...we use language to make **interpersonal meanings**: meanings about our role relationships with other people and our attitudes to each other. Whatever use we put language to we are always expressing an attitude and taking up a role.” (Eggins, 2004, p. 12)

When 67.4 per cent mainstream participants and 43.5 per cent ESL/ international participants select “to meet graduation requirements” as their only reason to enroll in FYC they are acting according to the expected norm. These expectations are not just personal; instead it has various shades of social, cultural and academic. A student’s role therefore, is expressed in relation to what the university, their parents, the society expects from them. Similarly, when they recognize the role of the academic advisor’s suggestion, another layer of expectation is attached. The advisor directs the student to take up particular sections of courses and in effect guides the student’s decision. 25 per cent mainstream and 19.4 per cent ESL/ international students noted the academic advisor’s role in deciding to take a particular section of FYC.

Another 8.3 per cent of ESL/ international participants selected a third reason for their choice of FYC section: “My first choice was ENG 101/102 (mainstream section) but I was advised to enroll in ENG 107/108 (ESL section)”.

Some of these students had also selected to meet graduation requirements and/ or advisor's suggestion along with this third reason. Evidently, the balance of power has shifted here – the student is not in charge. The academic advisor as a representative of the institutional norms and requisites bypasses the student's choice. So, if a student does not have the minimum test scores he or she cannot enroll into mainstream 101 even if that is the first choice. Similarly, an international student would be directed to take the ESL/ international 101 not mainstream 101. This seemingly regular pattern of the institution directing students to particular sections is challenged by the following remarks by the participants:

- “The other classes I had to take up in my semester were pretty tough so I was advised to enroll in ENG 107 [ESL/ international 101] and get better grades.”
- “I was born here so I can take whatever I want, but I chose 101/108 [ESL/ international 101/102] because this could be easier.”
- “I had high enough English scores coming out of high school, but I didn't want to overwhelm myself with a harder class [i.e. mainstream 101].”

From these remarks it is obvious that a percentage of students perceive ESL as “easier”, not “overwhelming”, and advisable for “better grades”. The mainstream other is then, the more challenging and “harder” alternative. These perceptions in effect create the identities of the students enrolled in these courses. So, ESL student would be the one who chose the easier alternative, and mainstream the more advanced and difficult and therefore, more creditable. These

anecdotes also establish the perception of the system as one that can be manipulated. In fact, it is also suggested that the institution through its delegates, such as academic advisors typecast ESL students in a way not conducive to the academic goals and functions of the course. Moreover, in directing students to the “easier” FYC section the construction of the mainstream section and its students as worthy writers also deepens the ideological barrier between NES and NNES.

This divide in viewing ESL/ international and mainstream students in opposition to the other is further heightened in their selection of combined section for FYC. I decided to propose this option before them not to highlight the merits of cross-cultural composition, but because I was interested in their reaction to this idea. Their choices and some of the reasons offered on the survey corroborate the basic presumptions that students have acquired through socio-cultural experience in the academic/ student community.

46 per cent of mainstream participants were not interested to be part of a combined section and 15 per cent agreed to join it. 30.4 per cent of the students were unsure of the proposition and expected more information to make a proper decision. The statement that the combined section will have the same course goals and objectives as their current FYC section was not enough information. They were interested in knowing the “difference” between mainstream 101 and the combined section, whether it would be particularly helpful and fit their schedule, as well as who would teach the course.

The ESL/ international students were more interested in this placement option. 23 per cent disagreed with the course choice but 31.5 per cent of the participants were interested in opting for a combined section. However, majority of the participants, 40 per cent, decided that they needed more information. Some of them observed that it might be “hard to balance” for the instructor because mainstream and ESL/ international students have different needs. One student also noted that he or she would “like mainstream but would take ESL for grade”.

The reasons for the direct “yes” and “no” for combined section as offered by the mainstream and ESL/ international students are an interesting amalgamation of their perception and judgment of their alternative other. Mainstream students were not inclined towards combined FYC because:

- they would rather stick to “advanced placement” in mainstream 101
- it would be a “waste of time”
- ESL/ international 101 is for foreign students/ English as second language – therefore, “slower... kids barely know how to speak English in it”
- it “may give me better grade... not fair to others”

Once again, most of the mainstream participants perceived combined section in relation to the ESL/ international other who would be responsible for making the class “slower” and essentially waste their time. It is also significant that some of them even suggest that it is unfair to get better grades competing

with peers who are not at par with their proficiency level. On one hand, such a view is considerate towards the deficient other, and on the other, it implies prejudice.

At the same time, the mainstream students who were interested in partaking of the combined placement option offered that “combination would enrich students’ learning” and that “it would be interesting to learn with people who speak another language”. One of them also noted that such a placement option would be more helpful for NNES and bilinguals than offered in regular mainstream sections of FYC. It is interesting that the group of 92 mainstream participants cover the entire spectrum of opinions on combined sections. From the realization of its merits as bringing together many languages and cultures, they also suggest the drawbacks of placing students at varied proficiency levels.

In the same vein, ESL/ international group offer a wide range of understanding of why it is appropriate or inappropriate to be placed with mainstream students. The naysayers would rather improve English first with classmates at similar levels of proficiency. Some of them are not eager for “too much work” that comes with taking classes with native speakers. However, those who agreed with the conception of a combined section offered the following:

- “higher goal of being with mainstream students will lead to more improvement”
- “good chance to improve my speaking, reading and writing. Meet different people from different countries and native speakers.”

- “get close to native culture is best choice”
- “good chance to be measured up with American students and see how they write and be able to learn by being exposed”
- “don’t like being separate from native speaker students”

Noticeably, the ESL/ international students construct themselves in comparison to the native speakers. The main drift of the reasons listed above acknowledge NESs as fitting yardsticks to compare their own proficiency. Another important argument relates to the ESL/ international students’ awareness that they are in the US to be “exposed” to “native culture”. They appreciate combined section of FYC because it will allow them a chance to observe first-hand the mainstream students at writing tasks and improve their language skills to be at par with American students. It must also be noted that they express interest in combined section of FYC even when they already take other subject courses with mainstream students. Clearly, taking engineering or business or math classes, for instance, is not enough to improve “speaking, reading and writing” in English.

The discussion on variety of course labels and identities as propounded by the first research questions has tended towards a clear-cut distinction between mainstream and ESL/ international. Although the two FYC sections comprise of a multitude of cultures, the students overwhelmingly recognize mainstream (with their preferred choice of label as NES) as a uniform sect, the dominant culture. In Bourdieuan terms the dominant “culture which unifies (the medium of communication) is also the culture which separates (the instrument of distinction)

and which legitimates distinctions by forcing all other cultures (designed as sub-cultures) to define themselves by their distance from the dominant culture” (Bourdieu, 1991, p.167). This view is oft reproduced, albeit indirectly, in students’ definition of mainstream and ESL as reviewed in the next section. It must also be noted that the purpose of this study is to direct attention to cultures and not just the preeminent dominant culture. The method of analysis underlines how differences in student identities (and “all other cultures”/ “subcultures”) are blanketed by institutional categories and students’ own perception. This perception has filtered down the chain to recognize that mainstream is the “standard” and ESL as a phase of learning, where learning is slow and tedious.

### **Textual positioning**

As proposed at the beginning of this chapter, Halliday’s three macrofunctions of language interrelate with each other (Eggins, 2004; Ivanic & Camps, 2001). This is made evident by the fact that out of four points listed under textual positioning in Table 4.1, two have already been incorporated in discussions under ideational and interpersonal positioning. The discussion rendered in this section will be primarily devoted to the remaining two categories – the definitions of mainstream and ESL as proposed by the survey participants and their overall expectations from FYC. These two discussion points will undoubtedly tie in what has already been presented in the chapter.



### *Defining mainstream and ESL*

The mainstream students' definition of their FYC section is at par with how they view themselves – “regular”, “standard”, “beginner’s class”, “refresher course”, “basic college level” that “majority” of students take. The majority consists of “natives” and “everyone, regardless of major” who use English for “main communication”. ESL, on the other hand, constitutes English learners who have “difficulty in writing and reading”, they “need a bit more help”, are not proficient and therefore, “learn at a different pace”. And of course, ESL learner is “not native”, English is not the “first language” and instead the “second means of communication” for foreigners.

The two sections of FYC, mainstream and ESL/ international, are defined by the image of the students who enroll in them. In other words, it seems students understand a course based on who enrolls in it more than what is taught. None of the participants from mainstream sections mentioned what kind of writing is taught or what are the course goals and objectives for either one of the sections. In spite of the diversity of the student body, the presentation of the two FYC sections is in homogenous terms, more to do with meeting graduation requirement than engaging in critical “use [of] writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating” (Harrington et al., 2001, p. 324).

The ESL/ international students define mainstream as “advanced” class for those who are “very good in English”, can “read and write fast”, and mainly “native speakers”. It is also defined as a course that teaches “how to become

native speaker”. The ESL section is for students who need “help with speaking, reading and writing”, “English is not mother tongue”, for “foreign speakers” and international students. It is a course designed to help “[NNEs] improve writing skills and speaking ability”. In the same vein, ESL is recognized as “easier than mainstream”.

Once again, mainstream and ESL is represented through the student body. The learning outcomes are overgeneralized, but distinctly point at native speaker-like as the final aim for this group of students. They admit their own lack of proficiency in English and recognize the ESL section as a chance to improve. At the same time, there is an underlying suggestion that ESL/ international students cannot be as good as their mainstream (defined as “native”) counterparts.

### ***The utopian mix-up***

When tallying the student responses I was curiously surprised at the mix-ups between some students’ understanding of mainstream and ESL sections. These errors were delightfully utopian and added much to the analysis as the politically correct perceptions. Some mainstream students perceived ESL as “upper division class”, “advanced” and “accelerated” course that engages in “more in-depth analysis of grammar and proper writing techniques”. Apparently, these classes are also for the “select few” as opposed to the “basic” or “standard” mainstream FYC. ESL was also suggested to be the acronym for English for Spanish learners and English as sign language. A few of the ESL/ international group of students also indicated that ESL section of FYC is for “advanced students” and that mainstream

was purely “language and grammar class” for “students who just started learning”, presumably English.

Erroneous maybe, but it would be interesting to check the sort of identity these students perceive for themselves. So, mainstream participants here understand themselves as the standard group and the unknown ESL represents something better, more advanced group, which they did not qualify for. Advanced is synonymous with “more in-depth analysis”, hence, higher goals in terms of language learning. Similarly, some of the ESL/ international participants viewed their section of FYC as advanced recognizing that there are other students who need more help learning English. This tangle of misinterpretations shows the varying standards of expectations that the FYC students pose for their own sections as well as others. These students also recognize power as situated in spaces that are usually believed to be neutral and power-less. Moreover, what is typical for one student varies from the other according to the socio-cultural realities of their situation. Halliday (1994) notes:

Knowing what are the ‘typical ways of saying things’ is part of knowing a language... the ‘typical’ might be the commonly said, or the way it is said in the absence of any special circumstances; and these will not always coincide... So as well as recognizing what is congruent, we also recognize that there are other possibilities, where the typical pattern has not been used and the speaker or writer has chosen to say things differently. (p.343)

In line with Halliday's assessment of the "typical" it can be said that these fewer number of survey participants who opted for seemingly erroneous defining criteria for mainstream and ESL may be correct. That ESL is advanced because it has multitude of language varieties, many more than a mainstream section and therefore, multiple aspects of language learning can be explored in class. There is more scope for experimentation, interaction between cultural domains, resulting in knowledge formation that goes beyond just fulfilling graduation requirements. And this goal of language learning is surely not utopian; it is recognized by the "common expectations" of FYC students enlisted on the WPA Outcomes Statement (2001).

### ***Expectations from FYC***

The survey approached the students about their language choices, their preference for identity markers and course labels, why they chose to be part of particular FYC sections, and their opinion on combined section of FYC. They were also asked about their expectations from the section of FYC they were enrolled in for the semester. For the mainstream students the goals were to be become "better writers", with a knack for presenting "good arguments" and organizing their paper well. The ESL/ international students reported that they wanted "improve English" and "experience academic writing". Both groups of participants were interested in "good grades" as a direct outcome of the course.

As a researcher I am intrigued by the minimal expectations the participants indicated, in fact some of them even stated that they had no expectations from the

course. On one hand, this absence of critical judgment does not match with their otherwise perceptive understanding of the “other”. On the other hand, these nominal expectations or lack of them are in tune with their perception of themselves – “standard” or a “beginner’s” class can only have “general writing requirements”, nothing too elaborate or difficult, which should earn them a “good grade”. Much like the constant, albeit implicit presence of the remedial other, there is also the advanced other, students who must shoulder the more difficult and in-depth analysis part of writing requirements.

### **Concluding remarks and the first research question**

The first research question asked for students’ preference for course labels and identities along with their definitions and reasons to distinguish between mainstream and ESL sections of FYC offered at NXU. The motive behind asking this two-part question was to determine the ways in which FYC students understand the course labels and identity markers that surround them. At the same time, I was interested in their perception of both the FYC section offered by the university because administratively the mainstream 101 and ESL/ international 101 sections have the same course goals and objectives. However, the pedagogical means and methods are distinct for each section and arguably, this difference accounts for students’ comprehension of the learning outcomes in distinct ways. The findings reported in this chapter can be condensed into a neat response for the first research question such as the following:

With the variety of course labels and identities available for first year composition, mainstream students prefer NES and ESL/ international students prefer English as a second language speaker as the best identity markers. Most of the mainstream and ESL/ international participants also accept the course labels that encase their FYC section.

However neatly packaged, this response is severely inadequate because it does not address the vital lacunae in student response that represents the “do not know” factor. The not knowing is a realization of the diversity of these sections and the student perceptions. In fact, the above response is a monolithic way of viewing student identities and their learning styles. It blankets the cultural milieu that can inform pedagogical practices and open newer avenues for critical thinking. In other words, a more relevant response to the first research question must take into account the atypical responses and student questions such as, “why should it matter what my language is, I am still learning the same thing as every other student.” Therefore, I make another attempt at answering the first research question in the following paragraph.

With the variety of course labels and identities available for first year composition, mainstream and ESL/ international students find themselves split in various directions. The survey may report a marked preference for NES and English as a second language speaker as the most prominent choices among mainstream and ESL/ international students, respectively, but this is at best the big picture. The “truth” lies in the finer details – when mainstream students select

NNESs and / or resident NNESs the students demonstrate a heightened awareness of individual identity. When this same category of resident NNESs identify themselves in ESL/ international sections of FYC, the range of student identities can be realized as not only varied but also overlapping between sections.

Although most of them are at peace with the FYC section they are enrolled for the semester, there are some who would have preferred to explore other cultures and languages. There are ESL/ international students who would want to compete with their American counterparts and be “exposed” to the “native” culture. Again, these atypical answers are fewer in number and easy to ignore, but they present complex dilemmas which should not be overlooked. Additionally, the WPA Outcomes Statement was developed to meet:

... the common expectations, for students, of first-year composition programs in the United States at the beginning of the 21st century. Central to the document is the belief that in articulating those expectations and locating them more generally, we help students meet them, and we help assure that the conditions required for meeting them are realized.

(Harrington et al., 2001, p. 323)

Therefore, addressing student expectations should be the norm. Instead of generalizing their identities attempts should be made to meet their uncommon but thought-provoking attempts at learning. This will in-turn mean participating in class as a productive venture and not just a pre-requisite for a good grade. The discussion on course labels and identities as offered in the chapter so far prompt

the second research question – in what ways do the students’ understanding of course labels and identities relate with or challenge the ongoing research in the field? The next section analyzes the survey participants’ understanding of labels and identities in relation to a selection of research that provides direct reference points to the prominent contexts that figured in student anecdotes.

### **Research focus**

Drawing cues from what the students said through the questionnaires and comparing them with what researchers have pointed I jumpstart the discussion from three critical standpoints – (a) Braine’s (1994a, 1994b, 1996) spirited concern for ESL students and support for separate ESL sections in writing programs, (b) Silva, Reichelt, and Matsuda’s (Matsuda & Silva, 1999; Reichelt & Silva, 1995-1996; Silva, 1994) studies on cross-cultural composition, and (c) Costino & Hyon (2007) and Ortmeier-Hooper (2008) studies that problematize relation between student identities and course labels. These research works have been selected because they are seminal to this project and are often cited as critical reference points in other studies in the area. I highlight their central concerns and try to see matches or lack of semblance with what the survey participants had to offer. This approach allows me to contextualize the findings and address the second research question.

#### ***Braine’s ESL and the context of cross-cultural composition***

Braine’s studies (1994a, 1994b, 1996) support the formation of separate ESL sections to cater to the specific needs of ESL/ international students. In fact,



he proposes ESL section as an alternative that universities must offer for students who are self-conscious and feel inhibited working with mainstream students.

Braine concludes his 1996 study as follows:

It is ironic that, whereas some mainstream teachers are unable to cope with ESL students in their classes, many ESL students see required writing courses, especially mainstream classes, as the main obstacle to their academic success. By encouraging our institutions to provide students with a choice, we could earn the gratitude of our students as well as that of our colleagues in English departments. (p.103)

While Braine's arguments are motivated to assist language learning, the schematic references he offers are somewhat incompatible. For instance, ESL students who choose ESL section are in a safe zone, where instructors and peers work in a mutually encouraging and rewarding environment. But for the ESL students who prefer to compete with mainstream students, the responsibility to learn and succeed in FYC is entirely their own. Braine's argument seems to be that "some mainstream instructors [who] are unable to cope with ESL students in their classes" are not the problem, the ESL student who views FYC, especially the mainstream one, as an "obstacle" is the problem. According to him a separate ESL section is the solution. It is taken for granted that ESL sections will be assigned to instructors who are aware of ESL issues. It must also be noted that ESL, in this case, symbolically represents the whole range of international and

ESL students. Braine's justification of ESL section is based on a broad generalization of student identities with no direct reference to mainstream students.

The survey for my study was conducted 14 years after Braine's 1996 study. The institution at which the survey was conducted offers ESL sections of FYC. The survey reports that students, mainstream and ESL/ international, still perceive ESL sections as "remedial" and "easy". Moreover, the choice to switch sections is based on the fact that it is harder to compete in mainstream sections and therefore, ESL is preferred for better grades. In fact, one of the participants notes – "like mainstream but would take ESL for grade". And there are also those ESL/ international students who want to be part of mainstream sections but academic advisors have directed them to ESL sections either because their visa status or because they do not have requisite test scores. These layers of criteria are over generalized in Braine's proposition for ESL sections.

The survey results presented in this study clearly challenge Braine's presumptions, that ESL section and the choice to switch sections can mitigate any complexities that FYC students may face. With all the placement choices one aspect of FYC repeatedly comes to the fore – pedagogy – what is taught and how it is taught can make a difference in students' perception of FYC, not multiple permutation and combination of student identities and course labels. Therefore, in reference to the second research question, Braine's research may have contributed to the institutional recognition of ESL as a separate entity that needs time, space,

and attention, but it does not delve in-depth to notice that there are in fact, many other identities lurking within the ESL construct. Matsuda, Reichelt, and Silva (Matsuda & Silva, 1999; Reichelt & Silva, 1995-1996; Silva, 1994) however, realized this presence of multiple cultures of learning and proposed cross-cultural composition.

In spite of the merits of cross-cultural composition realized over a few semesters, the course was eventually withdrawn. The mainstream students were concerned that they were not gaining anything from the course and were mostly assisting the NNEs in language learning. This survey had approached the students on their views of a combined section and a few students pointed that such a section could be useful for ESL students. The notion that working with ESL/ international students is equivalent to a “slower” class because they lack proficiency is also noted by some mainstream FYC participants. In fact, some ESL/ international students also reported that it may be “hard to balance” multiple levels of proficiency and expectations in a combined section. Once again, this placement option, even with its merits falls short of student expectations.

Furthermore, whether referring to mainstream, ESL, or combined sections, the survey participants used words or phrases like “proficiency”, “need to improve English”, “help with speaking, reading, and writing”, “language and grammar”, “enrich student’s learning”. These examples prove that students are

concerned, implicitly maybe, about their learning outcomes. Thus, I would reiterate that FYC students are concerned about what is taught and the textual presentation instead of how they are placed.

### *Course labels, identities, and residency statuses*

Costino & Hyon (2007) in their study based on nine FYC students could not establish any relation between their choice of identity markers, course labels (mainstream or multilingual) and their residency statuses. Ortmeier-Hooper (2008) with three resident NNEs presented cases where students were eager to join the mainstream and viewed ESL as a “liability” and not a choice. These two studies, as mentioned earlier, inform this dissertation in many ways. First, the concern for identities was established after reading these two research articles. Second, the survey was based on questions that these researchers put to practice in their studies. So, in a way I had tested waters in a theoretical realm before reaching out to students at NXU for more information. Hence, these two studies gave me an inkling of the kind of feedback I may expect from FYC students.

I differed with these two studies in the basic assumption that multiple identities and resident NNEs reside in both mainstream and ESL/ international section so, the survey must accommodate both varieties of FYC. This allowed me a larger scope and a complete one to gather data and offer my interpretations. So, on one hand, my study reports similar result as the two studies. For instance, like Costino & Hyon (2007) my study could not deduce any particular relationship between residency statuses and students’ choice of identity markers and course

labels. Also, like Ortmeier-Hooper (2008) this study noticed that some students enrolled in the ESL/ international section were eager to join mainstream students, compete with them and experience American culture. This would also help mainstream themselves with the majority group of learners. At the same time, there were resident NNEs who chose to be in ESL/ international section for better grades. Moreover, this study also reports that mainstream students were equally conscious of the NNEs in their midst. They were particularly concerned that combined sections of FYC would adversely affect the pace of the class and would waste their time. At the same time there were a few who were eager to experiment with different language users in their midst.

Thus, with diverse language varieties the FYC sections surveyed for this study probably included the whole gamut of identities, recognized and still unrecognized in research. Their preliminary recognition of FYC as a graduation requirement, however, seems to problematize the course. Nevertheless, diversity must call for action, a range of pedagogical applications that will improve students' experience of FYC and meet their learning outcomes and expectations. In conclusion, the discussion based on the second research question shows that FYC students inform and challenge research in the field of composition studies, both mainstream and ESL/ international. The survey responses also underline that there are no perfect ways to demarcate student identities and organize placement practices for FYC. But research must continue to follow the trends that the students implicitly endorse. As a researcher, I find that the multitude of language varieties and identities must prefigure in the course curriculum for FYC. The final

chapter, therefore, discusses the survey outcomes in line with the recent call for internationalization of higher education (Donahue, Horner, Trimbur), and focuses on the context of English as an international language (EIL), a proposition offered by the field of world Englishes, and its applicability for FYC.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The previous chapter presented the findings of the survey questionnaires and based the discussion on Halliday's three macrofunctions of language. Student responses were contextualized in relation to current research to derive patterns of understanding identity markers and course labels. The information generated by the survey informed the two research questions in many ways. This chapter revisits the findings and offers point of views that suggest a pedagogical move based on the field of world Englishes. More specifically, the discussion takes into account the applicability of EIL in FYC courses. The implications focus on the importance of EIL perspective in FYC courses in the US and makes suggestions for future research avenues.

### **Survey results vis-à-vis previous research**

Previous research (Braine, 1994a, 1994b, 1996; McKay, 1981; Silva, 1993) offered that ESL students feel more at ease when placed with students at similar levels of competency. The survey conducted for this study agrees that a predominant number of ESL students would prefer to remain in ESL sections. At the same time, there are students who would want to explore mainstream sections and compete with them. While placement practices can surely accommodate interested ESL students in mainstream sections, but as Braine's (1996) study would point, it does not guarantee that the instructors will be particularly understanding towards these atypical learners. Even cross-cultural composition could not inculcate this sense of sharing learning experiences in FYC students.

The initial success of the program was challenged by the mainstream students' disinterest to continue working with ESL/ international students who were perceived as lacking proficiency.

As mentioned earlier, I strongly feel that instructors with curricular agendas based on EIL can transform this seeming lack of interest in the other. As discussed in the context of the first research question, students may show preference for certain identity labels, but that does not mean that the finer details must be overlooked. For example, some of the survey participants specified more than one language in which they claimed proficiency. However, these bilingual or multilingual students did not necessarily select this obvious identity marker and instead chose to be called a NES only. Given this observation, I would contend that choice of identity markers determine one's proximity to the dominant culture. This is, as Bourdieu (1991) would point, the discovery of symbolic power "in places where it is least visible, where it is most completely misrecognized - and thus, in fact recognized" (pp. 163-164).

By interpreting students' choice of labels in Bourdieuan terms it can be argued that researchers like Braine based their opinion of student preferences on misrecognitions. FYC students then, much like their 21<sup>st</sup> century counterparts were aware of the how their preferences reflected their identity in relation to the dominant culture. They manipulated power dynamics, maybe implicitly, to toe the line between choices that would improve language learning, versus those that would mainstream themselves with ease. And this study argues that student



should not need to choose between the two. For instance, being placed in cross-cultural composition course has its advantages and students should be able to engage and interact with their peers, mainstream and ESL/ international, with equal ease without having to accommodate with dominant cultural norms. This may seem like an ideal proposition, but pursuing EIL based research agendas may be a start.

Furthermore, by exploring the applicability of EIL in FYC sections the many identities, specially the ones that overlap between the two sections, such as, resident NNEs would have a more uniform learning situation. Including an EIL curriculum will ensure “exposure to Englishes and their users, facilitating strategic competence, providing appropriate cultural materials, and increasing awareness of the politics of Englishes” (Matsuda & Friedrich, 2011). This orientation will also resituate the ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions of language learning in a Bakhtinian paradigm, where the knowledge of the other, and in this case, multiple others will devise “the actual architectonic of the actually experienced world” (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 58) and shape one’s individuality.

This study does not endeavor to suggest practical course policies or assignments based on an EIL curriculum. The goal is to realize the need for such a curriculum given the variety of student identities, and the challenges they present before previous research. Therefore, in the next couple of sections I attempt to set the functional domain of EIL and then posit through research analysis the reasons for including EIL in FYC courses.

### Setting EIL's functional domain

Since the study highlights the resourcefulness of EIL in FYC courses in the US it is important to clarify at the very outset that American English (AE) and EIL do not exist in opposition to each other. In fact, AE the language variety can be said to exist and interact (with other language varieties) within the functional domain of EIL. Further, AE the inner circle variety of English as situated in Kachru's (1985) concentric circles seems to negate the presence of other Englishes in America. The concentric circles diagram provides a historical context to English use in different countries but, it does not acknowledge the regional varieties that may exist along with what is perceived as the prominent variety. Tripathy (1998) notes, "Kachru has collapsed into one entity disparate models of growth and stasis, without adequate consistency" (p.56). In case of the US, regional varieties can be located in areas such as Boston, New York, Texas and the South. There are also ethnic varieties such as Ebonics. AE is differentiated from its regional varieties on the basis of phonological and lexical variations, while Ebonics brings up the debate on ethno-cultural realities in the country.

Much like Kubota (2001), this study conceptualizes these "domestic varieties of English as part of WE" in order to give space to alternative language identities. Further, AE speakers or, as Lippi-Green (1997) would refer to as 'mainstream US English speakers' are "*perceived* as living primarily in the Midwest, far west, and some parts of the east and/or as upper middle class or

upper class, as literate, school oriented, and as aspiring to upward mobility through success in formal institutions” (p.61). Though AE speakers can be argued to be situated in a region and therefore, a regional variety yet the ‘perceived’ notion takes over the apparent reality. So, when one talks about teaching FYC in the US, it is this ‘perceived’ variety of AE that is considered the norm. EIL as a functional category trespasses national and international boundaries. It exists, Friedrich and Matsuda argue, as a sub-field of English as a lingua Franca (ELF):

By defining EIL as a sub-category of ELF...we are better able to accommodate its significant presence among NNSs in different contexts as well as the influence of these NNSs in the development of varieties. (p. 9)

The authors are referring to the different levels of interaction that occur between NESs, between NNEs and also among native and non-native English speakers. EIL as a function then helps mediate NES-NNE dialogue. In fact, Kachru (1992) notes EIL’s function as ‘essential’ to cross-cultural communication and asserts that “this new role of English puts a burden” on NESs as well as NNEs which in effect means “responsibility [that] demands what may be termed “attitudinal readjustment” ” (p. 67). Also, when native and non-native English speakers of various nations interact they construct networks of communication characterized by linguistic and socio-cultural negotiations. The scope for such negotiations or adjustments therefore, characterizes EIL.

To conclude, this section attempted to establish the functional domain of EIL. Within this domain speakers of different language varieties interact to create

“new” knowledge. They have an opportunity to move out of their comfort zones and interact with others who bring many other cultures of language learning. The responsibility is shared in this space. The mainstream FYC students are not necessarily responsible for offering the dominant model of language learning. There could be other equally competent models or the language variety represented by the mainstream students may be one of the many dominant models selected for the class. The domain of EIL as discussed here seems to be an equalizer of sorts, and the next section justifies its relevance to FYC courses in the US.

### **Why is it important to include EIL perspective in FYC courses in the US?**

Researchers have often noted the “genuinely global status” (Crystal, 1997) of English. In the US, realization of this global phenomenon becomes all the more acute with numerous NNEs in higher education institutes. Interestingly, there has been ample research (for example, Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Kubota, 1998; Lai, 2008; Nunan, 2003) focusing on how outer and expanding circle language users are coping with the pedagogical objectives and institutional practices that may need to be revised given the increasing visibility and attention WE appropriates. At the same, there is not much research that promotes developing the knowledge and concerns of WE in the inner circle classrooms.

Usually, ESL/ international and mainstream sections with the same FYC curriculum are offered at US universities with an eye to meet common needs of the language learners. With the multitude of student identities, as evidenced by

the survey conducted for this dissertation, researchers have expressed the challenge to place these students in sections that would address their needs and expectations appropriately. In fact, with placement options, researchers have more or less, reached a blind spot. The focus now must shift to EIL that can be offered as a befitting addition to the FYC curriculum. Such curricular practices will also counter the indulgence of a monolithic AE variety.

Moreover, as presented in Figure 2.3 in Chapter 2, ESL/international section of FYC includes learners from outer and expanding circle countries such as India, Japan, Korea, China, Bangladesh, UAE, Oman, Sweden, to name a few. The ESL section suggests that multilingual, multiethnic and multicultural language users from outer and expanding circles admitted in an inner circle university interact and participate in class discussions, perform group work, and write papers with feedback from their peers. If the instructor is a NES, i.e. AE/other regional variety speaker, then this inner circle variety of English also gets added to the pool of language varieties. And if the instructor is a NNES, then another similar or different variety of English becomes available to the class. The learners and their instructor perform in this near perfect site of world Englishes, almost inadvertently. Rarely is this site of interaction ever visited from the WE perspective in a FYC classroom. The advantages of being part of this multi-fold exchange of language varieties are possibly immense.

In ESL/international sections the availability of speakers from different countries is a given. But, the mainstream sections are perceived to be

homogenous, albeit erroneously, because they include NESs and therefore, the norm seems to conform to AE as the appropriate variety for preparing teaching pedagogies. Unfortunately, this sense of homogeneity ignores the presence of other regional varieties of English in the US. It also seamlessly blends the presence of resident NNEs who figure in both ESL/international and mainstream sections adding to the multifaceted composition of these classrooms. Hence, in the face of an implied homogeneity associated with mainstream sections it is crucial to foreground the differences to allow learners an opportunity to participate in world affairs unconstrained by politically determined linguistic demarcations.

Most undergraduates take FYC in their first year of study. The objective of these classes is to make the students familiar with academic discourses, writing styles and conventions followed not only in that institution but in the US. In fact, the goal is to prepare them to create successful arguments in their discourse community which in reality could be situated in the US or other inner, outer or expanding circle countries. Therefore, it is only logical to promote the awareness of what is already available in these mainstream and ESL/international sections, i.e. language varieties.

Kubota (2001) “underscore[s] the necessity of affirming linguistic diversity at all educational levels and creating a pedagogical environment conducive to developing critical consciousness on the global spread of English” (p.62). Kubota’s study of an English IV class in a public high school bases itself

on the notion that outer and expanding circle speakers have a variety of classes, tests, and training institutes earmarked to “improve” their communicative and written skills in English. But, inner circle language users, again presumed to be a single homogenous community, credited with being native to the language are “rarely” introduced and encouraged to devise coping strategies that would conceive of other varieties of English as legitimate and not imperfect. For this study Kubota developed a unit on WE for the 17 high school students who participated in the project. Within eight sessions the researcher planned to draw the learner’s attention to the existence of different varieties of English in the US and the world, give a historical backdrop to emergence of English, familiarize them with the “difficulty” of attaining native-like proficiency in L2, figure ways to proficiently communicate with WE speakers, and to closely observe the underlying assumptions and results of using English worldwide. The results of the study indicated positive improvements in students’ realization of the difficulty in L2 acquisition and “perceived understanding” of WE speech samples. But it was observed that the students seemingly judged WE speakers and speech samples based on “how they speak” and not all of them were keen on interacting with WE speakers if the occasion did not necessitate it. This led Kubota to underline among others the suggestion that endorsing “cultural/linguistic diversities” early on is an essential part of pedagogical practice. Her study also implies that,

It is important for younger generations to remember that, no matter who the interlocutors are, communication is always a two-way street where both the listener and the speaker share the responsibility to

make their communication successful. While many non-mainstream English speakers, particularly in the Outer/Expanding Circles need to increase their cross-cultural awareness and language competencies, Inner Circle native speakers of mainstream English, often the privileged in international communication, also need to take responsibility for listening to and comprehending speakers of different varieties of English. (pp. 61-62)

Kubota suggests a kind of open-minded responsible stance which does not border on partisanship. Instead the call for increased “cross-cultural awareness” is fair and possible if the functional properties of EIL are put to practice. I believe this will also challenge the “privileged” position of mainstream English speakers, who exist as a symbolic figure of authority.

Therefore, the importance of EIL in FYC courses in the US is a practical requirement. All language learners need to experience the real world challenges that WE varieties and oft noted incomprehensibility seemingly proffer, not with a view to dis-empower particular language varieties, instead to create educational systems that do not under-privilege alternate language realities. At this point, it is pertinent to cite McKay’s use of the term ‘macroacquisition’ (Brutt-Griffler, 2002; quoted in McKay, 2003) because she posits that it holds “important implications for EIL pedagogy” (p.2). Macroacquisition implies that English is learnt for specific purposes and usages. Traditionally, English has been viewed from the need to understand the culture and linguistic concerns of inner circle



countries. But, the concept of macroacquisition proposes that the concerns have now shifted to meet individual language learner needs and cater only to selected domains of language use as determined by its users.

Smith (1976) and Widdowson (1994) also cater to a conceptualization of EIL that redeems English from the restricting purview of the inner circle and therefore, dominant ideology. EIL then, does not expect learners to be in tandem with the cultural mores and practices of mainstream English speakers. Further, as an international language, English is ‘denationalized’ allowing all learners to understand, interpret, experiment, and express their own concerns and cultures. Thus, the discussion establishes EIL as a promising domain, recommended by researchers, and open for analysis and interpretation. The next section considers some of the practical concerns for the implementation of EIL in FYC classes. These concerns are practical in orientation, but do not offer specific teaching techniques.

### **How can one teach EIL in a FYC classroom?**

“I think we need to be cautious about the designs we have on other people's worlds when we are busy designing our own.” (Widdowson, 1994, p. 389)

Widdowson articulates the word of caution perfectly that all policy makers, administrators, and instructors should keep in mind while devising an all empowering pedagogy for EIL based composition classes. But, caution cannot and should not mean that one feels weary of trying to move out of (pre)set modes

and orientation of language learning and writing instruction. Instead the idea is to qualify traditional pedagogical practices with newer critical thoughts which do not strive for perfection but are oriented for change and improvement. Having said that it is important to consider what kind of cultural context(s) EIL based pedagogy should profess, given that this functional variety of English allows multiple linguistic and cultural identities to foster and grow.

### ***Cultural contexts in EIL***

Cortazzi and Jin (1999) talk about ‘source culture’, ‘target culture’ and ‘international target culture’ as possible venues to derive materials to inform courses texts. Target culture has traditionally been part of language textbooks because most publishers of repute are believed to be situated in the inner sphere countries. While materials derived from the target culture may interest some but other students may find it difficult to figure the cultural ties associated with it. Also, if the instructor is NNES then it may be a challenge to communicate the nuances of cultural ideology that are conceptually unavailable. Source culture from the perspective of outer or expanding circle countries allows students and teachers to get involved with the local culture. Cortazzi and Jin consider this an opportunity to know and interact with one’s own culture.

From the view of FYC classes source culture can be conceived as “typically” American. Once again, the notion of typicality seems to bind a living, thriving culture into a monolithic, unidimensional typecast. American as the source culture can be veritably defined by the numerous immigrants that are

integral to the country, the regional and ethnic varieties that exist and inform AE. Therefore, including source culture in texts can allow for multiple voices to reach at students' as well as instructors' imagination. In fact, it seems that Cortazzi and Jin's understanding of target culture and source culture almost blends into each other when situated in an inner circle. The fine line of difference recognizes target culture as represented by the physical setting of where the class is held (i.e. if the class is in the US the target culture is American), source culture can be the physical setting of the class and also the dispersed physical realities of each and every student and instructor in FYC sections (i.e. a Korean student may individually determine her source culture as Korean, similarly a Mexican instructor can operate from her indigenous cultural roots).

The important tenet to realize in the midst of myriad varieties of English and culture is the knowledge that each one should critically inform and benefit from the other. A teacher operating from the knowledge of Mexican culture must be willing to develop an understanding of the various other cultures that students bring with them. Finally, the international target culture, which in the case of outer and expanding circle countries would imply various other WE can be tried and tested in these classes. For ESL/international FYC classrooms international target culture may be perceived to have an overlap with source culture, but the course materials can be carefully designed to include cultures that have no representatives in the classroom. For a mainstream FYC section international target culture would obviously offer the chance to immerse oneself in cultural tendencies outside the USA.

### *Grammar and lexis of EIL*

Without delving into grammar debate (refer to Ferris 1999, 2001, 2004; Truscott, 1996, 1999, 2007, 2008) that surrounds writing classrooms, I will focus on how EIL can adjust to the grammar needs of a FYC classroom. And the answer as Widdowson (1994) tenders is simple-

grammar is symbolic of communal solidarity. “Ungrammatical” expressions mark people as nonmembers. What you then do is to coax or coerce them somehow into conformity if you want to make them members (generally through education) or make them powerless on the periphery if you don't. (p. 382)

It is quite intriguing how Widdowson seems to wash away the sanctimonial status that often times composition teachers have for grammar correction. How much of grammar really helps a student is widely debated but, it is important to notice the matter of fact attitude with which Widdowson recognizes and equates knowledge of grammar with the conception of power. So, one is either ‘coaxed’ into the seat of power or reeling at the periphery all powerless.

As far as lexis is concerned, Widdowson finds it “very elusive”. He suggests that claims of a standard English variety means there are readily available and unchanging lexical features. But writers often invent words which stray away and contradict standard norms of the language. He then talks about the kind of vocabulary used in the fields of science, technology and business which may not be available for reference in dictionaries. Does that mean they use non-

standard English? Widdowson asserts that language standards and vocabulary are determined by their users. If one is not part of that domain then there will be lacks in comprehension. Finally, as an international language if “English is to retain its vitality and its capability for continual adjustment, it cannot be confined within a standard lexis.” (p. 383)

### *Critical pedagogy*

From non-standard notions of grammar and lexis, the focus now shifts to what kind of pedagogical practices should inform the teaching of EIL. Kubota’s (2001) study notes that one of the difficulties that her project faced was limited critical thoughts on part of the students. Dealing with English as global language means that questions and concerns arise which may not have one right answer.

Therefore, learner integration in classrooms should be such that they can critically rummage through related political, economic, social, cultural discourses that would inform the inquiry if not forge perfect answers. Critical pedagogy therefore, relies on multi-directional transfer of knowledge, not a linear transfer from teacher to students.

Canagarajah (1999) defines critical pedagogy in opposition to mainstream pedagogy. As the label suggests the tendency is to remove oneself from the traditional notions that inform our comprehension of language artifacts. Since EIL in its functional paradigm involves a shift from the mainstream perception of language orientation and composition practices, it is imminent that it would involve critical thoughts on hows and wherefores of EIL pedagogy. Critical

pedagogy, according to Canagarajah perceives learning as “personal”, “situated”, “cultural”, and knowledge as “ideological”, “negotiated” and “political” (pp. 15-16). The classroom focus is therefore, not teacher centered but determined by socio-cultural forces, circumstantial realities, which knock at the rigid doors of perceived and politically charged ideologies that need to be thwarted from their safe havens.

Teachers should therefore attempt to critically interrogate the hidden curricula of their courses, relate learning to the larger socio-political realities, and encourage students to make pedagogical choices that offer sounder alternatives to their living conditions. (p. 14)

To “critically interrogate” the pedagogical norms may not call for all that exists to be demarcated as outcasts, but it surely asks for a thoughtful venture that would prod through classroom routines that are at best relics of the past. Further, EIL based curriculum informed by critical pedagogy aims to recognize and nurture the “independent consciousness” that students possess, which may be marred with long drawn restrictive institutional ventures. But indulging their thoughts to critically evaluate the concerns of language learning can possibly promote the recognition of multiple agendas that EIL explicitly possesses and composition classrooms hope to achieve. To be able to move from the inner, outer and extending circle paradigms into the regions of overlap and relative understanding will confer FYC students, whether mainstream or ESL/international the realization of a multifaceted, often contradictory existence. Such an existence

does not view other cultures as active or passive but promotes cultural mediation as a process of critical empowerment and develops a personal voice that is the representation of power. And interestingly, the WPA Outcomes Statement (2001) acknowledges this call for “critical reading, thinking, and writing” in FYC.

### **Concluding notes**

This chapter recognizes the various parameters of an EIL based pedagogic practice for FYC. The attempt is to offer alternate ways of accommodating and encouraging student involvement by recognizing their peculiar styles of learning as critical sites of engagement. With the variety of language users, it may not be possible to explore each one of these engaging learning styles, but awareness of them and conscious selection of a few contexts will surely classify language learning as a constant process. This approach will not only engage ESL/ international students but also mainstream students who can explore multiple language realities as normal, and working with NNEs or ESL and international students as beneficial in the long run.

Maybe, I expect too much from these first-year writing students, most of whom want nothing more than meeting graduation requirements. But then again, as a researcher if I stop expecting, raising the bar a little more with every step, language learning will become a stagnant occupation and with time, lose its relevance. With 28 language varieties, the FYC sections at NXU are a tempting offer. By not exploiting this variety directly, through explicit curricular practices, we as language learners, researchers, instructors, and administrators are

mismanaging our resources. As one of the survey participants notes, “I’m proud of who I am” - cultural pride defines such a person not course labels or identity markers. And I would risk saying that each one the FYC students are proud of their cultural baggage and if encouraged they will share these contexts, their narratives with a class of eager listeners.



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APPENDIX – A  
SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Survey questionnaire for first-year writing students

**For the following questions please check [X] appropriate boxes and/or fill in the blanks:**

1.(a) What languages can you speak/read/write? (Mention all in the order of proficiency)

A. \_\_\_\_\_; B. \_\_\_\_\_; C. \_\_\_\_\_; D. \_\_\_\_\_; E. \_\_\_\_\_

1.(b) Evaluate your proficiency in each one of the languages mentioned in 1(a). Check [X]appropriate boxes. If you need more space, ask for extra blank sheet(s).

Languages		Excellent	Good	Fair	Not applicable
Language A: -----	Speak				
	Read				
	Write				
Language B: -----	Speak				
	Read				
	Write				
Language C: -----	Speak				
	Read				
	Write				
Language D: -----	Speak				
	Read				
	Write				
Language E:	Speak				

-----	Read				
	Write				

2. Have you taken any writing course(s) before? If yes, please describe the course(s) briefly:

---



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---

3. Which of the following descriptions best capture how you see yourself? Select

**all** applicable categories:

- Native English speaker
- Non-native English speaker
- Resident non-native English speaker
- English as a second language speaker
- English language learner
- ESL student
- Multilingual
- Bilingual
- Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

4. You are enrolled in mainstream (ENG 101/102) or ESL section (ENG 107/108) of First-year composition. What do you understand by the following terms?

(a) Mainstream section:

---



---

(b) ESL section:

---



---

5. As a student writer, would you like being addressed or described by the university in a different way? Select one and give reasons:

No, I accept being called a mainstream or ESL student because

---

Yes, I would prefer being called \_\_\_\_\_  
because \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. Why did you enroll in the mainstream (ENG 101/102) or ESL section (ENG 107/108) of First-year composition? Check **all** that apply.

- a.  To meet graduation requirements
- b.  On my academic advisor's suggestion
- c.  On my friend's suggestion
- d.  My first choice was ENG 101/102 (mainstream section) but I was advised to enroll in ENG 107/108 (ESL section)
- e.  My first choice was ENG 107/108 (ESL section) but I was advised to enroll in ENG 101/102 (mainstream section)

7. If you selected 6(d) or 6(e) please give a detailed explanation below:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. If you had an option to enroll in a combined section of First-year composition (mainstream + ESL section) in lieu of the standard mainstream or ESL section, would you choose to be part of it? Select one and give reasons:

**NOTE:** Course goals & objectives for combined section same as goals & objectives for this course.

- Yes                       No                       Not sure

Your reason(s):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. What are your expectations from ENG 101/102 or ENG 107/108?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. Section of First-year composition that you are currently enrolled in:

- ENG 101       ENG 102       ENG 107       ENG 108

11. Age: \_\_\_\_\_

12. Sex:  Male  Female

13. Intended field of study: \_\_\_\_\_

14. What year are you in the university? (Select one)

First year  Sophomore  Junior  Senior

15. Home country: \_\_\_\_\_

16. Native language: \_\_\_\_\_

17. Number of years of education in the home country: \_\_\_\_\_

18. Number of years spent in the US: \_\_\_\_\_

19.(a) Did you attend any educational institution in the US?  Yes  No

19.(b) If **Yes**, what kind of institution did you attend in the US? (for example, middle school, high school)  
\_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX – B

IRB APPROVAL LETTER



**To:** Patricia Friedrich  
FABN

**From:** Mark Roosa, Chair  
Soc Beh IRB

**Date:** 03/17/2010

**Committee Action:** Exemption Granted

**IRB Action Date:** 03/17/2010

**IRB Protocol #:** 1003004955

**Study Title:** In search of an Identity: A study based on freshman writing classrooms

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(1) (2) .

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.