

# Appalachian Language in the Two-Year College Composition Classroom

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation discusses the intersection of first-year composition instructors and Appalachian language and culture at the two-year college level. Very little of the existing literature discusses pedagogy as it pertains to Appalachian students, and virtually none of the literature focuses on either instructors or the two-year college. This study attempts to address that gap and to explore the attitudes about Appalachia that accompany the teaching of writing in two-year colleges in agricultural (as opposed to coal) Appalachia. This study finds that professors express very negative ideas about Appalachian culture and language, and sometimes about Appalachian students themselves. These attitudes do not, however, contribute dramatically to differences in grades and pass/fail rates for the region as a whole. Appalachian students overall are slightly more likely to fail and less likely to make A grades.

The more surprising finding, perhaps, is that students from certain either highly stigmatized or highly isolated communities are far less likely to pass the courses, with failure rates between 50-68%. These rates are far higher than non-Appalachian failure rates, and substantially higher than the rates for non-stigmatized communities and do, perhaps, stem from their instructors' inherent biases. The privileging of standard academic English above other Englishes informs the teaching of every respondent in this study and invites a consideration of how a more rhetorical approach to composition pedagogy might change outcomes for Appalachian students in writing classes and in college itself.

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## **General Audience Abstract**

This dissertation examines the attitudes of composition professors at the two-year college level toward Appalachian language and culture to determine if there is a correlation between professors' beliefs and students' grades and success rates. First-year composition courses are required of all students at the community college level, and these courses are designed to prepare students for the kinds of writing expected of them in college, both at the two-year level and after they transfer to four-year institutions. The study determined through interviews that professors tend to stigmatize both language and culture, but these attitudes do not necessarily result in a higher failure rate for students. While Appalachian students are 16% more likely to fail and 17% less likely to earn A grades, they still pass first-year composition courses at roughly the same rate as their non-Appalachian peers. The more successful students, however, are those who are willing to code-switch—that is, to exchange their Appalachian English for standard academic English

The study also determined that students who participate in incentivized tuition reimbursement plans (like the Access to Community College Education program) are more likely to be successful in composition courses and in college in general.

## Dedication

*For Sarah Katherine, whose genius lies in the details.*

## Acknowledgments

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## Chapter One: Introduction to Appalachia at the Two Year College

### The 50-Year Prologue:

I am eight years old, and spending an afternoon with my grandmother. She has been reading “the bird book” to me, a compendium of knowledge about, yes, the birds, rocks, trees, fish, mammals, and flowers of Appalachia. Her voice is the most wonderful thing in the room.

“Where’d you go to school, Memaw?”

She sighed and lowered the book. “I went to Sylvatus school through seventh grade. That was all they had. I would have loved to go to high school, but Mama couldn’t afford it.” She lowered her voice, because “Mama,” my great grandmother, was sitting by the window across the room cutting quilt pieces out of old dresses. She was nearly deaf, as both my grandmother and I knew, but Memaw still lowered her voice, out of respect.

“I would have loved to go to high school. I loved school.”

“Me too, Memaw,” I said, snuggling up. She kissed my head.

“You hang onto that, Janet. Don’t let anybody stop you from loving school.”

### The 15-Year Prologue

Fresh out of Virginia Tech in 1998, I ran the Writing Center at New River Community College. I thought I understood the teaching of writing, but that was before I met Beverly.

Beverly was older than I was by at least a decade. She had been perfectly happy sewing toes in socks for the Hanes plant in Galax until the factory closed, and now, under the Trade Readjustment Act, she had two years of tuition to rearrange her life. She had never intended to go to college, and the place baffled her, particularly her composition class. She was in the Writing Center nearly every day, trying to understand what the course and its instructor were asking of her. The papers we worked on were often solid masses of red ink (the professor was a bit old-school).

Each day Beverly was newly indignant. “What is wrong with this sentence? It’s a perfectly good sentence!” The sentence in question was “From the first time I met our new manager, I seen that he was only interested in one thing.”

“Well, let’s talk about the verb “to see.” How would you say that in the past tense?”

“Seen,” she answered promptly. “Everybody knows that. ‘I seen you at the store.’”

“Yes, but in academic English, you might want to use the more formal past tense, because not everybody uses ‘seen’ that way. The past tense of ‘see’ is ‘saw.’”

She burst out laughing. “No, it ain’t! Everybody knows a saw is what you use to cut wood.”

### **The Four-Year Prologue**

In 2015 Glen DuBois, Chancellor of the Virginia Community College System unveiled the system’s six-year plan, *Complete 2021*, which, among other things, had the ambitious goal of tripling the number of degrees and certificates awarded to students in order to equip graduates for jobs in Virginia’s workforce (“Our Strategic Plan” 1). The further goal is to increase enrollment by sixty percent. In pursuit of this goal, colleges have been encouraged

to streamline majors, reduce the number of required courses, and rethink the reliance on developmental education for underprepared students.

For those underprepared students, however, the numbers have not been trending in a positive direction. The Virginia Department of Education’s study of college graduation rates notes that students whose writing proficiencies are below the college standard (as measured by high school English grades) are far less likely to complete bachelors or associates degrees (Jonas 1). At New River Community College, institutional data show that the completion rate for students enrolled in one or more developmental English course is less than six percent, and despite extensive use of embedded tutors and required developmental courses, these numbers do not tend to change. Four years into the Chancellor’s strategic plan, the goal of increasing graduation rates seems as elusive as ever.

### **The Collision of Appalachian Culture and Higher Education at the Two-Year College**

Interesting things happen at intersections—ways and travelers meet; sometimes they collide. While “collision” implies a certain amount of violence and negativity, it can also be generative, as ideas not usually found together might discover that they are very close indeed and can be used together far more effectively than they were apart. This study examines the intersection of first-year composition pedagogies and Appalachian students first to see how those intersections happen—what pedagogies operate at this level and how they affect students—and secondly, to examine which of these approaches yields the

highest completion rates and the highest chances of success for students both in college and professionally.

Theresa Burriss is the Chair of Appalachian Studies and Director of the Appalachian Regional & Rural Studies Center at Radford University. Last spring, she directed a workshop for English faculty and writing tutors at New River Community College, and as part of that workshop, she asked participants the value of preserving Appalachian students' native Englishes. One of the tutors responded, "Well, I think there might be some value for them at home, but we have to correct their English for college." One faculty member joined in, adding that she just didn't understand her Appalachian students' tendency to write narratives for everything and their resistance to conjugating verbs "correctly."

As the faculty director of the Center, I was both embarrassed and chagrined. We talk a lot at New River about valuing students' home languages and cultures, but when those students are *Appalachian*, it seems that a different set of rules apply. According to some of the seminar participants Appalachian language is "slow," and "uneducated." Its speakers "drawl," and they "don't conjugate their verbs correctly." Burriss' suggestion that this might indicate a regional bias was met with a general defense of academic English as the one that higher education requires, and to allow students their own English at the expense of academic English would do them a great disservice.

This resulted in a standoff that was never completely resolved. As Amy Clark and Nancy Hayward note in *Talking Appalachian*, the Appalachian dialects—and there are many—still suffer from a stigmatization that is "openly practiced—even encouraged—against varieties of Appalachian English and those who practice them" (3). Jeffrey Reaser

points out the conflict even within the Conference on College Composition and Communication, where on the one hand, the famous 1974 Statement of Students' Right to Their Own Language affirms the value of dialects and variants, but at the Same time, the accompanying statement warns that "many employers have narrowly-conceived notions of the relationship between linguistic performance and job competence" and thus students should be instructed in the acquisition of standard academic English as a way to improve their prospects(96). Further, despite research that demonstrates the futility of writing instruction that attempts to standardize English for all students, such practices continue to be common in composition classrooms (105).

Appalachian students, particularly those who speak one or more Appalachian dialects at home, find themselves struggling in college classrooms, relegated to developmental writing programs, and left behind their peers whose families speak more socially-acceptable dialect forms (Reaser 105). Clark notes that Appalachian vernacular speakers are confronted with language in standardized tests that in no way reflect their experiences, and consequently test far lower than their peers who speak variants of standard English (117). Consequently, they struggle in writing classes that privilege standard academic English with little or no discussion of alternative forms. By the time they arrive in college, Appalachian students have a long history of marked-up papers, "corrected" speech, and a deeply held belief that their own writing and speech are somehow "wrong."

For this reason, (and many others,) it is unusual for high school graduates in the communities of rural Appalachia to pursue college educations. As Todd Snyder notes in *The Rhetoric of Appalachian Identity*, Appalachian students and their families feel that college is

too expensive, too demanding, and too dangerous for them both culturally and physically (104). Further, they are well aware of the demands that colleges make on students; everything changes, including language use, so that “holme” becomes “home” and students, paradoxically, are less at home there; to leave for college “is to leave the family behind” (81). For Snyder and other researchers, the central conflict at the intersection of Appalachian culture and higher education is the acceptance of and adaptation to academic English and the subsequent devaluing or abandonment of Appalachian students’ native Englishes. Language and culture are intimately intertwined (Hazen, Puckett, Sohn), and for Appalachian students, being asked to alter the former is often seen as a betrayal of the latter.

Because they are often Appalachian students’ point of entry into higher education, community colleges are at the forefront of this conflict, and without realizing that this has happened, composition teachers at the two-year level become the standard-bearers for academic English, as we learned to our dismay at New River last spring. High teaching loads coupled with diminishing resources mean that these professionals must devote a great deal of time to course delivery and have little time left over for contemplating how their courses privilege standard academic English and how such privileging affects Appalachian students.

The lack of time also means that most scholarship about Appalachian students is not being done at the two-year level or by professors and researchers who work in that area. Since people outside the system do not have access to instructors to discuss pedagogy, a great deal of the current scholarship about Appalachian college students focuses on the acquisition of literacy by the student himself or herself. Amanda Hayes, Anita Puckett,

Nathan Shepley, Katherine Kelleher Sohn, and Sara Webb-Sunderhaus have all discussed the varying accommodations Appalachian college students make to the first-year composition course environment, and this scholarship will be given a more thorough treatment in Chapter Two. It is important here to note that virtually no current scholarship examines the role of the instructor in this process, even though that person is instrumental in the student's success, and even less scholarship speaks to the two-year college experience from a pedagogical perspective. Even if instructors at the two-year level had the time for pedagogical research, then, there would be precious little for them to read. It is no wonder that as I spoke to instructors over the course of this study, nearly all of them referenced the acquisition of literacy in standard academic English to be their primary goal for their Appalachian students, while not one of them, even of the four professors who self-identified as Appalachian natives, mentioned that these students already had literacies that stemmed from their own cultures. In fact, the only mention of native literacies came in negative terms, as something that had to be eradicated so that the more appropriate SAE, along with reading and speaking practices, could take its place.

It must be noted that in privileging standard academic English, these compositionists were not intentionally disprivileging their Appalachian students' native cultures and Englishes. The professors I spoke with were concerned with their students' future prospects—"they can't get jobs speaking/writing like that"—and echoed Reaser's findings that employment prospects, however insubstantial they might be, were worth abandoning traditional Appalachian patterns of speech and writing. The language and culture, even the

familiarity lost in the endeavor would be more than compensated for by the earning potential and the mobility of the retrained Appalachian speaker/writer.

For participants in this study, the language of lack came easily. Students were underprepared, their high school teachers unambitious, and their home communities isolated and detached from the larger economic and social life of the college community. While all of the participants wished for different outcomes, they acknowledged that Appalachian students face obstacles in first-year composition courses, and that some of these obstacles came from the privileging of standard academic English and the concurrent disprivileging of students' native Englishes, and by extension, their cultures. They also felt that Appalachia as a whole was a deterrent to college education, since all of the respondents referenced a narrowing of economic and social prospects associated with remaining in the region.

### **Appalachia: Place, Language, Mindset**

Before we can begin to discuss Appalachian students, it is essential to consider the *place* that is Appalachia, and the situation—the siting—of people within that space. Appalachia is not a single region or a single set of regional factors. It differs between one mountain range and the next, or between one holler and the next, and can be maddeningly difficult to distill. As Douglas Powell said in *Critical Regionalism*, “to know a place, to acquire that ‘sense’ of place, is not to consume an experience, or witness a spectacle, or appreciate a landscape, but to participate, through consumption, through witness, through appreciation, in the ongoing creation of that place” (35). In other words, the “place” that is

Appalachia must be removed from the landscape of theory—whether romanticized or demonized—and placed in the landscape of lived experience, or at least experience that is described in greater detail than what is available in popular media or books like J.D. Vance’s *Hillbilly Elegy*, that speak only partially to the experience of Appalachian people in one small time and place. Appalachia is large; it contains multitudes.

In order to speak productively about it, a narrowing-down is in order, along with some background information that allows for a sense of place that is neither the stereotypical coal mining community nor the picturesque resort community. Agricultural Appalachia is certainly a place, but it lacks the mythology of the larger region, even as it shares some of the region’s characteristics, beginning with the very word that describes it. In the mountains of West Virginia, Southwest Virginia, Kentucky and East Tennessee, it is pronounced “App-a-LATCH-uh,” and the word is a shibboleth. A person who says it incorrectly inadvertently reveals himself or herself to be an outsider in communities that are still insular. The communities of AppaLATCHa have suffered from the loss of industries—not just coal, but textiles, furniture, and iron ore—and most towns in central Appalachia have dwindled in population (Betz 270).

Up in northern West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and even into western New York, the region is “App-a-LAY-sha” to its natives, and the natural gas industry is still sort of keeping the region afloat, although a public report to petrochemical investors indicates that this may not obtain for much longer (*US Petrochemicals* 5). For now, though, industries still churn in the valleys, and there doesn’t seem to be much in common with the southern version of the area. The disparity in pronunciation reveals something much more important, and that is

that there is not one uniform Appalachia. In fact, the myth of the monolithic region has been one of the most enduring, and most damaging, that Appalachian people have to contend with (Catte #110).

“Official” Appalachia spans thirteen states and includes 450 counties according to the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC 1), the arm of the Federal Government that oversees this vast area. While the ARC has said that the uniting characteristic is the presence of the Appalachian Mountains, rooted in Mississippi and continuing into New York, the main factor determining “Appalachian-ness” for the ARC is economic lag—the region underperforms the rest of the country both in wages and job creation (ARC 1). Appalachia also has higher rates of rural poverty and greater rural isolation than the rest of America, which contribute to fewer opportunities for residents of the region (Betz 268).

The 2015 United States census places 25 million people within the political boundaries of “Appalachia” that the ARC has delineated. Many of these people live in areas that lack the characteristic poverty and rurality that tend to be associated with Appalachia, and these areas do not readily think of themselves as Appalachian. An examination of the ARC map of Appalachia (Figure 1), demonstrates the difficulty of using the broad definition of the region.

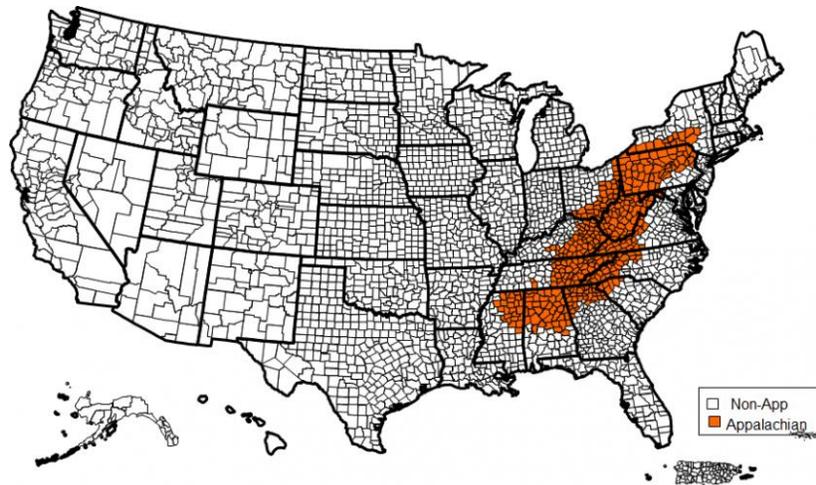


Figure 1 Counties in the Appalachian Regional Commission Service Area<sup>1</sup>

For purposes of the Appalachian Regional Commission, the primary indicator of Appalachian-ness is not language, culture, or topography, nor any sense of place that linguistic geography would recognize, but rather economics and infrastructure, and these characteristics would lump Mississippians with West Virginians in “Appalachia,” even though few in Mississippi would claim the label.

This is partly due to the ways that other identities in the region are more primary than the political/economic one, and this is the main point of a 2011 study by Christopher Cooper for Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, North Carolina. Cooper discovered that Appalachian identity is often subsumed within a “Southern” identity, which was the self-characterization of most of the outlying areas of the region (459-60). Cooper’s study found that the most common marker of Appalachian identity was topography—Appalachian people identify with mountains—and for this reason, most people who self-identify as Appalachian reside in the areas where mountains dominate the landscape—eastern Kentucky, southern West Virginia, Southwest Virginia, East Tennessee, and western North Carolina (469). Arguing that this is a more useful definition of Appalachia, Cooper suggests

that the boundaries of the region created by the Appalachian Regional Commission are too large and should be reduced to areas where residents not only share certain characteristics, but share the willingness and ability to self-identify as Appalachian (469).

A far more accurate picture of the region for purposes of this dissertation can be gained from the map of “distressed” counties, defined by the ARC as those with poverty rates, median household income levels, and unemployment rates greater than twice the national average. When we redraw the map to demonstrate areas with those characteristics, Central Appalachia emerges as the region with the largest concentration of deviations from the national norms (Figure 2). This maps much more closely onto Cooper’s definition of Appalachia as a place marked by mountains and shared culture as well as characteristics. Many of the characteristics of agricultural Appalachia are shared within this region, and indeed, the poorest counties, like Hancock County, Tennessee, are agricultural and have no extractable minerals or major industries.

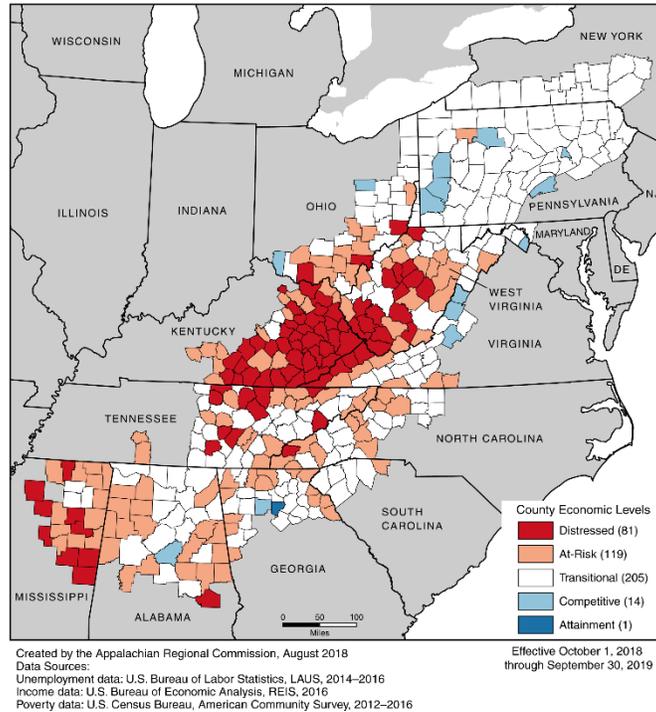


Figure 2 The Central Appalachian Region's Distressed Counties<sup>2</sup>

This central region can be traced by drawing a rough ellipse centered on Buchanan County in Southwest Virginia. It includes seven Southwest Virginia counties including Montgomery (where Virginia Tech is located), 68 counties in eastern Kentucky, 33 southern West Virginia counties, 13 North Carolina counties, and eight Tennessee counties. Not surprisingly, most of these areas are also the most remote, the most mountainous, and the areas that have been most impacted by extractive industries like coal and timber (ARC 1). The poverty rate (defined as families living below the Federal minimum living wage standard) is 18% in Tennessee and West Virginia (and remember, the statistics for West Virginia include the more economically healthy northern areas of the state), 19% in Virginia, and 26% in Eastern Kentucky (ARC 1). The Kentucky poverty rate is 172% of the nation's average, and Virginia, particularly the far Southwest, is 124% of the national average. The

unemployment rate is roughly twice the national average at 10.7% and even higher in the coal-producing areas (ARC 1).

Issues of poverty are compounded by issues of access. The Warner Commission's *Appalachia Report* notes that outdated infrastructure is difficult and expensive to replace in mountain regions, but perhaps even more importantly in today's economy, the real assets of American economic life—broadband Internet service and reliable cellular telephone service—are widely unavailable in the region (21). Internet service providers are not interested in the small community markets that make up the area, and cellular phone companies must make larger per-user investments in hardware in mountainous areas—towers must be closer together and often boosters or repeaters are necessary in the more rugged regions. *The Appalachia Report* notes these broadband issues, but does not address them in its recommendations for infrastructure improvements, illustrating that the lack of understanding about the necessity of 21<sup>st</sup> Century technology is present and persists at the policy-making level.

The ten counties included in this study (Figure 3) are almost all located along the Interstate 81 corridor in Southwest Virginia. Seven of the ten, Carroll, Floyd, Montgomery, Pulaski, Smyth, Washington, and Wythe, are considered “transitional” by the Appalachian Regional Commission, which means that their economies are improving, moving closer to state and national economic norms. Three counties, Bland, Giles, and Grayson, are considered “at risk” of economic and lifestyle deterioration (ARC 1). All of these counties are considered “agricultural Appalachia,” since they have not been the site of extractive mineral industries.



Figure 3 Southwest Virginia Counties<sup>3</sup>

### Appalachia and the Virginia Community College System

The ten-county area is served by three community colleges—Virginia Highlands in Abingdon (Washington County), Wytheville in Wytheville (Wythe County), and New River in Dublin (Pulaski County). Two other colleges—Southwest Virginia in Richlands (Tazewell County) and Mountain Empire in Big Stone Gap (Wise County) were excluded because their service areas inextricably include the coal-producing counties of Southwest Virginia which have been more extensively researched than the agricultural Appalachian counties.<sup>4</sup> The colleges have different and overlapping service areas, but they share the common characteristics of being part of agricultural Appalachia and having significant numbers of their student bodies from rural high schools and isolated communities within those service areas. (A complete list of the rural communities served by each school can be found in Appendix A.) Virginia Highlands serves all of Washington County and the city of Bristol, Virginia. Wytheville serves Smyth, Wythe, Grayson, and Bland counties and the city of Galax. New River’s students come from Giles, Pulaski, Montgomery, and Floyd counties, plus the city of Radford. In choosing areas for the study, demographic data for New River, which will be presented in a separate chapter, is not inclusive of its service area because of the

presence of two major universities, Virginia Tech in Blacksburg and Radford in the city of Radford. About 12-17% of New River's student population is either dual enrolled at one or the other of the universities or has a previous enrollment there. Very few of those students are Appalachian and therefore need not be included in the demographic data for New River.

All of these schools are part of the Virginia Community College System, a statewide organization of 23 schools that share one chancellor and one budget (VCCS 1). In addition, all of the schools share a master course file and articulation agreements with Virginia's public four-year colleges and universities, and these agreements offer guaranteed admission to the four-year schools with an associate's degree and a variable minimum GPA. The articulation agreements have standardized some course work and advising across the system, but a new initiative will streamline the transfer process and further standardize course objectives.

The VCCS as a whole is Virginia's largest institution of higher education with approximately 167,000 students, the majority of those students attending college in Northern Virginia and the Tidewater region (Impact 1). Interestingly enough, enrollment at the community college level correlates very closely with unemployment rates, and in the recent employment boom, the VCCS has seen its enrollments drop dramatically from 197,000 in the 2011-12 academic year to the current enrollment (Impact 1). The enrollments at New River, Virginia Highlands, and Wytheville are much lower, as the following chart demonstrates. These schools have also lost enrollment in the past seven years, with student body reductions averaging 11%.

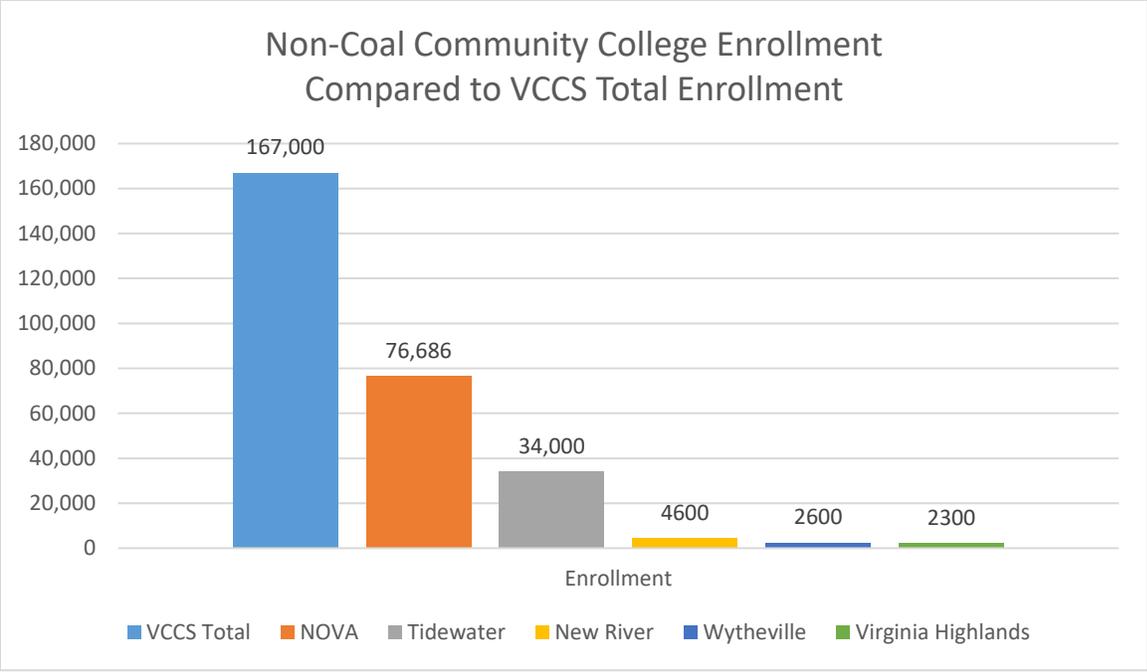


Figure 4 Comparison of Enrollments in the VCCS

These smaller enrollments create difficulties for the colleges in the region, not least because enrollment is the variable that determines each college’s funding. Since community colleges in Virginia are un-endowed, they receive 100% of their funding from tuition and state allocation, and both of these funding sources are based on full-time student enrollment (FTE). In addition, tuition rates are set at the state level, and the amount of FTE reimbursement for each school is set by the Virginia General Assembly each year (VCCS 1). Enrollments have dropped by over 20,000 students in the past five years, however these losses have not affected all campuses equally; urban campuses have seen less drastic reductions in enrollments (Impact 1).

As a practical matter, what the reduction in enrollment means is that there is less money available for the hiring and training of faculty. My own college, New River, has seen the number of full-time faculty reduced from 140 in 2000 to 64 at present, and other

colleges have seen similar reductions. Full time faculty in the VCCS are generally required to teach five courses each semester, but many faculty members teach more because the declining enrollments mean class sizes are smaller. While no faculty have been laid off at the three schools in this study, those who retired or left the colleges' employment have not been replaced. Instead, colleges rely on adjunct faculty who are hired on a semester-by-semester basis depending on need, and this contingent workforce receives even less training than full-time faculty and has fewer opportunities for research and professional development.

At the time of this study, the English department at New River had five full-time faculty members, two of whom have release time for other administrative duties.<sup>5</sup> Virginia Highlands and Wytheville each had three full-time faculty members. In looking at these numbers alongside enrollment, the nature of these faculty members' workloads becomes apparent: The equivalent of 3.5 faculty members taught 22 sections of FYC at New River in the Spring Semester 2019.<sup>6</sup> Wytheville's three faculty members taught 14 sections of FYC, and Virginia Highlands' faculty taught 17. These are just FYC courses—full time faculty also teach technical writing, literature, and creative writing courses. In the face of that workload, it is very difficult for faculty to find time to participate in professional development opportunities offered by the system office or local universities. It is still more difficult to revise and refine courses each semester or do reflective self-assessment on one's teaching practices.

Demographically, the faculty in these three Southwest Virginia Colleges are 60% female and 10% non-white. Eighty percent of the faculty hold masters degrees as their

terminal degree. Of that 80%, 16% of the faculty have MFA degrees and a further 8% have an MS degree rather than an MA. Of the 20% of faculty with PhDs, 100% of them are in literature rather than rhetoric or composition.

The structure of FYC courses is somewhat standardized across the VCCS. Every course has a “Course Plan” (see Appendix B for an example that is handed out to all students) that lists the basic information for the class, including VCCS policies and course-specific objectives. These objectives are created by a committee of instructors who meet in Richmond periodically to revise them according to the needs of the four-year colleges and universities to which VCCS students transfer. The needs of the transfer program drive FYC, even though many students are terminal-degree or are earning certificates or other credentials that require at least one semester of composition. The courses are further complicated because developmental writing courses, called “English Fundamentals” are piggybacked onto the normal FYC courses but require a second course plan and between two and five extra hours of instruction each week. Every instructor in the system uses the basic Course Plan information to structure his or her course, however syllabi and materials differ by instructor and are included in a separate document. Often the course plan is the only document a new instructor receives; it is left up to him or her to develop a course that delivers content in keeping with the objectives, and in the case of adjunct faculty, sometimes these courses are not assigned until the week before (or the week after) classes start.

When we talk about the intersection of Appalachian culture and the FYC experience, the preceding is the regional and institutional background against which it is juxtaposed.

Too often, attempts have been made to understand Appalachian students in higher education without offering the specific context of their experiences, and while we will treat this more fully in Chapter Three, we need to be reminded that the region is not monolithic and while students share some characteristics and cultural experiences, there are many others that are highly individualized. Two-year college faculty members also struggle with generalizations and stereotyping about their experiences and pedagogies, and they, too, need acknowledgement of the diversity, and often the difficulty, of their circumstances. They teach multiple sections of the Same courses, and while they are aware that many of their students are culturally Appalachian, all of the respondents noted that they rarely know, at least in the beginning, which those are. Students are reluctant to self-identify as Appalachian for fear of negative stereotyping (Satterwhite 17). Additionally, they feel pressure to code- or culture-switch in order to fit in and not attract negative attention, often due to other students' "unsympathetic attitudes" toward Appalachian-ness (18).

And so we return to the place we began: the first-year composition classroom may not be the most sympathetic place for the Appalachian college student, and yet it is the place in which the student must be successful first, before he or she can enroll in other courses or obtain a terminal or transfer degree. Just as place shapes the students, place shapes the pedagogies and lived practice of the instructors, and that place, Appalachia, means different things to each group. To the former, it is home; to the latter it is an obstacle to be overcome, or a lack to be filled, or in some cases, a shell to be outgrown and discarded.

The hope is that there can be a middle ground—a place where Appalachian-ness can thrive and where pedagogy can move Appalachian students forward in their academic careers without stripping away identity and language in the process. That is the ground we hope to explore here.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Map used with permission of the Appalachian Regional Commission, 2018

<sup>2</sup> Map used with permission of the Appalachian Regional Commission 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Map used under fair use guidelines from Opportunity SWVA 2012

<sup>4</sup> This study wishes to acknowledge that in eliminating far Southwest Virginia from its research area, some agricultural communities were missed, particularly in Russell, Scott, and Tazewell counties. There is an opportunity for further research in these areas.

<sup>5</sup> The department chairman receives 12 hours of release time each semester, and the faculty director of tutoring receives 7.5 hours of release time each semester, thus reducing the number of teaching-units available to the department by 1.5 people.

<sup>6</sup> In the Fall Semester 2019, NRCC enrolled 527 students in FYC courses, which reduces to an average headcount of 151 students per instructor in writing courses alone. As noted, this does not take into account the literature, technical writing, and basic writing courses these instructors teach.

## Chapter Two: From the Study of Students to a Profile of Pedagogy

### A Review of the Literature

Context is everything when it comes to culture. If we talk about the ways Appalachian culture can thrive, we must also consider the ways in which it currently fails to thrive and why. Further, as Chapter One iterates, Appalachia is not one, but many, and the region holds contradictions that can certainly affect both the academic and popular perceptions of it. The challenge in exploring both the academic and to a certain extent the popular literature of Appalachia lies in teasing apart the ideas that need to be addressed and those that are intertwined with baseless or unnecessarily specific generalizations.

In *All That Is Native and Fine*, David Whisnant explains the philosophy behind the settlement schools and night schools that arose when America came to the conclusion that Appalachia was poor in every sense of the word—economically, physically, spiritually, and educationally. Missionaries from American capitalism set out for the hills, armed with books and a sense of purpose: they were going to bring Christianity, education, and civilization to the childlike savages living in the hollers of North Carolina, Southwest Virginia, Eastern Kentucky and southern West Virginia. Their journals and letters reveal the high moral purpose and even the compassion with which these reformers approached their tasks, but the letters, like Vance's book, served a more sinister purpose. They reified the belief that Appalachian people were characterized by lack—subsistence farming was the prevailing industry, schools were few and far between, and religion was a mixture of Primitive Baptist

Calvinism and spiritualism (Davies 8). Clearly, Appalachia needed saving, and also clearly, the region could not save itself.

The dominant narrative of Appalachia in both scholarship and popular media has been a narrative of lack, so it should not surprise us that this also manifests itself in scholarship on Appalachian students. The teachers in the settlement schools were there to combat illiteracy, noting even in that pre-Freirean era the need for basic reading and writing skills among the economic underclass. Even in 2019, scholarship focuses on students' acquisition of literacies, largely ignoring the means by which those literacies are acquired. A further issue is that scholarship at the college level, as Amanda Hayes has noted, focuses on four-year institutions, even though many Appalachian students begin their studies locally at community colleges (Hayes 169). The four-year level studies deal with a student population that has already been vetted for language use in some ways. These students have passed the standardized tests and met other admissions criteria that allow them to be enrolled in the first place, and they have already demonstrated a willingness to leave home for education. In other words, the four-year studies are already looking at Appalachians who have chosen to culture-shift before they ever set foot in the doors of their institutions. The studies, as we will see, also focus heavily on the ways Appalachian students accommodate themselves to higher education and not on the ways higher education accommodates itself to them, or fails to do so.

It appears, then, that there are two general and systemic problems with research in the area of composition pedagogy at the two-year level. First, there is a decided lack of two-year college scholarship, for a variety of reasons that will be discussed later, and second,

both scholars and students struggle with the deployment, strategic or otherwise, of Appalachian English in college composition courses.

Investigating the impact of standards-based pedagogical practices and the privileging of “standard” (read “white, middle-class, suburban”) English has implications beyond Appalachia and beyond the two-year college composition classroom. In examining actual classroom practices and the impact of one-size-doesn’t-fit-anybody pedagogies, we want to discover underlying structures that can be altered to improve Appalachian students’ retention and graduation rates and at the same time value their home cultures and Englishes. Composition practices that benefit Appalachian students will also improve outcomes for other minority or stigmatized groups whose Englishes seem to put them at odds with the courses they are required to take. Rather than seeing these Englishes as problems to be overcome, one outcome of this study may be that compositionists find scholarship that allows them to see these Englishes as rhetorical strategies, tools that can be used to deliver the right word to the right audience at the right time.

### **Literacy in the Appalachian Region**

As we have noted in Chapter One, Central Appalachia is the mountainous region of Kentucky, Southwest Virginia, and West Virginia. Within this region are the 26 poorest counties in America, and unemployment rates that often double those of the nation as a whole (USDA 1). McDowell County, West Virginia, has a poverty rate of 36.3%, which is over three times the national average (USDA 1). Virginia’s poverty rate of 11% looks good, until one turns to the Appalachian counties in the Southwest, (including Montgomery County), where

the poverty rate hovers around 18% in the agricultural counties and closer to 27% in the coal counties of the far southwest (USDA 1).

The poverty and unemployment rates in these areas correlate to educational achievement and literacy as well. The National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL 1) used by the National Center for Education Statistics measures literacy by determining the ability of adults to use reading and writing both as skills in their own right and as skills used to complete tasks that require them. While this is certainly a more narrow definition than that used in New Literacy Studies, the correlation of a lack of basic language skills and poverty is still striking. The NAAL recognizes multiple levels of literacy, ranging from “basic, word level skills (such as recognizing words) to higher level skills (such as drawing appropriate inferences from continuous text)” (NAAL 1). Using NAAL’s criteria that defines “illiteracy” as skills that fall below the threshold for the “basic” word-recognition level, NCES data shows that the poorest counties are also those with the highest rates of illiteracy—22% for McDowell County vs. the 13% average for West Virginia, and 16% for Dickinson County in Virginia vs. the 12% state average (NCES 1). NCES also records lower scores on literacy competencies for high school students in the Appalachian region, which translates to lower adult literacy scores as well. According to the Appalachian Regional Commission’s data set on college and high school completion, Southwest Virginia has a college completion rate of 14.2% as opposed to the state’s rate of 29.5%. For West Virginia, the college completion rate is 14% (the entire state is considered part of Appalachia,) and in Kentucky, the Appalachian eastern region graduates just 10% of its students from college, as opposed to 17% of the state’s residents as a whole (ARC 1).

As we have said, Appalachian students, particularly those from lower-income families and those whose parents did not attend college at all, tend to enter academia via the two-year-college route. As Karen Hlinka points out in her study of community college attendance in Appalachia, community colleges appeal to Appalachian students because they seem safer; they are close to home, students can stay in the workforce, and family structures are not significantly altered (150). Nevertheless, completion data indicate that these students do not remain enrolled, or if they do, those family and work responsibilities can interfere significantly with degree completion, delaying it by as much as four years (Student Success 1). Statistical data from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center indicates that the two-year college completion rate across the state of Virginia is only 30.75% in six years (Wright 1). In 2015, the most recent year for which the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia has data, students from Southwest Virginia graduated at around 7% in two years and 22% in four years (Student Success 1).

While data points do not tell the whole story, they indicate that Appalachian people still struggle to acquire the literacies they need, and Appalachian students struggle to complete degrees that can offer them social, financial, and personal advancement. While many factors—financial instability, family and community biases, cultural norms, geographical isolation—contribute to Appalachian students’ tenuous and fragile relationships with college education, language usage stands out as a kind of gatekeeper. Stephany Dunstan and Audrey Jaeger found in 2015 that “speaking a stigmatized dialect can result in students feeling they have additional barriers to overcome,” and that language-use was a significant contributor to how comfortable students felt in college as a whole (796).

Dunstan and Jaeger also note that the composition classroom is the nexus of most students' anxieties about language use and dialect, since, as one student interviewee put it, "English classes are always on the ball at pronunciation and things like that" (790).

### **Appalachian Students in Academia**

Students' nervousness at speaking and writing in public seems to be justified. National and regional data clearly demonstrate a success gap between Appalachian and non-Appalachian students, but where does it originate? Appalachian scholar Emily Satterwhite suggests that it comes not from the students themselves, who are in no way less capable or intelligent than other students, but from the ways students from Appalachia are treated within the institution and specifically within its classrooms (17). Quoting Pam Cole's study of Southwest Virginia high school students at Virginia Tech, Satterwhite notes that students grew sensitive to the ways they were perceived because of their speech and accents, and because they lacked the experiences and sophistication of their more urban peers (17), and that this sensitivity came from classroom experiences (18). Several literacy scholars, most notably Katherine Kelleher Sohn, Todd Snyder, and Sara Webb-Sunderhaus, have looked at the ways Appalachian students respond to the use—or denial of the use—of their Appalachian English in composition classrooms, but it is important to note that none of these scholars address the students enrolled in two-year colleges, even though there are more of them, nor do they discuss the ways those colleges' composition courses might reinforce students' beliefs that they, their culture, and their writing are inferior.

Amanda Hayes, whose work *does* focus on community college students, notes that for those students, the acquisition of SAE is a priority, since the students themselves associate Appalachian English with ignorance and backwardness; one student explained that she didn't use the local dialect because "I know how to talk right" (171). Many Appalachian students choose not to self-identify as such because they are well aware of the stigma surrounding Appalachian English. Hayes speculates that this stigma stems from biases against rural communities in general and *for* linguistic standardization represented by white, middle class, suburban America (172-3). Eugene Garcia notes that language is not merely a vehicle for the communication of meaning; it brings with it cultural and social implications (qtd. in Powers 86). Hayes notes that Appalachian students find that their spoken and written language may form a strong tie to their home community, but in the writing classroom, it can lead to failure because the instructors focus on SAE to the exclusion of everything else (87).

This means that scholarship which focuses almost entirely on students' adaptations to composition classrooms is not adequate; the first-year composition course completion data we have already discussed suggests that strategies which place the burden of adaptation solely on the student are not successful. Appalachian college students' success seems to be intimately connected with the way rhetoric and writing are presented by their instructors in composition classrooms. Course plans and instruction, as we have seen, privilege SAE to the exclusion of students' native Englishes and rhetorical patterns, and by so doing, the courses require both code- and culture-switching for students to be successful. Erica Locklear, writing about her own experience, described the way this pressure to code-

switch led to an identity crisis for her—as an Appalachian student at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, she found herself too linguistically rural for academia and too linguistically urbane for home (11). Dunstan and Jaeger found that Appalachian students as a whole were less willing to participate fully in classes for fear of being stereotyped as “less intelligent or uneducated based on language” (798). Reid Luhman notes in his 1990 study of stereotyping and Appalachian English that “low-prestige” dialects like AE are, nonetheless, markers of social identity and solidarity; this is the reason they continue to exist (332). Further, Luhman says that speakers of Appalachian English not only accept the negative evaluation of their dialect, but also “stereotype standard speakers as superior in qualities such as intelligence, ambition, wealth, success, and education” (332). Luhman’s work illustrates the difficulty of separating the stereotypes from the speakers themselves, noting that dialect can be used “to make guesses about others based on less than complete information” (332). Because these stereotypes carry such weight, scholarship needs to move away from the focus on student adaptations, which reinforce the negative perceptions, and toward composition courses and pedagogies will we be able to understand how the institutions themselves contribute to the success or failure of marginalized students whose language use marks them as “different.”

It is remarkable that this research focus been so long in coming for Appalachian students, given that composition studies has a long history of calling attention to and encouraging the hearing of the marginalized. Mike Rose’s *Lives on the Boundary*, for instance, tells the story of his transformation from student outsider to teacher-includer, one who takes the time to hear his students in Los Angeles’ less desirable neighborhoods and

give their work the approval he knows they need as students. Tom Fox's *Defending Access* calls out the ways that composition courses rely on standardization at the expense of minority students' access. In a way that also speaks to first-year composition teachers at two-year colleges, Fox reminds compositionists that their own practices can reflect the rhetorical considerations of audience and purpose more fully if they incorporate students' own Englishes. In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks demonstrates the ways that professors can create space for all students, allowing them to express a "real" voice by allowing oneself to be a "real" presence in the classroom, not a personality that one puts on at the classroom door. Hooks' recommendation for transparency allows students to see their professors as fellow humans while also humanizing the students for the professor, and hooks asserts that this shared humanity creates a safe classroom space for all students and removes some layers of stereotyping and stigmatization.

All of these writers address the need for broad inclusion in composition classrooms, but they stop short of identifying the specific strategies required when working with a stigmatized group and specifically the stigmatized group that is Appalachian students. The stigma of the "hillbilly" is alive and well, and the region has internalized it. Todd Snyder, in his introduction to *The Rhetoric of Appalachian Identity*, says that he and his classmates in impoverished Cowan, West Virginia "knew that city folk though we were Stupid-Barefoot-Hillbillies and we understood that some things in life were not meant for Appalachian kids like us, college being one of those things" (8). Further, the presence of Appalachian English in both written and oral communication engender feelings of inferiority among Appalachian

students, who tend to accept the academy's evaluation of their speech and writing (Shepley 85).

In the context of composition studies, we know that there are pendulum swings between the teaching the utility of standard academic English and making space for students' native Englishes. The 1974 Conference on College Composition and Communication statement on students' right to their own English has been something of a canonical text in rhetoric and composition, but it doesn't solve the problem of the stigmatized culture and the disprivileged Englishes that are nearly always perceived as substandard. Patricia Dunn and Kenneth Lindblom have offered an overview of the problem of standards-based pedagogies focused on grammatical "correctness" at the expense of everything else, and noted that merely standardizing language does not ensure socioeconomic or cultural parity (45). Their advocacy of a rhetoric-based pedagogy of writing that considers a multiplicity of Englishes suggests a composition practice that uses real-world audiences, problems, and strategies for writing. Vershawn Young has also noted that the promise of economic opportunity is a thin guise for prejudice that justifies the standardization of speech and writing by counseling students "it is what it is," and urging them to accommodate to white, middle class norms instead of using the strengths of students' native Englishes and encouraging their inclusion in academic and professional life ("It Ain't" 397). Rosina Lippi-Green notes that "the myth of standard language persists because it is carefully tended and propagated, with huge, almost universal success, so that language, the most fundamental of human socialization tools, becomes a commodity" (61). This commodification of language insures that the power structures that use standard

English remain in power, while other Englishes are marginalized and in some cases, as with Appalachian English, stigmatized. The argument then becomes why institutions, such as community colleges, find themselves defending “standard” English from their own marginal position when an alternative position might be the privileging of a multiplicity of Englishes to offer alternatives to the “standard.”

This view has not been unchallenged. In 2009, for example, Stanley Fish attacked the notion that alternative Englishes have a place in the college composition classroom, noting that students need to learn standard academic English precisely because it is the language of power, and no disruption of that power is likely to come from someone who doesn’t speak in a way it respects. Fish, of course, made no distinction between the use of alternative Englishes as a matter of entitlement and their use as rhetorical tools for making a particular point to a particular audience, and his challenge to linguistic inclusiveness has been met with a number of counter-challenges and alternative pedagogies, the most well-known of which belongs to Young.

In “Should Writers Use They Own English?” Young makes the point that even if we remove the word “correct” and substitute “standard” in our writing pedagogy, we are still reinforcing a linguistic oligarchy with middle class white speech at the top, and other people at the bottom because they “don’t get no jobs or get fired or whatever cuz they talk and write Asian or black or with an Appalachian accent or sound like whatever ain’t the status quo” (110). Inclusive pedagogies, on the other hand, can help change people’s minds about stigmatized languages and cultures, or as he put it “we gone help reduce prejudice,” and not just for one group (117). The trick is, of course, to get those pedagogies accepted at the

local level when the conventional wisdom says that students' home language is a hindrance rather than a help.

### **A Literacy of Place—Culture and Landscape Intertwined**

Paul Reed has noted that there is a significant correlation between language use and the connection to a particular geography that he calls “rootedness” (410). Reed also identifies Southwest Virginia as an Appalachian region with a strong regional identity, along with the nearby areas in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky (413), and there is a high correlation between even stigmatized language use and regional identity (414). Few other regions in America offer the sense of place that Appalachia does—perhaps the Acadian and Creole cultures of Louisiana or the Native American canyon cultures of Arizona. To be Appalachian is to be situated, and any exploration of Appalachian language at the college level should begin with an understanding of that situation. We can find in the scholarship on Appalachian literacy a complex picture of interwoven and sometimes competing loyalties that matter as much to students as academic success or college completion, and Snyder tells us that Appalachian students are influenced by “localism, historicism, and familism,” three culturally entrenched and place-based ideologies that inform students' college experiences, even unconsciously (82). Chris Cooper has written extensively on the emplaced-ness of Appalachian people, noting that it is the presence of mountains, and all that mountains imply, that creates shared identity in Appalachia (469). The topography has been valorized and romanticized, but it remains the salient feature in Appalachian students' experiences, and many of my own students choose to write about their relationships to the landscape, particularly to the hollers and small valleys that have been their families' homes for

generations. They have a rootedness that goes beyond a simplistic appreciation for a particular view and becomes something that is almost binding. As one of my students said in a conference, “I can’t imagine living nowhere else. It’s like nothing else feels comfortable.”

We know from the work of Yi-Fu Tuan that “landscape is personal and tribal history made visible,” (157) and for the Appalachian, that landscape is the vast, serrated, deeply grooved mountain terrain that both isolates and connects. Small communities huddle in the hollows, as if for protection, and each hollow has its own identity and ethos. They have their own names—Tom Bland, Possum, Caseknife—and families have lived there for generations. Tuan has also said that the power of landscape to “tie” a person to it comes from the number of connections that develop in that particular area—and for Appalachians, those connections are multiple. Family cemeteries dot the landscape, and family traditions (like hunting or reunions) are intimately tied to place. Religion, too, plays a role, since having multiple generations of a family within a religious community is the norm, and those religious traditions exert a powerful hold on even younger members of the families (Davies 8).

Localism can also BE language. Erica Locklear and Mary Beth Pennington both note, separately, in a special edition of *American Culture*, that they immediately noticed the differences between themselves and their classmates when they went away to school, and those differences were linguistic. Locklear writes that among her diverse group of friends “our accents clanged against one another like discordant bells, yet mine was the only one ever targeted as odd, bizarre, or just plain wrong” (11). Kirk Hazen, a linguist specializing in Appalachian language at West Virginia University, argues that “cultural identity” should be a

subidentity in linguistics precisely because language use is tied strongly to location, and ties to location are built through culture (241).

Localism is, of course, also tied to historicism. Tuan notes that the concept of “homeland” is strongly rooted in the bones of one’s ancestors—the longer the association with a particular area, the stronger the historical ties will be (158). Further, those ties are spurred by a kind of collective memory, so that one has not only one’s own history in an area, but that of one’s family members and others who have influence (145). In terms of Appalachia, this explains the very common desire of students to remain close to home and close to the landscape that carries their own memories. They fear, not without justification, that if they go away to school, they (and by extension the landscape) will change, and it will no longer be home. Silas House says that he is “a man with no country” because his hometown and family are suspicious of his liberal academic ways, and the academics with whom he works are suspicious of his mountain speech and Appalachian identification (197). For him, education changed both the landscape of home and the landscape of the wider world, a reality that many Appalachian students face.

Familism may be the cultural difference most difficult to negotiate for those who teach Appalachian students. Frequent class absences arise from family obligations that seem to make no sense to those outside the region. As students move closer to completing their academic goals, they sometimes find the net of family obligations being drawn tighter, as a way to keep them close and reduce the chances that they will move away to work and live. On the other hand, some families’ support of their students marks the difference between success and failure. In their 2009 study of Appalachian college students who did not

complete their degrees, Elizabeth Bryan and Leigh Ann Simmons cited family involvement as the single greatest predictor of success or failure in college (392). The students surveyed noted that their families were often generally supportive—making space for college work and time for attending classes—but that families’ lack of familiarity with college practices was a significant barrier to their success (396). The students in Bryan’s and Simmons’ study emphasized that the acquisition of college literacies meant the loss of connection to their home literacies and communities (397), and that connection remained lost, even if they returned to their communities after (or instead of) graduation. As one student put it, “I don’t think about it, ‘cuz it would make me sad, you know, to realize I’m more removed from my family than I’ve ever been in my life”(398).

Any study of pedagogy that affects Appalachian students, then, must also take into account the place in which they live and the connections that keep them there. One participant in my study begins her first semester composition course with what she calls the “Hometown Assignment,” that asks students to write about the places they live or the places they’ve been attached to most strongly in the past. This participant noted that Appalachian students are not uniformly supportive of their home communities; some write about the discomfort of the small-town microscope, or the stifling lack of employment opportunities. She added that most, however, even the disenchanting ones, write about the landscape of mountains and about the New River as focal points for their ideas about “home,” and adds that no matter how far away they have gone, the sight of the long spur of Little Walker Mountain is a signal that they are back in familiar territory, where they know

not only the paths through the woods, but the reasons those paths are there, where they lead, and who is most likely to use them.

### **Liminal Spaces—Place, Pedagogy, and Culture in the Writing Classroom**

*Keywords in Writing Studies* defines contact zones as those places where dissimilar ideas and practices meet and where cultures and people, particularly those with large power differentials, can encounter one another productively. The contact zone implies conflict, at least initially, but it is conflict born of mutuality—the combination of equality and balance—and of the ability to be heard even when other voices are louder. There is power in a contact zone, according to Cynthia Fields, because those who find themselves in that uncomfortable space can learn that there is an opportunity for “empowering students to resist dominant discourses” (Fields 39). The assumption underlying this assertion, however, is that the non-dominant voices *can* be heard on some level, and the speakers are not conditioned to silence. The reality for students from stigmatized cultures is that the contact zone is more like a hospital ward than a town hall or a public debate. For these students, the contact zone is a place where the contagion must be contained and the patient brought back to “health” in the form of orthodoxy and standardization. The stigmatized culture is not given the benefit of equal status, or even un-equal but recognized status, since the assumptions surrounding it are first, that the stigmatized culture doesn’t really have anything to add to the conversation anyway, and second, that even if it had something to say, it would not be able to say it in a way that would be respected. Both the spoken and the written word are, for Appalachian students, causes for marginalization and disregard. Silas House has noted

that even now, on book tours, “I’ve encountered a lot of people who discount me because of my accent,” even though the tone of the speech is part of the message (Inocéncio 1).

The first-year composition classroom does little to change the perception that home languages are at best quaint anomalies and at worst, wrong. Casie Fedukovich uses Judith Butler’s ideas of performativity to explain the ways Appalachian academics must negotiate the dynamics of their classrooms and departments, noting that “recursive acts that reinforce identity” are sometimes compelled by the very ones (compositionists) who believe that marginalized voices should be heard, but not *these* voices (150). The peril is that the Appalachian voice will not be taken seriously, since even in academia stereotypical thinking abounds and is used to “reduce” the experiences of Appalachian students, disempowering them and forcing them to negotiate their identities away from their Appalachian-ness (149). Snyder also discusses this performative identity that is imposed from outside the region and internalized within it, precisely in order to perpetuate a cheap and compliant labor pool (25). Appalachian students do not arrive in first-year composition courses with ready-made frameworks for re-negotiating their identities within the college writing community, and at any rate, this negotiation is not (usually) an overt process where students’ home literacies are directly challenged by the professor. For Appalachian students, Amanda Hayes asserts that the pressures are more subtle, and their dialect is suppressed by “silence” and by the constant reinforcement of standard academic English as the only means of developing as a writer at the college level (169). She notes further that the lack of scholarship concerning Appalachian students and their uses of language in college composition reflects an unspoken determination to ignore the speech and narrative patterns of students because of

their relative powerlessness and the stigma that still surrounds Appalachia (169). Because many students enter at the community college level, Hayes believes they find themselves in courses where their language identity has been associated (by instructors) with negative stereotypes of white poverty—racism, sexual deviance, domestic violence, alcoholism, and willful ignorance. In this context, the concept of a contact zone seems more like a one-way street.

Amy Clark addresses the prejudices that arise from language use in her introduction to *Talking Appalachian*. “Linguistic bigotry,” she writes, “stems from ignorance about how language is constructed, its place in society, and the human tendency to project prejudicial attitudes about a group of people by attacking a cultural trait” (4). That the “ignorance” in this statement is perpetuated by those in power (composition instructors) makes it even more damaging. In writing of her own experience as a composition instructor teaching standard academic English, Clark says that her devotion to “standard” patterns meant that she “was silencing [her] students’ authentic voices,” and by extension reinforcing the idea that everything touched by that language was “wrong”—churches, families, communities (112). As a practical matter, of course, Clark wasn’t the first writing teacher to label dialect as wrong and linguistic features of Appalachian English as sub-standard. This has been the persistent narrative at all levels of writing instruction in Appalachia, as Katherine Kelleher Sohn points out in her chapter of Clark’s book. Research has shown that from the point of view of instructors, “speakers of Appalachian English were judged to be lacking ambition, intelligence, and education,” despite evidence to the contrary in terms of class performance (128).

The suggestion of an ingrained and unexamined prejudice residing within composition itself has serious implications for Appalachian students. Just as a student of color might be falsely characterized based on physical appearance alone, the Appalachian student may be judged the moment she opens her mouth and speaks. It doesn't matter what the words actually say, but only what they sound like. House, Donehower, Clark, and others have noted that in academia, it is still okay to make fun of someone's speech, particularly if that speech has hallmarks of rurality or indicators of "hillbilly" origins. In an era when most things that are not overtly chosen—skin color, ethnicity, country of origin—are clearly inappropriate for mockery, it is still possible to find academics laughing maniacally whenever someone from Appalachia speaks (House 198). Such responses do not give Appalachian students confidence in their own voices or in their own abilities to express perspectives that differ from what might be thought of as the mainstream.

Of course, part of the problem stems from the difficulty of differentiating Appalachian cultures from "mainstream" rural or working-class America. Despite Loyal Jones' attempts to valorize the character of Appalachians by describing them as independent, anti-establishment, familial (not to say tribal), artistically gifted, and rooted in a place and possibly a time, the Appalachian character has changed and become harder to regionalize. Jones is still widely quoted on the subject, even though he was writing in 1974, before Big Coal became tangled up with Appalachian masculinity, before patriotism, nationalism, and Christianity became conflated in the region's consciousness, and before the collapse of the extractive economies and the rise of the internet and its associated technologies. There are many Appalachias, as Steve Fisher and Barbara Ellen Smith assert

when they challenge the internal colony reading of Appalachian culture (47). Each sub-region has an identity that both forms it and is formed by it, and while there certainly is pressure to characterize the entire region as one bedeviled by poverty, ignorance, racism, and distrust, the regions can, and do, resist this pressure (48). Nancy Hayward makes the case that “Appalachian Englishes” are no more homogenous than the region itself (70). In fact, she says that much of the supposed homogeneity of the language comes from external constructions, those of journalism and entertainment media, for whom a monolithic Appalachian language is a necessary simplification of the more complex reality (72). Hayward proposes a way forward by localizing dialect using Etienne Wenger’s “community of practice” and looking at the ways Appalachian dialects are used in the various contexts of Appalachian life (72). The assumptions underlying her study, however, are that observing the dialect doesn’t change it, and further, that dialect speakers make similar contextual shifts as they move from one form of encounter to another, both suppositions that are largely unsupported or suggest the need for more research. What the model does do is allow for the variety and complexity of dialects and for the agency of dialect users, particularly in making rhetorical choices about speech based on audience, place, and time. The situated-ness of communities of practice allows much greater flexibility in observing Appalachian speech, and may, if applied to a group over multiple contexts, help explain how Appalachian college students code-shift for purposes of blending in with their non-Appalachian colleagues.

In the introduction to “Appalachia in the Classroom,” Satterwhite notes that students from within the region are often just as surprised by the content of her

Introduction to Appalachian Studies courses at Virginia Tech as are students from distant regions. All of the students are aware of the negative stereotypes, but the reactions of students from the region are either overly romanticized versions of Appalachia or acute embarrassment at being associated with the perceptions of poverty, ramshackle lifestyles, opioid abuse and the like (17). When confronted with the more nuanced layers of Appalachian-ness, the regional students are made visibly uncomfortable, and their rosy versions of what it means to be Appalachian are harder to budge than the negatives (19). In other words, Appalachian students cling to their own mythologies and can find even necessary challenges to these mythologies painful and disorienting.

The essentializing (defined as reducing all Appalachian students to the stereotypes of one who is poor, ignorant, lazy, unintelligent, racist) that goes on inside and outside of Appalachia, as Theresa Burriss notes, creates a tension for Appalachian students and professors—“how do educators avoid essentialism and essentialist thinking while still acknowledging that a distinct region and culture exist?” (Loc 105). Burriss, the Director of Appalachian Studies at Radford University, noted in a lecture to New River Community College English faculty and writing center staff that acknowledgement of culture needs to be made overt, and the exigence behind the study of composition in Appalachian community colleges needs to fill in this gap by acknowledging that it is in the interaction of instructor and class that the friction occurs. One problem with the essays in Burriss’s collection is that while they discuss Appalachian studies in depth, the role of Appalachian students is, if not ignored, then reduced to a reactive one. Appalachia, as a region, becomes its sociology, its biology, its literature and music, its art forms, and despite the best of

intentions, this becomes yet another form of essentializing. In the classroom focused solely on the region, there is not much room for negotiating what it means to actually be from and operate in the region. The focus needs to be shifted to the negotiated space between instruction, instructor, and instructed, with all of these pieces having some responsibility for maintaining Appalachian identity in the classroom without becoming a caricature of an educated hillbilly.

### **The Appalachian Student: The Obvious and the Elusive**

In 2016, a virtually unknown lawyer from Ohio named J.D. Vance published a memoir—not always an innocuous genre at the best of times—of his family’s life in the economic wasteland of Breathitt County, Kentucky. *Hillbilly Elegy* came at a kairotic moment for the region: just after it was published, voters in Appalachia helped to propel Donald Trump to the American presidency, despite dozens of op-ed pieces written outside the region decrying Appalachians’ tendency to vote against their own interests. Vance’s book gave pundits and some scholars the reason they were looking for—Appalachians are not bright enough to recognize that they are damaging themselves, and the predicaments they find themselves in, particularly in regard to poverty and opioid addiction, are their own fault. The nation, Vance suggests, doesn’t have to feel guilty about a region that refuses to take care of itself. The subtitle of the memoir, “A Memoir of a Family *and a Culture* in Crisis,” (italics mine), proclaims right up front the sweeping nature of Vance’s arguments, which have been taken up and touted by everyone from *The Today Show* to the *Los Angeles Times*. Vance is everywhere, and he speaks for Appalachia.

An internet search for Vance turns up his self-styled title: “writer and venture capitalist.” That tells the alert reader something about Vance’s approach to Appalachia—it is the fault, always the fault, of the poor for being poor. Their choices, their flawed coping mechanism, even their laziness and unwillingness to better themselves are all reasons Vance gives for the failure of Appalachians to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Senior 1). No doubt some Appalachian people prefer drug addiction to working minimum wage jobs in the food service industry, but Vance’s reduction of the problem of Appalachian poverty to the choices of individuals masks one problem and uncovers a larger one. His work masks the role that American capitalism, absentee landownership, extractive industries, and corrupt politicians play in perpetuating a cycle of poverty and dependence. On one level, individuals do indeed make poor choices based on family history, a perceived lack of alternatives, and a host of other individual-level issues. At the larger level, however, Vance’s willingness to stereotype his entire family, and more unfortunately, all of Appalachia reveals the larger problem of the stigma that still surrounds the region and that Vance has (perhaps unwittingly) perpetrated. The real problem with *Hillbilly Elegy* is not that it’s wrong, but that it’s incomplete at best, malicious at worst, and it reifies the stereotypes of Appalachian people that have plagued them since the rest of America suddenly noticed the region at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and began the settlement schools, moonlight schools and other ventures that attempted to “improve” the lot of ignorant, morally deficient Appalachian people (Whisnant #). The further problem, of course, is that Vance’ narrative has become *the* narrative of the region in the public consciousness, and once again it is a bad time to be an Appalachian.

*Hillbilly Elegy* stayed on the *New York Times* bestseller list for over two years, sold 780,000 copies its first year in print, and has shaped the dialogue about the region in countless ways (Heller 1). In a *Washington Post* interview, Vance noted that he actually neither intended to be, nor is comfortable as, the spokesman for Appalachia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, but he has still stepped into the role as a regular opinion writer for the *New York Times* and a frequent lecturer on Appalachia (1). This, in turn, has created outrage among Appalachian scholars for whom Vance's lack of sociological training and his eliding of Appalachia's economic history have largely discredited his conclusions. Political scientist and Harvard PhD Stanley Greenberg notes two errors that undercut Vance's position: he equates Appalachian whiteness with the white working class everywhere, and he fails to acknowledge the economic and social toll taken by absentee landowners and extractive industries in the region (1). While Steven Fisher and Emily Satterwhite have questioned the validity of the "internal colony" model of Appalachia, Greenberg notes that the region still suffers from national ignorance about its history and the external forces that shaped its people (1).

Essentializing has certainly contributed to the sense that, in terms of being able to discuss and negotiate the critical characteristics of Appalachia and Appalachian-ness, the narrative has somehow gotten away from "normal" Appalachia and become its own caricature. Vance has deepened the gap between the Appalachia recognizable by those who live there and the one constructed by external media and scholarship. The stereotypes Vance relies on—indolence, ignorance, willful stupidity—are precisely the ones that drive academics to eradicate Appalachian speech and writing patterns, lest students' ideas

become tainted by association with their home language. Vance's generalizations take on weight because of his experiences: "No hillbilly makes it to adulthood without a few screw-ups" (239), "Seeing people insult, scream, and sometimes physically fight was just a part of our life" (72), "you can walk through a town where 30 percent of the young men work fewer than twenty hours a week and find not a single person aware of his own laziness" (56). Vance offers no support for any of his assertions, but this last one is particularly damaging, since he offers the "laziness" as a given, and in his subsequent interviews on *Hillbilly Elegy*, he has not explained how he arrived at this knowledge or what "laziness" actually is, given that full-time employment in the region is difficult to find. Few people outside the region have stopped to consider whether Vance has the authority or the scholarship to make assertions like these about the Appalachian character, whatever that is, and so he continues to be a fixture in American media, speaking as an expert without the benefit of definitions or data.

One writer who has taken exception to Vance and the stereotypical portrayal of Appalachia is activist Elizabeth Catte, whose defense of the region acknowledges the complexity of cultures that make up Appalachia, but also erases some of the differences that for Appalachian students, are all too real. In an interview on NPR's *All Things Considered*, Catte rejects some of the critical regionalism that she feels has essentialized Appalachia and taken away Appalachians' ownership of their own lives. She says:

There's an idea that Appalachia is not fundamentally part of the United States, that it's a place within a place, and it's not a place but a problem. I would like people to understand that Appalachia is very much part of the

wider United States. There's no mysterious culture here that explains the - you know, the realities. And our stories - the story of Appalachia cannot be separated from the story of the United States and the historical forces that have shaped us. (1:54)

In *What You Are Getting Wrong About Appalachia*, Catts attempts to demythologize Appalachian people and their culture, asserting that they are not very different from other Americans, certainly not to the extent that they have been portrayed as other by Vance. Further, Catts notes that the projections of Appalachian culture are often external—others are deciding what culture is or isn't and retrofitting Appalachians to meet the stereotype.

Of course, Appalachian people are sometimes all too willing to comply. As Satterwhite noted, that “mysterious culture” is something Appalachian students cling to, and the removal of its layers needs to be managed in a way that honors the histories that established them in the first place. Appalachian students can romanticize and mythologize their culture just as easily as outsiders, with the doubly important reason of improving their status as outsiders and giving weight to their cultural heritage. The study of Appalachia as a region is hotly contested these days, and actual Appalachian students seem to be getting lost in the dust of larger skirmishes.

For individual students, particularly those who are first-generation college students and trying to negotiate the line between assimilation and regional identity, the broader theoretical contexts of Appalachian studies seem not to apply. The sweeping generalizations that are so common in Vance prove to be, at the granular level of the

individual student to be so much dust—too small to address individually, but large enough to cover the student with a number of mythologies. The Appalachian student seen through the lens of Vance, say, struggles against addictions, family pressures, low expectations on the part of high school teachers and guidance counselors, and only triumphs due to his own personal grit and determination, both Appalachian values, and native intelligence, which is not a stereotypical characteristic. In fact, the native intelligence seems, through the Vance lens, to be virtually absent in “typical” Appalachia.

By way of contrast, the Appalachian student who shows up on the first day of my College Composition I class is likely part of the ACCE program<sup>1</sup>, has a one-hour commute (one way), works 30 hours a week, and contributes to her family’s support. She attends church, cares for livestock, and has managed to avoid addiction to prescription painkillers. The problem is not that the stereotypes do not apply, but that they are being perpetuated at a level far above that which the student can engage them. Students are not reading *Hillbilly Elegy*; faculty members are. In fact, one participant in my study uses Vance’s book as a classroom text. When students arrive in class, sometimes they are unaware of the reputation that precedes them in the form of debate over the character and characteristics of “typical” Appalachia, and the scholarship in the field has not addressed the ways that stereotyping on the part of first-year composition instructors shapes classroom and college identities for Appalachian students. Reading about themselves in Vance’s work comes as something of a shock. They don’t recognize anybody, either.

The pressure to change and conform all flows in one direction—toward the student. For student writers, particularly at the two-year level, the burden of Appalachian culture can

be overwhelming, and the most common solution is to code- and culture-switch just to get along. Jennifer Cramer notes in recent scholarship that “negative stereotypes about Appalachian speech are, unfortunately, alive and well,” and these force users of Appalachian dialect to code- and culture-switch even within the region (46) Cramer’s research reveals that in higher education settings, Appalachian dialects are named “country,” “redneck,” “mountain,” and “hillbilly,” each carrying negative characteristic of “wrongness” both in usage and pronunciation (55). Tellingly, Cramer’s study reveals that in Kentucky, Appalachian speech is perceived as “incorrect” and “nonstandard,” and these characteristics cause people within the region to disavow any connection to the dialect through their own families or histories (62), something that is borne out in community college classrooms, where students are also reluctant to identify themselves as Appalachian.

The struggles these students face when they want to deploy their family or cultural histories in an alien setting such as the classroom result in what Sara Webb-Sunderhaus calls an “untellable narrative,” something that falls outside the acceptable categories and therefore remains invisible (12). In writing for her own graduate and undergraduate classes, Webb-Sunderhaus omitted details of her grandmother’s story to make it “tellable” in the context of what might be expected of Appalachian people. She pruned away the details that did not fit, such as her grandmother’s love for learning and her practice of reading magazines and other ephemera with relish. As she points out, her grandmother’s high regard for education and her many personal literacy activities placed her outside the more usual tropes of poverty and deprivation, and that would not have been an acceptable complication in Webb-Sunderhaus’s own course work. There is a sense in which Appalachian

students who dare to claim their Appalachian-ness are still forced into ways of representing it that fit comfortably within the stereotypes.

The classroom is not the only setting where marginalization takes place. The writing center, too, is a contested site, where Appalachian students sometimes feel forced to choose between their native English and that of the academy, with no other justification than “This is what you’re going to need if you’re going to be taken seriously.” Rose Jacobs, interviewing Lori Salem for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, describes Salem’s “horrifying” discovery that writing center pedagogy as it is currently practiced actually works best for privileged students. First generation, non-native speakers, and working-class students were all poorly served by pedagogies that were non-directive and focused on higher-order issues. While she doesn’t mention Appalachian students specifically, the criteria definitely apply—working-class and rural students who use the writing center need more direct intervention and a more hands-on approach to writing, because this is the culture they understand and can work within. They are not served by pedagogies that work obliquely to try and elicit non-native organizational and mechanical control. In fact, some of the most entrenched and long-standing practices of writing centers are of minimal benefit to the most at-risk student writers. Salem notes that even the non-directive “what do you want to work on today?” is an unhelpful question for writers who are struggling to identify the literacies they need, much less deploy them (1).

Because so much writing center pedagogy focuses on higher order skills, skills obtained in proportion to students’ fluency in both prose and culture, it assumes a level of familiarity with the dominant cultural norms that many Appalachian writers struggle to

attain. Nancy Grimm warns that writing centers may inadvertently become places where marginalized students learn not so much to write as to identity-shift, taking on the “what the teacher wants” trope without examining what they are being asked to do (55). Grimm asserts that without a conscious effort to avoid it, writing centers become centers of “identity regulation,” where students are refit to the dominant culture’s norms (58). The refitting can include homogenizing the writer’s language without considering the writer’s rhetorical purposes for using it, and this is perhaps more evident at the two-year level, where standards-based composition classes spill over into standards-based tutoring. Indeed the common two-year college practice of embedding writing tutors in courses with high numbers of underprepared students creates a link in students’ minds between the instructor and tutor, both of them on the side of “correctness” and neither on the side of listening to what the students actually want to say or the voice with which they want to say it.

### **Methodologies: Small Samples, Big Problems**

The chief methodological problem with all of the relevant scholarship at the sample sizes are always very small, and the data, as we have said, always focuses on the adaptations students make to the composition classroom rather than on the ways composition instruction marginalizes and devalues Appalachian Englishes. Further, an examination of large-scale studies of the region, particularly David Whisnant’s *All That Is Native and Fine* and Steven Fisher’s *Fighting Back in Appalachia*, reveals that education and educational practices at the post-secondary level receive very little discussion, even in terms of their relationship to activism and cultural politics. The moonlight schools highlight, for Whisnant, the ways the rest of the United States essentialized and romanticized Appalachian folkways, while Fisher

suggests that activism in the mountains, particularly in coal Appalachia, arose in opposition to, or in spite of, attempts to bring in educators and organizers from outside the region. The histories and ethnographies present in these texts can help us understand some of Appalachia's culture and the ways that culture has been appropriated, but they offer us nothing that can be used to help Appalachian students write their way into higher education.

Of the small-scale studies, one of the most interesting and useful is Sohn's *Whistlin' and Crowin' Women of Appalachia*. Sohn followed three Appalachian women through their experiences with higher education and noted the shifting literacies that accompanied their academic journeys. In addition to highlighting the difficulties that arose within their families when they pursued literacies outside the acceptable contexts of home and church, Sohn's study focused on the women's own awareness of their Appalachian origins and the limitations that their Appalachian culture placed on them. Sohn's work, however, focuses on the women's adaptations in literacy acquisition without venturing an analysis of the practices that led them to make those adaptations in the first place. Even though they attended college in an area that is considered Appalachian, they were well aware of the stigma of Appalachian culture and the classroom practices that assumed literacies they struggled to acquire. We have no suggestion of underlying pedagogy or theory that might mitigate the same experiences for women in the future. Of course, this is not the book's aim, but it does highlight the need for such pedagogies and theories.

Even when instructors are aware of the difficulties Appalachian students face, they may still find themselves falling into the pattern of privileging the suburban, middle-class

experience of some students at the expense of all of those on the margins. Nathan Shepley interviewed two of his students, self-identified Appalachian men, and studied their adaptations to another regional college. Shepley acknowledges that his writing assignments were alien to his Appalachian students, but in doing so he offers no critique or substantive analysis of the ways those assignments could be structured differently to make room for more traditional Appalachian responses. Shepley wrote that for his student, Matt, the subject matter of his college composition course was alien, not to say banal. It was designed for 18-year-olds who came from middle-class, suburban families where their status was clearly that of “dependent,” not for 26-year-olds who had dependents of their own and other community responsibilities (83-84). The assignments, like one writing to three different audiences asking for spring break money, were pointless to Matt, who worked full time to support his wife and children while also attending school. In Matt’s words, “I would never do that. I would never be able to do that” (84).

In another small study, with a sample size of one student, Amanda Hayes argues that Appalachian students’ native Englishes need to be given scope for strategic rhetorical use in the composition classroom. The disprivileging of Appalachian dialect in favor of standard academic English, even if it is done for reasons of improving individual students’ academic and economic progress, reinforces the idea that the dialects are wrong, and further stigmatizes the people who use them (172). Hayes’s student developed an awareness of the multiplicity of dialects and the rhetorical and contextual choices that guide their usage, but the study stops short of advocating a pedagogical practice that might produce such awareness in both instructors and students.

All students, not just Appalachian ones, bring life experiences and rhetorical preferences to the writing classroom. The most useful pedagogy, then, might be one that begins by acknowledging the ways that experience can inform writing and helping students acquire the rhetorical facility to deploy experience and language, even non-standard language, to the best effect. Such a pedagogy, however, must be developed with stronger theoretical underpinnings than merely a desire to empower marginalized students or somehow “give” them skills and strategies. We need a theory of Appalachian rhetoric, and perhaps classroom rhetoric, robust enough to challenge the dominant narrative about nonstandard Englishes and their utility beyond storytelling.

### **Theory and Research: In Search of a Theory**

In the first-year composition classroom, under a typical “standards” model, the Appalachian student will learn that her language is “non-standard,” that her speech reflects poorly on her intelligence, and that her narrative rhetorical strategies are simplistic and naïve. The skills that she has brought from home are not the ones the composition classroom values, and consequently, she learns to be quiet, invisible, muted by assignments and courses not designed for her. She lacks the power, both institutionally and individually, to make her own untellable story tellable, but her instructors do have that power. Their ability to wield it on behalf of the student, however, is obstructed by the constraints of their teaching load, the relatively unexamined pedagogies that migrate to the two-year college level, and the lack of rhetorical and theoretical tools that could allow for and undergird such an examination. An Appalachian theory of first year composition, particularly at the two-year level, needs to be imminently practical and easily accessible. Teachers at this level do not

have hours to spend in unpacking theories and devising applications. They need theories that are swift, mobile, flexible, and above all, accessible to people who are facing the task of evaluating 250 pages of student writing five times a semester. True change is possible at the pedagogical level, but only if it is first *accessible* for faculty and demonstrably *useful* to them in their daily practice to allow them to examine their own beliefs, revise them where necessary, and create critical pedagogies that challenge all students to use their native Englishes and literacies in the service of their rhetorical goals. Creation of such a theory lies beyond the scope of this project, but this project lays the groundwork for it and aims to provide a starting place for compositionists who want to challenge themselves and perhaps also challenge the dominant standards-based culture in the first-year composition classroom.

A logical theoretical starting-place is within the critical pedagogies of Paolo Freire and bell hooks. Keeping in mind the limitations of pedagogies of liberation and the inherent problem of seeing literacy acquisition as somehow liberating in its own right, it is still possible to use their models of engagement to shape a theory of Appalachian composition and rhetoric that makes space for students to combine self-awareness, rhetorical awareness, and native literacies to shape an argument. Using critical engagement in first-year composition can allow students to express their culture and its needs in such a way as to deny the possibility of essentializing and reaffirm the innate abilities of the student writer. Appalachian students, we have seen, are aware of the power differential inherent in their writing classrooms, and like Freire's Brazilian peasants, are often all too willing to cede authority to standard academic English and those who teach it. Few Appalachian students

realize the power of rhetoric, their own rhetoric, to shape their own learning. As hooks reminds us, “students from marginalized groups enter classrooms within institutions where their voices have been neither heard nor welcomed” (83-4). This is certainly true of Appalachian students, who cannot escape the perception on the part of many of their instructors that they begin college-level writing several steps below everyone else—they are people of “lack.” A critical classroom, then, might be one in which the instructor asks them to examine this perception and where it comes from and to further examine the forces beyond the student that may be acting to reify the stereotypes and stigma. Appalachian students, like students of color and students from other marginalized cultures, may have to be taught to see where the power lies in their situations, who controls it, and why.

The pitfall of critical pedagogy has been well documented by Beth Daniell, who has warned that the misapplication of theories of power differentials can lead to a culture of victimhood and blame-casting rather than one of self-actualization and critical consciousness (400). Daniell acknowledges that students in “community colleges and technical colleges are, certainly, on the front lines of social and economic injustice” (400), but reminds us that a wholesale appropriation of Freire encourages the educator to assume the role of savior, one that is all too familiar in regions where outsiders assume that no insider could have the necessary knowledge or skills to effect change.

Nevertheless, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire asserts that exploitation lies at the bottom of the withholding of literacy from certain populations. It can certainly be argued that Appalachian people in general are exploited by American capitalism and expected to become obedient workers and unquestioning consumers. A Freirean pedagogy might allow

Appalachian students to see themselves more as self-actualized agents of change and direction in their own lives rather than passive consumers of education. A classroom strategy modeled on hooks' ideas of transgressive and radical equality might further encourage students to use their native Englishes and narrative strategies to make meaning for themselves and their communities, and to do so with confidence.

One way to take advantage of Appalachian students' native rhetorical strategies lies in developing a composition pedagogy of inclusion that augments the practical applications of Freire and hooks with the rhetorical theories of Wayne Booth and the idea of a rhetoric of assent. Booth, in rejecting the oppositional and argumentative positions of traditional rhetoric, offered an alternative. Instead of forcing the traditional hierarchy of claims, grounds, and warrants, Booth asked a more basic question: "When should we change our minds?" (12). In rejecting the "dogmas" of modernism—sciencism on the one hand and irrationalism on the other, Booth advocates a path where reasonable assent is the starting point and the premises can be presumed true unless directly countermanded by fact or experience. One cannot, therefore, privilege a pedagogical strategy, or even an English, on the grounds that it is somehow "correct" or better," but must negotiate the boundaries between language and practice with a more nuanced eye, one which takes into account the context of the text and the writer, its rhetorical purposes, and the Englishes that serve those. In this approach, Appalachian narrative ways of thinking and learning are not inferior to the more linear ones of middle-class white culture. They may function just as well, or better, for the purposes for which they are deployed. Writing becomes less a matter of learning the "code" of the academy and more a matter of learning to select a rhetorical

strategy to fit the occasion, which can then be addressed with one's native strategies as equal components to standard academic English in a rhetorical toolbox.

This kind of strategy is seldom deployed in the Appalachian writing classroom, where Appalachian-ness falls broadly into one of two categories: a characteristic that must be edited out of finished prose, or an identity that comes pre-loaded with cultural baggage like the limitations on women's literacies, the rejection of work of the mind as "work," and the romanticized and shamanistic Granny woman/mountain man stereotypes. As Erica Locklear points out in *Negotiating a Perilous Empowerment*, Appalachian women's literacies can be tightly controlled by men, and their activism and literacy activities are only welcomed in the acceptable arenas of church and school, and even then only in certain well-defined ways. Scholarship in this area, particularly that of Sohn and Webb-Sunderhaus, focuses on students' adaptations to the requirements of a classroom that is presumed not to accommodate them, as well as to their roles in family and community that must be renegotiated after obtaining a college education. It does not address the possibility that the classroom and support services themselves can do the adapting.

Appalachian college students need a college writing environment that gives them space to enter the academy on their own terms, with their own literacies intact, and with the support of composition instructors and writing center staff. Some of this space needs to be created in the minds of instructors and tutors who have for too long operated on the model in which the Appalachian student represents a series of deficiencies to be repaired and bad habits to be eradicated. New research in the field at the level of the classroom can begin a conversation about old stereotypes and assumptions and about the utility of other

rhetorics, in this case, the rhetorics of Appalachia. Todd Snyder says that “critical pedagogy asks students to consider multiple possibilities and truths” (175), but I contend that teachers of composition must do this before they ask the students to follow, and the “multiple possibilities” include the one that acknowledges Appalachian difference without stigmatizing it and allows students a more culturally honest approach to composition and rhetoric.

### **Exigence Meets Appalachia: Examining the Pedagogies of the Two-Year College Composition Program**

To be Appalachian in the college composition classroom is to negotiate a powerfully entrenched hierarchy of standard academic English, and while we have discussed how this plays out for individual students in four-year colleges, I want to note again most Appalachian college students first encounter higher education in two-year colleges where there is little time or inclination on the part of instructors to review current scholarship in the use of alternative Englishes or to adopt more flexible, rhetorical approaches to language in the classroom. The default assumption is that the experiences of students at four-year institutions are not relevant to those at two-year schools, and this is partly founded (not incorrectly) on the difference in admissions criteria. The assumption on the part of instructors at four-year schools is that the school’s own admissions policies will have vetted students for academic readiness. Two-year colleges, with their open admissions policies and increasing reluctance to test for readiness or rely on developmental courses (another barrier to success), have no such assumptions. They routinely receive the underprepared and those for whom college was never a serious consideration either at home or at school. There is,

therefore, a huge difference in the student populations at two- and four-year institutions, and comparing them makes one acutely aware of the need to reiterate these differences in order to make any comparisons meaningful.

What is missing, in fact, is any discussion of the linguistic, rhetorical, and cultural barriers these students face in first-year composition courses at the two-year level, nor any examination of the ways composition and writing-center pedagogies at community colleges may contribute to Appalachian students' lack of success in college English courses.

Community colleges face a unique set of challenges in the form of open admissions policies, dwindling financial resources, and heavy course loads for composition instructors. State mandates for student access guarantee that students with a high school degree or equivalent will be admitted to college. This means that students enter the first-year composition programs at all skill levels, from advanced to very basic. As enrollments have fallen in the last ten years, community colleges have seen their financial bases shrink, and some schools have been forced to lay off full-time faculty members, further impeding their ability to meet the needs of underprepared students. It is also difficult to research and transform one's pedagogy when one teaches the 5/5 course load that is typical of the community college faculty and the expected minimum course load in Virginia.

Instructors at Virginia's community colleges, whether adjunct or full-time, are given a composition course plan that lists learning objectives, and then they are sent out to teach. They have no common pedagogy or theory, and no real forum for developing those things in conversation with each other, because the course load leaves little time for reflection or conversation. Each composition instructor is an island, interpreting and teaching the course

objectives in unique ways, with the result that these courses have attrition rates approaching 30% at many colleges, and a large number of those leaving are first-generation, local students. They begin their college careers only to vanish from the rosters, one by one, overwhelmed by the unfamiliar notes of standard academic English and the classical structures of argument that almost require a re-wiring of their minds.

The term “re-wiring” is apt, since my research indicates that first-year composition instruction at the two-year level is almost exclusively standards-based rather than rhetoric-based. As Justin Young notes in “First Year Composition and the Common Core,” most standards-based pedagogies rely heavily on informal texts, sentence level writing instruction, and narrative rather than argumentative rhetorical strategies (19). In addition, these pedagogies have a largely unquestioned allegiance to standard academic English since this academic language is the requirement of the text that students need to produce for college-readiness classes (19). The danger of standards-based pedagogies for Appalachian students lies in the privileging of standard academic English (SAE) over students’ native Englishes and the consequent disprivileging of those Englishes as inferior (Hayes, Satterwhite, Sohn, Webb-Sunderhaus). As one study participant noted, Appalachian students are quick to concede the authority of the classroom and have been told since kindergarten that their native Englishes are “wrong” and “sub-standard,” so they make every effort to comply with the forms of SAE and create a kind of stilted, unnatural prose that lacks vitality or intellectual engagement. Because composition courses in the Virginia Community College System are required for nearly all degrees and certificates, and because language skills are foregrounded in those classes, they represent points of risk for

Appalachian students whose non-standard dialect still elicits stereotyping among faculty members and fellow students. Often, two-year college composition pedagogies have not taken into account the way that privileging standard academic English (SAE) translates, in the minds of Appalachian and other minority groups of students as a referendum on their home Englishes, forcing students to choose the “correct” English of college over the comfortable English of home.

Perhaps the most pertinent question we can ask is whether this disprivileging of students’ home Englishes in composition courses and their support services leads to disengagement with college in general and contributes to the abysmal graduation rates of Appalachian students at the two-year level. The objectives of composition courses in the VCCS are standardized across the entire system, so that in theory, instructors in Northern Virginia, Tidewater, Southside, and Southwest Virginia are all teaching toward the Same goals; however these goals are vague. Of the ones that pertain to writing and language use at all, the course plan simply states that students will “write effective introductory and concluding paragraphs” and will “write, using standard English and correct mechanics” (Course Plan 2). The underlying assumption seems to be that “standard English” is somehow the Same for each college and community, and that students have equal access to what “standard” means in that setting. It appears that a standards-based system of writing instruction and evaluation is built in at the course plan level, which in this case is at the system-wide level, and this alone could explain instructors’ focus on sentence-level standards even though students have differing Englishes and cultural habits of mind that might allow them more success through using a rhetorical approach instead.

This study will examine the two-year college composition program very closely, along with its support system, the writing center, to first evaluate what practices are taking place there and how they affect Appalachian student, and more importantly, to then discover ways to transform the teaching of “standards” in writing to a rhetorical approach that gives space for student writers to choose multiple Englishes based on their own contexts of audience and purpose. The writing classroom is the most visible, and for some students the most painful intersection of academic and home cultures, because of the intimacy that is writing. If Appalachian students can be given the rhetorical tools and the confidence to use them, they can bring their ways of knowing and writing into the larger community of academe and perhaps help in a small way to transform the region, both in the eyes of outsiders and, more importantly, in their own.

**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup>The Access to Community College Education program, (ACCE, pronounced “ace,”) is a partnership between New River Community College and local governmental and industry partners to provide free community college education to qualified high school graduates. Students’ tuition is paid through grants as long as the students maintain a 2.5 GPA and perform 80 hours of community service in their home communities.

<sup>2</sup> Appalachian studies contains a fairly large body of research on the subject of Calvinism as it was practiced by the Scotch-Irish settlers and their descendants. Briefly, this theological position holds that God is responsible for both good and evil, and human free will does not technically exist. Instead, every action and reaction is foreordained by God and cannot be

countermanded. The most hardline fatalism has waned in recent decades, but many Appalachian families still reference God's will in both good and bad circumstances. Jane Tolle provides a good overview of Calvinism in the mountains in her dissertation, "Contrasting and Comparing Calvinist and Arminian Baptist Attitudes Toward Hard Work, Poverty, Church Charity, and Governmental Monetary Aid Programs in Central Appalachia," done for Ohio University in 2010.

## Chapter Three: Theory, Methodology, and Method: The Importance of a Blended Approach

In order to understand both the exigence and the approach for this study, I need to supply background in the teaching of English in the Virginia Community College System. As noted previously, community colleges are open admission, which means that students do not have to meet a minimum level of criteria to be allowed to take courses. Instead, applicants are currently required to take a series of placement tests, administered and scored by computer, before enrolling. These tests can be waived for students who have acceptable (C or higher) grades in dual enrollment or transferable courses, but in general, every student, even those who have not routinely used computer technology, has to sit for a series of computerized assessments before they can register for classes.

In English, this means that in addition to answering a battery of reading comprehension questions, the prospective student must also compose an essay using a prompt generated by these same professionals. One prompt asks students to design the perfect school. Another asks them to elaborate on what they see as the greatest national virtue. The third asks them to explain a time when they learned something. The completed essays are scored by a computerized black-box rubric<sup>1</sup> designed by textbook giant McCann that seems to privilege sentence-level perfection over other measures of competence.<sup>2</sup> For underprepared students of all levels, the essay has been an academic watershed—an unsatisfactory score relegates the student to mandatory developmental courses which present writing not as an expressive or communicative act, but rather as attempts to match as closely as possible the template of standard academic English. It is not to be wondered at,

then, that Appalachian and other dialect speakers see the acquisition of sentence-level skills as more important than communicating one's own critical responses to texts and their underlying cultural assumptions and ideas. The system currently in place reinforces these beliefs.

That system—the delivery of remediation in writing and reading in the Virginia Community College System—has been in crisis for a while. Eight years ago the English peer group of the VCCS was in a quandary. Students with low scores on the Virginia Placement Test in English found themselves in mandatory developmental courses that sometimes translated—depending on how low a student's score was—to twenty hours of non-transferrable remediation in reading and writing, or four five-hour courses that also had a restrictive impact on students' schedules, since they met five days a week. Those twenty hours also used up twenty hours of students' financial aid or Trade Readjustment Act awards, and they frequently meant that students who needed developmental work were unable to complete their degrees for financial reasons. To make matters worse, studies showed that students who took developmental courses were no more likely to fail later for-credit writing courses than those who had similar scores and bypassed the developmental system (*Focal 3*). Clearly change was in order.

In 2011, a committee of composition instructors in the VCCS spearheaded a change in the way developmental education is delivered. These writing instructors created what became known as the “Developmental Education Redesign” that combined the former developmental reading and writing into a single course, called English Fundamentals. The English Fundamentals course began with ENF 1, which assists students at the most basic skill

levels, to ENF 3, which is taught concurrently with ENG 111, College Composition I. The goal was to have a student take no more than five hours of extra instruction before taking the college-level courses. Enrollments in developmental level instruction declined, failure rates in college-level courses stayed the Same, and the system was considered a win (*Impact*).

Unfortunately, student writing did not improve at any level. The students in ENF 1 were native Appalachian and international students, and both groups began that course with skill levels far below those required for high school graduates. Some international students did not have enough grasp of spoken English to interpret their professors' instructions. The native English speakers were demoralized by classes that seemed to be teaching basic language skills. Even though an optimistic 2014 report on the success of the initiative indicated that it had accomplished its goal of reducing the number of courses students needed to take, it neglected to measure whether the students' facility with college-level reading and writing had improved (*Impact*). Further, it ignored the effect of remediation on stigmatized groups, like Appalachian students, whose machine-scored placement essays frequently landed them in developmental courses because of sentence-level constructions rather than holistic, essay-level rhetorical choices.

Why this focus on developmental education? Because Appalachian students often find themselves in developmental courses for three reasons: First, under-resourced rural high schools find it hard to prepare students for college. Second, students from Appalachian homes often lack parental support for education in general (Snyder, Hendrickson) and thus find it difficult to prepare for any part of college, including placement tests. Finally, Appalachian students who are dialect speakers tend to use that dialect in their placement

test compositions, thereby affecting placement scores and ultimately resulting in their enrollment in developmental courses.

As I write this, ENF courses seem destined for the dusty shelves of failed educational experiments, as new state-level guidelines recommend the elimination of developmental courses altogether, both for native and non-native speakers. The assumption is that students of all backgrounds and levels of preparedness will be able to acquire the skills they need for college-level work in the gatekeeper courses of College Composition I and II (ENG 111 and 112, the equivalent of ENGL 1105 and 1106 at Virginia Tech). We won't know if this works until the follow-up study begins in 2021, but the assumption among faculty is that underprepared students will at best need ancillary support from writing centers and tutors and at worst will suffer further decline in completion and graduation rates.

Because these rates are already low, this study seeks to determine what pedagogies currently operate at the community college level and how those affect the Appalachian students in the composition classrooms whether they are in ENF or ENG courses, and therefore it is descriptive rather than proscriptive. While it may identify some practices or assignments that connect better with students, that is not its primary goal. Before we can make any changes, or even any assumptions, about what happens in the classroom, we first must understand what that is and how practitioners engage with the material. This discussion is first framed by theory, then methodology, and finally delves into the specific methods used.

## Theory: Appalachia, Critical Pedagogy, and the Composition Classroom

Perhaps it is surprising, given the recent flurry of activity in Appalachian Studies following the 2016 election, that no one has yet developed a comprehensive (or even apprehensive) theory of Appalachian rhetoric. Instead, Appalachian discourse has been refracted through activism, anthropology, culture, education, geography, linguistics, politics, and sociology, each with its own subset of theoretical underpinnings and each with its own agenda.

In the absence of a theory of Appalachian rhetoric then, it is all the more important to be able to rest a study of pedagogy on a sound theoretical basis that, in some ways, crosses disciplinary lines, since no one discipline at the moment has a robust enough set of theories to adequately describe and support what goes on in the composition classroom for Appalachian students. For this study, therefore, the basis rests on the foundation of both critical pedagogy and the rhetoric of assent. Critical pedagogy is important because at the root of any stigmatized culture we can find the soil of oppression, and a rhetoric of assent is needed to unpack the contradictory Appalachian values of tightly-knit community and personal independence, of hard-line anti-Federalism and meek acquiescence to corporate control of community resources.

Paolo Freire felt that Brazilian peasants needed literacy in order to combat the social forces that exploited their labor while ignoring their needs. Briefly, Freire contended in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that students from marginalized and stigmatized groups, generally those in poverty and in wage positions, were taught by state-run educational institutions to distrust and devalue their own intelligences, something that Appalachian

students would recognize as well and that has a long history in settlement schools and other educational efforts to civilized mountain people (Whisnant 85). Freire elucidated the now-familiar “banking model” of education: the teacher held the knowledge, and the student should be an open and uncritical receptacle for it. The banking model posited a one-way flow of knowledge that was further complicated by the awareness that the students had no choice in the matter; they received what was given and what was considered *appropriate* to be given. Even the language of education privileges students of higher socioeconomic status, and Freire realized that this language use contributed to the disenfranchisement of the Brazilian and Chilean peasants with whom he worked.

In Appalachia, this has translated into a belief that the school system and those who work in it have authority over at least some aspects of people’s lives. Teaching is a respected profession in most mountain communities and one of the few professions women are encouraged to enter (Snyder 11). This means that the educational system delivers far more than literacy. Friends of Coal, an “advocacy” group started and run by coal industry executives, provides coloring sheets to third graders in Appalachian schools, glorifying coal mining and associating it, and it alone, with the region’s identity and economic wellbeing. When those third graders graduate from high school, the jobs they want are in the coal industry (Snyder 71), and even though this industry has exploited the region in many ways, it is defended by the very people it defrauds due in part to their educational conditioning. Freire would recognize this as exactly the type of exploitation that literacy can combat, but the path to resistance is complicated by cultural barriers that go much deeper than coloring sheets. Educators have authority, but if they are to help students develop the

“conscientization” that critical pedagogy requires, they have to themselves have a critical awareness of the injustice, exploitation, and inequality that is built into the very educational system.

This issue lies at the very heart of this study—while meaning well, teachers of composition have often approached Appalachian culture as something to be eradicated rather than liberated. Far from conscientization, instructors have actively perpetuated the feelings of inadequacy that Appalachian students already have by failing to consider the contexts—geographical and cultural—of their writing (Shepley 76). Going further, hooks asserts that teachers have perpetuate a white, middle-class ethos, largely without thinking about what they are privileging in the classroom (*Critical* 30). Freire believed that the students’ own language was the one they needed to use first, because it *was* their own, and not connected to hierarchies of power. The students could then build upon that initial literacy until they developed more complex ways of writing and thinking. The parallel for Appalachian students is obvious. Rather than having their language stripped away, a critical pedagogy acknowledges its utility and uses it as a fully-formed pedagogical tool, not something to be “outgrown” as soon as the student can master standard academic English.

Underlying Freire’s pedagogy is the assumption that literacy can mitigate oppression. This was true enough in agricultural Brazil to get Freire exiled, since an educated peasantry might not be as effective a workforce, but in 21<sup>st</sup> Century agricultural Appalachia, critical pedagogy only helps us make a start. It is not enough to sustain a composition practice that focuses on students’ goals rather than societal ones, therefore it can only be one component of the theoretical underpinning of Appalachian composition courses.

Further, the danger of appropriating Freire in the composition classroom in America is that, as Beth Daniell, educational theorist at the University of Texas, Austin, has said, an instructor start to envision himself or herself as a “hero of literacy” whose job it is to liberate students from whatever oppressions they face, even if, as a practical matter, they don’t face much (“Narratives” 401). Daniell notes that “the Freire narrative has been used to support a discourse that sometimes seems to assume that all our students are oppressed” (400), and such an assumption can lead to a culture of victimhood and blame-casting rather than self-actualization and critical consciousness. Appalachia already struggles with a culture of victimhood and fatalism, brought about by a toxic confluence of poverty, opioid addiction, and Calvinist theology (Davies 8). Further, the region is deeply suspicious of those who would bring change in from the outside, working from the assumption that no one on the inside could possibly be competent enough to solve the region’s problems or even know what they are (Whisnant 10). We can look to Freire for conscientization, but then we must move on to a theory of actualization.

Such a theory begins with bell hooks’ assertion that good pedagogy begins with the egalitarian assumption that students and professors are equally capable of learning from one another (hooks *Transgress* 14) and that critical awareness of the students’ situations can only come when they are free to deploy their own literacies and methodologies in search of it (hooks *Critical* 56-7). The professor is, per Freire, not there to deposit knowledge in students’ heads, but instead is a guide for knowledge-making that generates in new forms during each course and with each group of students. In the hooksian classroom, critical inquiry lies at the center of pedagogy for both the teacher and the learner, and reflective

practice is necessary for both. It is not merely jumping through some hoops in order to pass a required course, which is all too common in FYC sequences, but rather a collaboration between learners that not only communicates knowledge but builds new knowledge from the experience of the community.

For Appalachian learners, particularly in writing courses, this is new territory. They have never been asked for the unique contributions of their rhetorics before, nor have they been given the privilege of bringing their native Englishes and experiences into the writing classroom except as quaint stories and anthropological exhibits. Because teaching has been invested with authority in Appalachian communities, Appalachian students may find this sort of pedagogy bewildering and somehow not “real” education. If they don’t need to change, divest themselves of their dialects, or otherwise conform to standards, then what are they there for? Over time, of course, the collaboration of Appalachian and non-Appalachian students can create an understanding of and for both groups, but as hooks notes, there is an increasing demand for “content” over thinking, both because it is easier and, coming full circle to Freire, because “content” absorbers are less likely to question the systems that keep them focused on small and short-term gains rather than real social change (*Critical* 46).

To overcome the challenge of retooling the Appalachian mind to accept the validity of its own reasoning and expression, we turn to Wayne Booth. Building on the theories of Kenneth Burke, Booth asserts that the current burden of proof—assume the falsehood of any proposition and then test it—is completely backward. More progress can be made, he says, if thinkers allow themselves to assent to new ideas and new ways of thinking as if they were true, at least until reasonable evidence undermines them (*Dogma* 201). The “burden of

proof” becomes the much more reasonable “burden of support” than can be far more easily accessed in a classroom where many of the students have been taught to doubt themselves and their academic abilities.

Further, Booth’s rhetoric of assent is built upon collaboration rather than confrontation. Loyal Jones and others have noted the contradiction at the heart of many Appalachians: while valuing independence and freedom of thought, Appalachian people also tend to accept certain kinds of authority, like education, without question. In fact, to challenge such authority runs counter to a number of deeper Appalachian values, some of them far more sinister, like the incipient Calvinism that informs the fatalistic thinking of even the non-religious (Davies 8). The fear of “getting above your raising,” or advancing so far and fast that one leaves one’s family behind, looms very large for Appalachian students, most of whom feel that college is designed to do exactly that, and for that reason, they treat it with a mixture of respect and distrust (Snyder 81). They don’t belong there. In order to give these students the comfort level they need with college instruction, the assumption can be that the students’ Englishes and their rhetorical strategies are adequate tools for college communication and can be shared, questioned, examined, and used like any other tools.

Finally, as hooks has also suggested, Booth advocates “sympathetic, serious listening to others” as the central virtue of humanity and the one quality that can move rhetoric from a position of antagonism to one of understanding (*My Many* 133). A rhetoric that rests on a listening posture is one that can help reduce the stigmatization of a culture and afford recognition to the strengths that culture can provide the composition classroom. In 1995, Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin wrote about the concept of “invitational rhetoric” that begins

with a listening practice. They saw listening practice as “a means to create a relationship rooted in equality, immanent value, and self-determination” (5). Foss and Griffin provide a valuable connection to feminist methodologies, since those seek to deconstruct the power structures of traditional rhetoric and substitute a more equitable and “grounded in respect for others” (4). A pedagogy based on these principles will be able to let go of the negative stereotypes of Appalachians (and other marginalized groups) and make space for those groups to determine their own needs and deploy their native rhetorical strategies without prejudice. A listening, invitational pedagogy must, paradoxically, come from the top down, however, since students rarely feel empowered to make, or even suggest, pedagogical changes in college classrooms.

A further dynamic must be acknowledged here. As several studies have shown, there is a clear connection between student retention and engagement and the student’s connection to his or her professor (Burroughs, Good, McFarland, et al., qtd. in Hendrickson 38). Further, these same studies have noted that rural students from working class or poor backgrounds have difficulty finding a connection with urban or suburban faculty members because of the latter group’s lack of awareness of the former group’s values, histories, and community practices. Furthermore, Lisa Delpit has suggested that language forms a significant barrier between teachers and students, with standard academic English diction being the language of power, while the students’ own linguistic practices are devalued and stigmatized as “wrong” (Hendrickson 38). A listening practice implies that both students and teachers can approach one another with an assent built in—rather than challenging each other’s beliefs right out of the gate, the two groups can come to an accommodation, a

non-contested ground from which to build both compositional strength and cultural awareness. Because the college classroom will always have an unequal power dynamic—the instructor files the grade sheets, after all—it seems most fitting that the instructor take the lead in creating a listening classroom, however we have to acknowledge that this leadership is often far from egalitarian when it comes to language and language use. As this study has discovered, most instructors still feel that standard academic English is “correct” and therefore the English that they must in fairness impart to their students.

We cannot end this section without mentioning both the Conference on College Composition and Communication’s resolution “Students’ Right to Their Own Language,” and the way this plays out in Appalachian (and other dialect-speaking) classrooms. Even though the 1972 resolution was bold in its language, asserting that “the claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to assert its dominance over another,” (Larson i) it required a subsequent special issue of CCC to discuss the ramifications of such an assertion. Richard Larson, in his explication of the resolution, advises teachers of English to examine their own assumptions about language and linguistic correctness, specifically those that privileged “the English of educated speakers” as having some “inherent superiority” (2). Larson’s supposition was that dialect in no way obscured meaning, and further, that teachers of writing tended to privilege inadequately developed prose delivered in standard academic English over more complex ideas presented in dialect or with dialect features (8-9).

We find that this debate continues 45 years later without abatement, since Larson’s essential advocacy for a rhetorical use of dialect has encountered Stanley Fish and others

who insist that code-switching is necessary to academic and professional success. Larson's assertion that "standard" dialect reinforces middle- and upper-middle class white norms seems as valid today as it did in 1974, and Vershawn Young, also among others, has advanced the idea that dialect can, and should, play a more mainstream role in academia as a way of disrupting the hold of educated white speech on communication. What seems central to this study is the ongoing debate on the rhetorical use of dialect—does it reinforce or obscure the speaker's or writer's ideas? On the whole, teachers of writing at the secondary school and college levels have answered that dialect is a distraction, although Michelle Crotteau has used dialect speech as a way to provide entry into "standard" writing practices via code-switching (30). Crotteau's strategy was to help students pass the Virginia Standard of Learning in English, which required code-switching. She simply offers no mention of what might be done with Appalachian dialect when it is leveraged rhetorically to communicate sophisticated ideas and experiences from the students' culture.

The fact that this issue remains unresolved lies close to the center of any study of dialect in Appalachia or elsewhere. Participants in this study cited students' need for "correct" English in order to be successful in school and beyond, without challenging the assumptions that lie behind "correct" and the synonymously used "standard." For Appalachian students, as I have noted, code-switching amounts to culture switching, and in confronting the use of any dialect labeled "standard" or "correct," the Appalachian student understands where (s)he falls on that continuum—in the area of nonstandard and incorrect. Freire may well advocate that students be taught in the idiom that they use, but for dialect

speakers being taught not by liberationists but by those who reinforce the standards of the majority, the concept is both foreign and fraught.

## **Methodology**

While it may be impossible to find an easy way forward through the layers of cultural and socioeconomic stigmatization inherent in dialect use, several methodologies can be instrumental in peeling back at least some of the assumptions. In *Critical Regionalism: Connecting Politics and Culture in the American Landscape*, Douglas Powell describes the methodology of critical regionalism as a way to understand “this kind of contradictory moment where something unique and isolated seems to be going on, but something else—something complex and interconnected—is also happening” (18). Powell suggests that regions themselves—including Appalachia—offer lenses that can be used for critical analysis of systems and institutions, and by extension, pedagogies, and that these lenses are overlapping spheres of culture, economics, industries, institutions, landscape, and environment (148). In short, the region that is comprised of both land and people can be viewed through a number of critical lenses, but the mistake is trying to isolate one of them and basing one’s view of the region on that. This has led to misrepresentations like *Hillbilly Elegy*, which ignores economic, industrial, and cultural components of the opioid crisis in Appalachia. By acknowledging and using the region’s interconnected elements, it may be possible to arrive at a study of pedagogy in Appalachia that does more than reify the obvious.

The central tenet of critical regionalism is that areas are best understood by multifaceted approaches that take into account language, history, and landscape itself, and

further, that there is no single “true” narrative of a place or a culture, but rather a spectrum of narratives that can be “best understood in relationship to each other against the backdrop of broader regional narratives” (78). This is the reason that history, culture, and regional identity are central to this study. Without these key components, an examination of pedagogy in FYC classrooms in Appalachia becomes a mere exercise in educational theory. Inside the larger context, it becomes a way to understand the larger regional culture and the ways that it remains stigmatized in larger narratives of America and Americanism, even while acknowledging that there is no single “Appalachian” culture or even region (Smith, et al.).

More importantly, critical regionalism forms an interesting intersection with Kirk Hazen’s assertion that “cultural identity” should be a subcategory of linguistic studies. Hazen (along with Anita Puckett and others) has demonstrated that language is a marker both of cultural identity and of cultural performance in specific regions—in other words, regional and local cultures are expressed in linguistic variations (241) and the subsequent identity expressed has importance both for the community and the individual speakers (253). Agricultural Appalachia has much in common with the rest of rural America; in fact, its similarities are far greater than its differences, except in one point: language use. Language and its variations are at the heart of Appalachian identity, both the individual speaker’s identity within family and community and the community’s own identity, and literacy practices are enacted from deeply held beliefs within Appalachian communities (Puckett 145). These practices serve to define the region, but they also form, as Puckett

notes, a crucial part of the individual's identity, such that it may be difficult for Appalachian students to get past gendered or utilitarian notions of literacy (146).

We should not, however, allow the lens of critical regionalism to devolve into what Emily Satterwhite has called the “insider/outsider” mentality, since this forces us to create arbitrary categories that are difficult to support (Smith 68). Carefully deployed, critical regionalism can allow us to transcend the “othering” that can happen in situations where we confront those who strongly identify with a region or culture and those who don't but who are nonetheless participant in it. Appalachian students are used to having to choose their identities—which they keep and which they discard. They will sometimes decline to identify with Appalachia at all for fear of the stereotyping that comes with it, realizing that there is a distinct “us” and “them” mentality that does not serve them well in academia. The important component that critical regionalism can bring to this mutual observation is an awareness of the region in its larger context, and that it is possible for participant and observer to work together to understand the region. In fact, the two groups need one another. In terms of this study, the perspectives of those who identify as Appalachian need the perspectives of those who are from outside the region, and vice versa. The purpose of the study is not to identify some set of exclusive pedagogical characteristics, but to increase the understanding of how those characteristics are acquired and deployed in the region by natives and non-natives alike.

As a methodology, critical regionalism offers tools for analysis that are useful, and yet by itself, it is not enough to carry the entire study. In addition to situating the study in a particular landscape (both literal and figurative), some other means of entry is necessary to

examine community college pedagogy as it is practiced within the larger culture of higher education, particularly in rural Virginia and within the micro-culture of my own experience. I am unavoidably situated within this research, since I am examining the practices and theories of my colleagues and since I, too, teach Appalachian students in first-year composition courses. The situated-ness and reflexivity of feminist methodologies, then, are also applicable here. Just as the schools, their faculties and students, are situated in a region, so is pedagogy situated in bodies, many of them female, and all of them in some ways analogous to Powell's critical landscapes. The best way to not only acknowledge, but leverage this situated-ness is through practices that disclose up front my own involvement and experience, while also reminding the readers of the particularity of teaching practice in individuals who bring with them their own stories and histories.

It is particularly important to give participants the ability to voice their motives, ideas, and reflections about their pedagogical practices and their students. This study, as I have said previously, does not seek to prescribe or judge, but rather to observe what is happening and examine any correlation to Appalachian students' retention and completion rates for two-year colleges. In the process of interviewing and observing, then, the researcher must be scrupulous in divulging my own processes, biases, and assumptions as they arise. As Gesa Kirsch and Patricia Sullivan put it, "Only by understanding the implicit social, political, and methodological issues involved in our work—the writing about writing we call research—can we partake in self-consciously shaping our growing research community with respect, care, and responsibility for our students, colleagues, and fellow researchers" (11). That forms an excellent focus for why we study pedagogy in Appalachia—there is a concern for each of

these groups—students, colleagues, and fellow-researchers—and a very great awareness of the ways that research can be used both for and against particular communities, especially stigmatized ones.

It is also important, in this context, to acknowledge the problem with essentializing that has crept into Appalachian studies and that can make it hard for an Appalachian native to create and maintain a balanced picture of the region. We are well aware of the dangers of the negative stereotype, but of equal concern is the valorization of the region. Satterwhite warns, “the problem with a purely celebratory stance is that a romantic view often relies on superficial understandings that can be just as reductive as negative stereotypes” (loc. 305). For critical regionalism to truly be effective in approaching the study of pedagogies in Appalachia, it must walk a careful path, aware of the tendency to respond to stigmatization with the kinds of fulsome praise that also ring hollow and do damage. It is not a matter of balance—as if one could be juxtaposed against the other to somehow cancel one another out—but a matter of allowing neither the negative nor the romantic view any measure of control at all, a far more difficult problem. Perhaps more than many other regions, Appalachia arouses the emotions, both positive and negative, and it is easy to be either defensive or derisive, and neither position is conducive to understanding. Yet to be human is to be emotional, and therefore, rather than pretending these do not exist, perhaps they are best foregrounded and allowed to be accounted-for in the final analysis.

The principles of collaboration and conversation apply here as well. Community colleges have in some ways been stigmatized themselves—they admit students of all levels of ability and preparedness, and their faculty are primarily teaching faculty; research is

encouraged but not generally supported with funding or release time, and grant-funded research is rare. Community college composition faculty, therefore, are often under-prepared and under-supported in the daunting task of teaching writing to such a wide range of student writers as are usually present in FYC courses. Informal collaborations and conversations happen all the time, however, and best practices are often shared over lunch rather than in seminars. Community college FYC faculty are often at the forefront of initiatives to improve both classroom teaching (paired courses, first-year seminars) and integration with the expectations of the four-year schools (transfer initiatives<sup>3</sup>). One of my goals in this study, therefore, is to provide an opportunity for conversation and for drilling down to the commonalities that all of the faculty in the three schools of the study hold in common.

Collaboration is of further importance as participants have an opportunity to observe, evaluate, and contest the data obtained in the study. The hope is that by including this component, it will be possible to agree on what we see as “negative” language describing Appalachia and what is “positive,” and why. For purposes of determining how the interviews are coded, the multiplicity of perspectives serves as a corrective to my own biases and assumptions.

Key among these are the sorts of narratives about Appalachia that emerge when one is a multi-generational Appalachian native. While my own college career was never a question—no one in my family asked “if” my sister and I would attend college; it was always “where”—my father and his siblings were the first in his family to attend college, and only one of my mother’s siblings attended. My maternal grandparents had minimal education,

with my grandmother leaving school in eighth grade due to the financial constraints of having to board in another community to attend high school and my grandfather leaving school after the fifth grade to work in the coal mines. My paternal grandmother attended a music conservatory for a semester after high school, but my paternal grandfather left school after the seventh grade to go to work. A polymath himself, this grandfather sent all four of his children to college (my father and his sisters), and was instrumental in our family's positive view of higher education.

Nonetheless, it was education (and concomitantly language) that separated me from the culture of my rural community. The language my peers used was not my home language, although my mother did not conjugate the verb "to come" at all. The rest of her English was closer to standard academic English than not. My father, of course, had attended both preparatory school and college and was able to code-switch fluently. The use of Appalachian dialect in our home was strongly discouraged because both my parents felt that it would be limiting. There was no question of cultural solidarity, even though both my father and grandfather were excellent storytellers who employed Appalachian dialect in their storytelling as the natural language of stories. That language was for entertainment purposes, not for the serious matter of school. My sister and I were read-to as children and then encouraged to read widely on our own. My maternal grandmother and paternal grandfather were also voracious readers, as was my mother, and therefore books and ideas were frequent subjects of conversation in our family. It took me many years to learn that this was not the case in the homes of most of my friends.

Against this backdrop, then, I have conducted this study with the awareness that my upbringing was not typical of Appalachia and may carry with it certain assumptions, the most pernicious of which is the one that says Appalachian language is somehow less serious, and less carefully constructed, than standard academic English. A further danger lies in assuming a connection between reading, language use, and educational readiness or attainment based on family histories or Appalachian predecessors. The narrative form that constitutes much of Appalachian lore is easily dismissed, even by me, as merely anecdotal rather than a way of making sense of the world having epistemological value.

Finally, one cannot teach in any educational system as long as I have (twenty years) without forming certain opinions about it. Those may be based as much on inaccurate memory as on empirical research, and therefore whenever possible I have taken care to explain the pedagogies and practices that have arisen in the community college system and particularly in the teaching of writing without reference to my own experience. In some cases, such as the delivery of developmental education, this entails a certain amount of skepticism that must be made overt in order to allow readers to draw their own conclusions rather than accept mine at face value. Placement testing and first-year seminars are other areas where it is important to distinguish between the theory as it is produced by the VCCS and the implementation at the local level. I have attempted to note where I am relying on my experience and to use end-notes to explain from whence that experience comes, but even then, I am well aware of the degree to which I am enmeshed in both the community college system and Appalachia, and, to come full circle, the ways those entities that seem so dissimilar are interpenetrated and inseparable, each needing the critical lens of the other.

## Methods

It is not difficult to get first year composition professors to talk about pedagogy; in fact, it's far more difficult to get them to stop. There is always one more anecdote, one more point to be made about the state of writing in the community college classroom. For this study, I interviewed six composition professors at three community colleges in Southwest Virginia and together we reviewed an assortment of their assignments and assignment sequences.

The interviews, conducted in the spring and summer of 2019, all took place in the professors' offices at their own schools. While the lead-in questions for interviews remained the same for all participants, follow-up questions and conversations led into different areas. In order to assure that participants felt able to speak freely, a colleague interviewed participants at New River Community College, where I teach. The average length of interview was one hour and twenty minutes, just slightly longer than the average length of class session for most of the participants. The questions focused on pedagogical practices, asking FYC instructors to characterize their Appalachian students as they have been observed in the classroom and to describe and the quality of the work that those students produced. Participants were further asked about their familiarity with Appalachian culture and their attitudes toward it or participation in it. Follow-up questions focused on the resources the participants would like to have and/or lack, including both material resources and professional development. For a summary of the questions and the demographic data obtained, please see Appendix C.

The participants range in age from 42 to 67. Three men and three women were interviewed; one person holds a PhD (in early modern British literature), three have MFAs (one fiction, two poetry), and the other three have master's degrees in English. Of the six, four identified as Appalachian natives, including the one African-American faculty member. Two have published either fiction or non-fiction with Appalachian themes, while a third has written extensively about violence and non-violence in regional culture. One participant is deeply concerned with the preservation of Appalachian culture and is a lead musician in an old-time<sup>4</sup> string band that performs in the region. All participants have at least four years' full-time faculty experience in community college teaching, with most having significantly more. The interviewee with the longest tenure has been teaching college composition since 1995. The newest faculty member has four years' full-time experience with a further two years as an adjunct before being hired into the department. The participants live in Bristol, Richlands, Wytheville, Pulaski, and Blacksburg in Virginia, and in Lewisburg, West Virginia.

All of the participants were sent a copy of the prospectus along with an email explaining the scope of the project and its roots in pedagogy. Follow-up questions were sent in the form of email to participants for clarification of ideas or information.

Participants' interviews were recorded on an Apple iPhone 6 and an Apple iPhone 8. They were transcribed using the online software Transcribe from Wreally Studios. The transcriptions, in addition to being used at face value, were coded to determine the participants' underlying views—positive, negative, or neutral—of Appalachian students and Appalachian culture. A second coder also reviewed the transcripts to ensure that the coding was done with fairness and rigor.

Participants' interviews were coded using words and phrases that are common in the body of texts that have contributed to the discussion of the stigmatization of Appalachia. These include Elizabeth Catts's *What You are Getting Wrong About Appalachia*, J.D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy*, and David Whisnant's *All That Is Native and Fine*. Words and phrases that were coded negatively were those associated with lack, degeneration, victimization, and negative personal characteristics like dishonesty, laziness, and so on. Positive words and phrases were associated with perceived strengths in the region—familism, humility, loyalty, and perseverance being among the most common topics. A complete list of these terms can be found in Appendix D.

Following the standard procedure for mining raw qualitative data, the interview transcripts were coded by myself and an independent second coder who first reviewed the transcripts for all possible relevant passages, marking and coding those in ways that seemed relevant at the time. From that collection of many codes, four basic themes emerged, and these were uncovered independently by the coders. These themes were then divided into “positive” and “negative” categories that will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

The single most important consideration in coding the participants' language is the language of lack. Every participant described his or her Appalachian students at some point as lacking basic skills, broad experience, or willingness to adapt to college language uses. For this reason, the language of lack was further broken down into sub-categories to indicate whether the interviewee's negative comments were directed toward the students' language or culture, and within those two categories, whether the negative language was strong (“ignorant,” “lazy”) or mild (“basic,” “underprepared”).

Also important was the participants' attitudes toward students' native Englishes. No participant used a completely rhetorical approach to teaching first-year composition; most were heavily standards-based and privileged standard academic English as the "correct" option for student work. The interviews were therefore also coded for attitudes toward linguistic features of Appalachian English. There were fewer of these types of comments, but several participants singled out basic features as problematic—the leveled *was*, the idiomatic use of the past participle, and the dialect-specific conjugations of the verbs "to see" and "to come." Coding also took into account comments on spoken or written English and the corresponding positivity or negativity of those comments. It is worth noting that several features, notably the leveled *was*, the perfective *done*, the perfective *seen*, and *for-*to constructions are considered stigmatized constructions within the region generally (Hazen "Vernacular" 15). These terms were often mentioned specifically by instructors in the course of discussing Appalachian language features that prove problematic in the classroom.

Because the correlation of pedagogy to success rates is important for this study, I obtained data on students' completion and retention rates from the offices of institutional research at each school. Because each school collects, stores, and manages its data differently, there are some statistical differences that have been taken into account in the analysis. Specifically, two schools do not maintain data on students' status as first-generation college students. One other school allows students to self-report that data. Only one school collects first-generation status as part of its application process. Further, while all schools collect aggregate completion data for students, they have different completion

thresholds—two years, three years, and six years. For purposes of this study, “successful” completion was defined as completion within four years. These differences are recorded in Chapter 5, which discusses student data. Data for students in the Appalachian region is also compared with data from the VCCS on student performance across the system, and it is important to keep in mind that much of this data is urban, since the two largest colleges (Northern Virginia and Tidewater) represent the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area and the Hampton Roads metropolitan area respectively.

For purposes of limiting the statistical data for students, I used two criteria for selecting aggregate data. The student must be from one of a set of rural zip codes (included as Appendix A) and must be a first-generation student. While some Appalachian students will live in the urban parts of the study area, it is far more likely that native Appalachian students live in more remote communities where their families may have lived in the area for generations. The excluded zip codes include the cities of Bristol and Radford, and the towns of Abingdon, Blacksburg, and Christiansburg. The Cana area of Carroll County was excluded because it falls below the escarpment of the mountains and is more closely associated with the piedmont region of North Carolina than with Appalachia. Several areas on the margins were not excluded, however, due to declining populations and large concentrations of Appalachian families. These include the city of Galax and the town of Pulaski. Some areas were all-inclusive, and these were the counties of Bland, Giles, Grayson, and Russell. The coal-mining communities in the service area that might have students enrolled particularly at Virginia Highlands were also excluded, since this study focuses on agricultural Appalachia.

The exclusion of coal Appalachia rests on two points. First, the issues facing coal Appalachia differ substantially from those of agricultural Appalachia. The impact of extractive industries on local economies and social structures has been discussed by scholars including Shannon Bell, Stephen Fisher and Emily Satterwhite, and those issues are quite different from the less dramatic, but no less significant, decline faced as textile and furniture industries have departed from agricultural Appalachia. Secondly, coal Appalachia has been the subject of extensive study, particularly in terms of literacy (Puckett, Webb-Sunderhaus, Sohn) and activism (Fisher, Satterwhite), while agricultural Appalachia has been largely forgotten, subsumed in discussions of rurality that have been non-specific to the region.

The second criteria—first-generation college student status—is important because many native Appalachian students have at least one parent who has attended college, and this may affect the type of English spoken in their homes. Appalachian English may be spoken by grandparents or other relatives, but the use of Appalachian dialect declines with educational level and higher socioeconomic status (Hazen “Identity” 91). In terms of college access and culture, it is more likely that first-generation students come from multi-generational Appalachian families, due to the well-documented Appalachian bias against college attendance (Hayes 169). Further, these first-generation students have more access to Appalachian Englishes at home, since their families have probably not had to code switch for purposes of school or employment. While the use of dialect markers is reduced in younger generations, it still persists in particular forms (the leveled *was*, the existential *there*, pleonastic pronouns, the perfective *done*) (Hazen “Appalachian” 56-57).

For purposes of this study, then, aggregate student data included zip code, first-generation status (if available: this is one of the places where data collection differed by school), placement in a developmental English course, final grades in English, and graduation within three years of enrollment. This tabular data is included in Appendix F, but it must be noted that this is an area in which this study proceeds with caution. Recent outcomes-based incentives and outcomes-based funding models within the VCCS have led to the careful tracking of student success and retention, and several participants in the study were afraid of repercussions from their school administrators if their data showed a negative trend. For this reason, even though it might make sense on the most basic level to break out completion and success data by school, this study will only consider it by region. To do otherwise would single out individual instructors, which is not the intent of this investigation.

### **End Matters**

It is quite difficult, possibly dangerous, and certainly disingenuous to attempt to reduce any Appalachian region or English to theory, methodology, or methods. Those presented in this chapter have been chosen for their utility in guiding us toward a better understanding of the pedagogies in place and will be explained in more detail in later chapters. For purposes of clarity, the following chapters detailing the results will be divided using the general categories participants developed themselves. Participants considered Appalachian culture as a separate entity, larger than their students' experiences, and often comprised of handicrafts, history, music, and storytelling. Some aspects of the culture,

notably familism, were regarded equivocally--skeptically by non-native instructors and with understanding by native instructors.

Appalachian language, the second division, was uniformly regarded as a local or familial dialect whose usage would predispose non-Appalachians to think less of students' academic or intellectual abilities. While "culture" was generally positive, then, the discussion of "language" was wholly negative and constitutes a separate chapter. Instructors' attitudes toward language, then, form a single chapter and include their responses to students' language, both written and oral.

The final chapter presents the study's findings in the context of theory and methodology, where we hope to find a way forward in delineating our current practice, the interplay of attitudes and resources, and the need for further investigation in providing the

**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> The test is administered by McCann, and no published form of the rubric is available.

<sup>2</sup>In 2013, I, along with a group other community college instructors and staff, took the placement test from the point of view of a student. Each of us had a different platform from which to write, and these included "international student," "dialect speaker" (without specifying the dialect), "grammatically correct gibberish writer," and "average high school writer." The "grammatically correct gibberish" essay scored a 4 (on a scale of 1-7), placing that writer in regular ENG 111. The essay written in dialect received a 2, which meant that the writer would face at least five hours of developmental instruction before being allowed to take the transferable course.

<sup>3</sup>The Virginia Transfer Initiatives program will be a re-evaluation and mapping of all VCCS courses onto all first- and second-year core curriculum requirements for all of the public four-year institutions in Virginia. This is a multi-year effort that began in the fall of 2018 and will continue perpetually as courses and requirements change. The program's end goal is to simplify the process of determining which courses transfer to satisfy which requirements.

<sup>4</sup>It needs to be noted here that "old time" music is definitely not bluegrass or country music. It is played in a distinctive fingerpicked style on banjos, mandolins, and guitars, with fiddles and upright basses providing support. Old time is played without the instrumental breaks that distinguish bluegrass, and like traditional Chinese painting, the performance is assessed on its faithfulness to the originals, not its innovation. While vocals are not common in old time music, such as there are often occur in two- and three-part harmonies, frequently with a male lead and female tenor. Old time music is associated with the deepest and most counter-cultural roots of Appalachian culture and someone immersed in that culture is more likely than not to also be aware of the sociopolitical and sociocultural aspects of Appalachia.

## Chapter Four: Standards and Stigma: Being Appalachian in the Writing Classroom

### Framing the Discussion

It is a warm summer evening, and the family is spread over a beach house. Some people are downstairs shooting pool, but a bunch of us are up in the living room, sharing a discussion that turns to language. My mother-in-law asks what I'm writing about next in my dissertation, and I start trying to explain about the problem with treating standard academic English as the only English. She is 86, has a master's degree in high school counseling, and certain views about language that are very much defined by race and class.

“But It IS correct,” she asserted. “That’s what we all were taught.” I take a deep breath, but my daughter, a licensed clinical counselor, is there first. “Standard academic English,” she tells her grandmother, “is ‘standard’ because it is the language of the white, educated middle class. We see it as ‘correct’ because the whole educational system has made sure that it’s seen as ‘correct,’ and THIS is because the educational system really functions as a form of social control. It keeps the white people in power.”

My mother-in-law’s brow wrinkles. “No. It’s the standard. I mean, all educated people speak this way, so if you want to sound educated, you have to sound like this. It’s not just white people.”

Sarah tries again. “It’s based in white language. Some people don’t want to learn standard English because it sounds white.”

“Exactly!” my mother-in-law crows, as if she’s won a point.

“No,” Sarah continued, “it’s not that people *can’t* learn the language and or choose not to for lazy reasons; it’s that they don’t want to participate in the language of the oppressor. It sounds like a bad short story, but it’s also true. I would feel oddly ashamed using somebody else’s dialect just so I could fit in and gain some perceived advantages. My feeling would be that the people who speak that dialect as natives can spot me as a poser and will make fun of me because they know I’m not *really* part of the culture whose language I’m speaking. I imagine that’s how it feels for black or Appalachian or Hispanic students who are being more or less forced to use Englishes that are truly non-native and that don’t really have a connection to their home cultures. Why should I speak your language when it’s not my language? Furthermore, why isn’t my language good enough?”

And the thing is, students’ native Englishes often ARE good enough, but my mother-in-law’s view of standard academic English is not the outlier that we might think it is. Her opinions are very much mainstream among educators even in the VCCS, as we will see, and the tenacity with which these opinions are held creates a real barrier for students, as we will see in Chapter Five.

In this chapter, it helps to think of language is a kind of watershed, where one person’s way of speaking opens doors, while another person, equally gifted intellectually and creatively, may find that door closed because of language. And further, the second person may not even *want* to open the door, because it might feel more like burglary than like coming home. Just using the standard conjugation of the verb infinitive “to see” may feel like a cultural betrayal and like the speaker is wearing someone else’s clothes, because (s)he is. And the implication is that the native clothes aren’t good enough for some things,

so those speakers should stick to doing the things they have clothes for. Or, of course, try to make the new duds fit, which is never as simple as it sounds.

### **Stigma and Suspicion**

That Appalachian language and culture are stigmatized is no secret inside the region or out. In the introduction to *Talking Appalachian*, Amy Clark and Nancy Hayward point out that “linguistic prejudice is still openly practiced—even encouraged—against varieties of Appalachian English and those who practice them” (3). In his forward to *Whistlin and Crowin’ Women of Appalachia*, Victor Villanueva asserts that “Appalachia is a color, even if it is not recognized as such,” because the same bigotries that disprivilege African American Vernacular English and Latinx language are present in the disprivileging of Appalachian English (xiv). Clark and Hayward note that the association with whiteness and poverty “is a plausible reason why the region’s dialects are still openly ridiculed in just about every aspect of society” (4).

We need to juxtapose against this the advancements that literacy provides, if we define literacy as conformation to the linguistic norm of standard academic English. Katherine Sohn notes that the women in her study used literacy as empowerment. Acquiring academic English and the constellation of behaviors that surround it allowed these women to gain higher status both within their families and the larger community, thus reifying the power of language in recreating identity (“Silence, Voice, and Identity” 135). What is not mentioned, however, is the way that the women’s home dialect is diminished and devalued in this exchange, even though this is almost a universal experience. Sohn notes that the

women were able to remain in their communities, challenging “previous literature about other nonmainstream groups who were alienated from their cultural moorings because of an acquired academic literacy” and suggesting that the acquisition of academic language is not as distancing for Appalachians as it is for others (136). It does mean, however, that the community is also participant in some way in the devaluing of its own language by recognizing academic language as somehow more elevated and special, associated with economic success and middle class values.

Beverly Flanagan reminds us that “education, social class, economic opportunity, ethnicity, and gender” all play roles in the development of and deployment of dialect, and further “as people in any region acquire secondary and higher education [...] they become influenced by those language forms considered by the schools to be prestigious, and as they move from working-class to middle class socioeconomic status, those prestige forms become linked with access to power and wealth” (179). Further, in marginalized cultures, women tend to adapt prestige forms before men do, using these as levers to move them into groups with higher social status and avoiding linguistic constructions that might result in disapproval or social disapprobation (188). Again, the realization seems to be that people who persist in using the stigmatized dialect of Appalachia will be less successful than those who code-switch.

In the community college classroom, code switching is universally mandatory among the respondents in this study, and rather than explore this idea directly, we might better understand it by triangulating in on it through the reasons respondents have given for their decision to require code-switching and by examining the beliefs that underlie those reasons.<sup>1</sup>

Primarily, respondents believe that the use of Appalachian dialect will “hold students back,” both academically and professionally, and the use of dialect carries with it the entire set of characteristics that define Appalachians for the respondents—“uneducated,” “lazy,” “unmotivated,” and “provincial” were some of the terms respondents used to describe Appalachian culture as evidenced in its language.

The difficulty here is not within code-switching itself, which probably is required for academic and professional work, but in the privileging of standard academic English as “correct” and other dialects and speech patterns “sub-standard,” “incorrect,” or “wrong.” As many linguists have noted, no grammar has been considered “correct” by any decision-making body. Instead, the common acceptance of standard academic English as the ONLY English has happened because it has traditionally been the English of the white middle and upper classes. Vershawn Young, Villanueva and others have said that this means that non-white persons, persons of color, and poor persons have always been denied, or at least restricted, in their access to power by their language. Women, too, as Flanagan said, have found themselves outside the traditional power structures because of their language and because they do not belong to the powerful elite. The main response of community college faculty in this study has been that Appalachian students must rid themselves of their “incorrect” speech and writing patterns in order to be successful, and if they wish to subvert the existing power structure, they must do it in terms of the language of power.

Young has challenged this idea in numerous texts, asserting that resorting to the language of the oppressor cannot actually change the oppression (“It Is What It Ain’t,” “Should Writers Use They Own English?”). Young has long advocated code-meshing, using

one's own English for rhetorical purposes, but this attitude has not gained traction at the ground zero of two-year college education in Southwest Virginia. For the respondents in this study, alternative Englishes, no matter what their origin, were "incorrect," although one respondent said "I don't care how they speak, but they had better be able to write academic English."

In brief, the discussion of Appalachian students in the writing classroom was a discussion of lack. Instructors noted only students' deficiencies, even those instructors whose own backgrounds were Appalachian. All but two of the respondents practiced a standards-based pedagogy rather than a rhetoric-based one, and this commonality meant that most discussed their assignments in terms of "corrections" to student work at the sentence level. One respondent who mentioned rhetorical strategies also noted that much of his time was taken up with sentence-level constructions in his Appalachian students' work that made it hard for him to focus on the larger rhetorical context. The other respondent who referenced a rhetorical approach noted that she does not address sentence level issues, but instead refers students to the writing center for such basic work.

The other areas of perceived lack were in students' reading skills, writing skills, a general perception of Appalachian male students as disengaged and unmotivated, a perceived lack of sophistication and experience on the part of Appalachian students who tend to stay within their home communities, and perceived deficits in those Same home cultures and communities, including conflicts between familism and academic work and between traditional working class jobs and the kinds of jobs for which college degrees prepare people. The tracing of these attitudes to their sources is beyond the scope of this

investigation, but it is important here to examine the main themes of instructors' beliefs about Appalachia and Appalachian students to understand how these attitudes may shape students' success or lack thereof in first year composition courses.

## **Definitions**

Before we begin a discussion of pedagogies, some definitions will be helpful. For purposes of this study, we defined a “standards-based pedagogy” as one that relies on skills-based instruction and the mastery of a given set of objectives. In the writing classroom, this translates to a scaffolded set of skills that roughly follows Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning from the very basic mastering of sentence-level grammatical and mechanical skills to the far more complex essay level evaluation and synthesis of information. For most instructors, the student must develop a facility with the lower-order skills before (s)he can progress to higher-order ones. Community college first year composition courses have the added burden of being taught often as “dual enrollment” courses in local high schools, where they must meet the criteria for the Virginia Standards of Learning tests and must, therefore, adhere to the standards adopted by Virginia’s public schools.

These standards are, by way of review, the results of the 2001 “No Child Left Behind” act (NCLB) that mandated, among other things, common curricular milestones for grades K-12 and certain metrics for English and writing that are set at the federal and state levels. These metrics in Virginia are often focused on sentence-level work and can be readily measured via standardized testing (VASOL). The focus on grammar, particularly, assumes the teaching of standard academic English and contains no variation for rhetorical purposes even in secondary school (“Grammar Progression,” “Writing Progression”). As previously

noted, four of the participants either taught English in public schools or taught dual enrollment courses there and were required to implement the standards of learning in those educational settings, so it is probably not surprising that standards-based pedagogies operate at the college level.

By contrast “rhetoric-based pedagogy” conceives a much broader base for composition, one that focuses on exigence and audience rather than forms or hierarchies. A rhetoric-based composition classroom teaches the construction of arguments using the most appropriate means for the audience. It focuses less on the sentence-level structure and more on the creation of texts appropriate for the rhetorical situation.

“Dual enrollment” refers to the common community college practice of teaching some first-year courses in local high schools. Students taking dual enrollment English receive both high school and college credit for the courses, and the articulation agreements with Virginia’s public four-year colleges and universities ensure that these courses are acceptable for transfer to four-year schools. Dual enrollment courses are usually taught by high school faculty under the oversight of the chairperson of each college’s English department. Dual enrollment instructors are considered adjunct faculty. This study did not investigate dual enrollment instructors since they are far more likely to be full-time public secondary school faculty with different responsibilities and expectations than college faculty. It is important to note, however, that three of the respondents were formerly high school dual enrollment instructors before they were hired as full-time faculty at their respective colleges. The association with secondary schools and their focus on the Virginia Standards of Learning may mean that these faculty members are predisposed to a standards-based approach to

composition given their background that was heavily standards-based and individual schools' success depended on meeting the SOL metrics.

ENF or “English Fundamentals” courses are developmental English courses designed for students whose scores on the Virginia Placement Test indicate that their ability level is not sufficient for College Composition I. The lowest level course, ENF 1, is generally reserved for English language learners (in the absence of an ESL program) and those who have significant intellectual or preparatory barriers. ENF 2 serves students who place above the rudimentary level but not high enough to even attempt first year composition without further preparation. ENF 3 courses are taught concurrently with ENG 111 (College Composition I), and instructors will, in this chapter, frequently refer to these as ENF 3 111s. Many of the ENF 3 111s are taught online, further complicating these students' access to peers, instructors, and the writing center. ENF 1 and 2 are taught face-to-face only at most colleges, since the feeling is that those students need more instructional support and instructor time and attention. While not all Appalachian dialect speakers place into ENF 1 or 2, many of the native speakers in those classes in our region are Appalachian, and it is worth noting that their instructors remark on the difficulty these students face, feeling out of place in classes that are, in some cases, more than 50% Chinese students. The ENF courses, designed to remove a barrier to success for students, have unfortunately become one themselves, and are scheduled to be phased out over the next three years in the VCCS, leaving underprepared students to face College Composition I with no preparatory courses or extra in-course support.

Embedded tutors provide part of the current in-course support in at least at two of the schools in this study, and both intend to continue the practice of embedding after the ENF courses are discontinued. Embedded tutors are writing center staff who attend the ENF courses with students and serve, in some cases, as supplemental instructors. Often they serve as guides to the colleges' learning management systems, the technology in the classrooms, and the expectations of college-level writing. Embedded tutors are the only intervention at this level whose benefit has been demonstrated by empirical research. (For an excellent discussion of this practice, see Russell Carpenter, et al. "Revisiting and Revising Course-Embedded Tutoring Facilitated by Writing Centers," in *Praxis*.)

### **An Introduction of Participants**

Information for this section of the study was gathered in interviews conducted over the space of four months in the spring of 2019. Participants self-selected in response to an emailed request for interviews. Most were interviewed in one session conducted on the interviewee's home campus, although occasional follow-up questions were asked via email. Several instructors also participated in sharing assignments and course materials that they had found particularly helpful in classroom work with Appalachian students.

A spokesman for the Virginia Community College System, blogger Jim Babb, noted in a 2018 blog post that enrollments at Virginia's community colleges have declined 22% in six years, and further, that the loss is equivalent to the total enrollment of 17 VCCS schools. For comparison, there are 23 schools in all. This decline has resulted in staff reductions across

the system, even in departments like English, where the nearly universal requirement for College Composition I means that most students will take at least one English course during their community college attendance. At the schools in this study, departments have not yet lost full-time faculty members, however they have all experienced attrition through retirement or relocation, and those positions have remained unfilled. This means that the departments are small—Virginia Highlands has three full-time faculty members in English and Wytheville has two. NRCC has the largest department, with three full-time faculty and two who are full-time but teach 2/2 schedules due to other college responsibilities. All three of the colleges rely heavily on a pool of adjunct instructors to fill in courses that full time faculty are unable to teach.

All of the instructors in this study are full-time faculty. As noted elsewhere, half were male, half female, and there was one person of color among them. One respondent holds a PhD in early English modernism (literature), and two others have MFAs in poetry and creative writing, with one of those holding a second MFA in creative nonfiction. The remaining three respondents hold MAs in literature rather than writing. Four of the six worked for several years as adjunct or dual-enrollment instructors before being hired full time. Two respondents teach composition courses exclusively, while the others teach a mixture of composition and literature courses. In the VCCS, literature courses are taught exclusively in the transfer program and must be survey courses, so for that reason, they are always American, English, or World literature rather than specific genres, although one respondent had taught an elective Appalachian literature course and another an elective in women's studies.

The standard teaching load for a full-time faculty member in the VCCS is 5/5. In the case of the respondents in this study, three taught a 5/5 course load, one had a 5/7, one an 8/8, and one a 2/2. The person teaching the 2/3 had release time to chair the English department at her school, while both the respondent with the 8/8 and the one with the 5/7 load had several small online sections of composition courses. The person with the 8/8 load only taught two face-to-face courses in the 2018-19 academic year, both ENG 111. All of the faculty members serve as mentors for adjunct faculty, and most of them have significant other college responsibilities, including sitting on college committees, serving on search-and-interview teams, and serving on system-wide curriculum development teams. Full-time faculty in the VCCS are required to submit their college service hours for evaluation at the beginning of each calendar year.<sup>2</sup>

The shrinking departments, along with a concomitant reduction of resources for professional development, mean that faculty members are concerned for their future and spoke out for this survey under conditions of limited anonymity. As one person put it, “I don’t want your dissertation to be the reason I lose my job, because I’m not passing enough local students.” At two of the three schools, there was a very definite atmosphere of distrust and the very real fear that data generated and tied specifically to a respondent and his or her school would be “used against us” and as justification for further reducing staff.

For that reason, the identities of the respondents will be protected in this discussion of their interviews and in the discussion of conclusions formed in this study, and aggregate data for schools and regions will be used in Chapter Five. Respondents will be identified by pseudonym and while it might be helpful to note these responses, the race, ethnicity, and

non-local origins of respondents is suppressed. While the data might be significantly more useful if it could be narrowed to a specific school or instructor, it could also be used to allocate resources in ways that would be inconsistent with the goals of the study, particularly the goal of identifying current practices that influence the retention and graduation of Appalachian students. No respondent in this study was unwilling, much less unable, to alter his or her pedagogy for the benefit of students, but before something can be changed, one has to know exactly what it is, and if possible, how it works, and it is important not to pre-emptively do damage to those who have helped in this endeavor.

### **Appalachian English vs. The Privileging of Standard Academic English**

Even in the context of the writing classroom, Appalachian students are defined by what they do not have. In the case of the respondents in this study, the first order of discussion is the lack of what one person termed “general writing ability.” During the very first interview, an instructor that we will call Alex told me that her Appalachian students are “sooooo low. Some of them can’t write a sentence.” She indicated a strong affinity for her students and their struggles, but also found that the Appalachian students were very poorly prepared, even though they had come from the same high schools as more prepared students. The difference, she said, came from the students’ home cultures.

“So many of them, you know, are first generation students and don’t have anyone at home who can help them. They don’t speak academic English at home; they don’t know

anyone who speaks academic English at home.” Alex went on to muse that “they’re so weak. We have to teach them what a verb is, what a complete thought is.”

The dominant narrative among the community college faculty I interviewed was that students’ ideas must be couched in acceptable academic prose first, and then considered on the merits of their ideas or arguments. Several instructors indicated that students who fail to clear this first hurdle of language use are seen as lacking in educational development, if not actual intelligence. One instructor remarked that the prevalence of dialects in his classes was indicative of a school-wide problem: the more fluent students were in dual enrollment classes, so the only ones showing up in ENG 111 and 112 on campus were the lower-level students. This applied not only to those who speak Appalachian Englishes but to African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) and to various dialects used by Hispanic students. In every case, the faculty members expressed very real concern that students “will not be successful” unless they master standard academic English, so the sentence-level “correction” of students’ writing was the first priority for every instructor, and the general feeling was that there was a failure to master basic skills at an earlier level that contributed to students’ struggle in their college English classes.

In discussions of which elements of standard academic English were most important, interviewees indicated that sentence-level constructions, particularly verb-constructions, received much of their attention. The leveled “was,” for instance, may be on its way out for Kirk Hazen’s subjects in West Virginia, but in agricultural Appalachia, it continues to be in common usage as evidenced by the frequency with which respondents mentioned it. “You know,” one respondent commented, “students will say ‘We was walking to class,’ which I

get, but then they'll write it, and that's a problem." Another construction was the perfective "seen" and "done." The Same respondent remarked that "I can understand them [Appalachian students] saying 'I done that already,' in class, but they have to learn to write 'I did that.'"

Every instance of Appalachian English that instructors recalled was recalled with an eye to how it must be "corrected" for the student's own good. None of the instructors, even those who had Appalachian backgrounds themselves, referenced rhetorically appropriate times to use Appalachian dialect, although three instructors use Appalachian novels in their classrooms. The dominant view was that, even in the novels, the speakers were using a sub-standard dialect that could not be encouraged outside of literature. The academic essay, with its component of critical analysis and research, must be couched in the prose of the academy. One professor acknowledged that students were allowed to use dialect in instances where they were either quoting or inventing dialogue, but the sentences in between the dialogic statements "had better be correct."

This view is so common that it has been unquestioned in any of the English departments in this study. While the respondents, with one exception, acknowledged some value in Appalachian culture and cultural narrative patterns, there was little room for those patterns in college composition. The respondents' use of "rhetoric" was limited to "rhetorical modes," and referenced a strategy of teaching narrative, comparative, or argumentative essays rather than an awareness of exigence and audience. When it was mentioned, the respondents universally indicated that rhetorical strategies were a luxury for those who were already grammatically proficient, rather than something that could be built

in at every level for every writer. The argument from each participant was that the sentence-level language issues had to be “fixed” in order for the student’s work to be taken seriously.

Morgan said “I know that my students didn’t come here because they love learning like I did in college, and that’s okay, but now that they’re here I need to be able to help them meet their goals, and those are tied to using language correctly.” Andy was even more direct: “Students come here to get jobs, and I have to help them do that, help them see that language helps them do that. I teach them how important it is to write well for the job [market].” Avery, also referencing the connection of writing to employment, said that most of his students lack the network of connections that can help them get employment, so they have to rely on their ability to write a good cover letter and present themselves well in online job applications.

Instructors noted that creating “blemish-free” prose or the “fixing” of language is linked to humility on the students’ part. “They know their language skills are not up to par, and they’re so humble about it,” Alex noted. “They’re apologetic about their writing skills, especially the men.” Other respondents mentioned the students’ willingness to see their own dialect as inadequate, based in large part on their previous experiences with English classes where they have been told that their constructions are “wrong” or “bad.” Alex mentioned a particular student, a young man who had recently graduated from a rural high school, and who said, in response to her work with his paper, “I know my writing’s bad. All my teachers told me so.” Alex’s reflection on this indicated that the comment reflected the student’s understanding of his own dialect vs. academic English and the superiority of the latter, at least for college.

Emerson also mentioned the students' awareness of their own dialect, but in different terms. "They don't know how to write," he noted. "The ones who do know have already taken dual enrollment. We only get the ones who are at the very bottom [of the grading scale]. Anybody with any ability will have taken ENG 111 and 112 in high school." Emerson's judgment was reflected in his approach to students' work, which was first to eradicate the markers of Appalachian dialect, particularly in verb forms. "It's just a losing battle," he said. "I don't even know where to start with some of them."

Not only is it difficult for instructors to find a starting place, but they also get pushback, according to Andy, based on the degree to which students are supportive of and enmeshed in their culture. Andy noted that many of his students do not see the need for writing standard academic English, since they are training for local jobs where such skills are not particularly valued. Avery also noted this pushback with regard to employment, and said that he has often reminded students that "that paper is your face," meaning that the cover letter they use to apply for jobs is exactly how they will appear to an employer. "It can't have any blemishes on it. It's got to be perfect; it's got to be pristine." Andy also connected standard academic English to career success, noting that he often tells his students that he writes and edits cover letters for all his cousins, and they unflinchingly at least get interviews. "But I tell them 'You're not my cousin,' so they have to learn to write those letters on their own." Every respondent referenced the need for job placement as a reason for replacing Appalachian dialect with standard academic English. There was not any discussion of Appalachian students in the transfer curriculum, although one respondent indicated that his college had comparatively few transfer students of any sort, due to a focus on pre-

professional programs of study. Another respondent said that his college was heavily invested in dual enrollment and therefore had very few transfer students enrolled in on-campus English courses. Morgan gave voice to the idea that local, Appalachian students would not be interested in a four-year degree and tended to attend community colleges as a way to gain an advantage in the local job market rather than gain expertise in an area of knowledge or look for employment in the wider world.

Many of these students find themselves balked from even these modest goals by enrollment in developmental courses. Almost all of the instructors I interviewed teach at least occasionally in the English Fundamentals programs that are required (for now) when students' do not achieve an adequate score on the Virginia Placement Test. These courses are mandatory—students cannot take ENG 111 without adequate scores in ENF 1 or ENF 2—and they are often used as English as a Second Language courses. Alex, who primarily teaches ENF 3/ENG 111, said that these students in her experience are at least somewhat resentful of being placed in classes with non-native English speakers who need a grade of C or higher in community college classes before transferring to four-year colleges and universities. “They really feel disrespected, you know,” she said. “They’ve been speaking English all their lives, and now they’re in a class with people who don’t speak it at all. It makes them feel like they’ve got to prove that they belong.” Alex and Morgan both felt that Appalachian students suffered from placement in the very lowest level ENF 1 courses with non-native speakers, especially given that, in their experience, the two groups comprised the whole of those classes. One school did have a handful of AAVE speakers in a particular class, but generally the students who are enrolled in ENF 1 are Appalachian or international.

While Alex said that this did provide an opportunity for students to develop an appreciation for another culture, it was most likely to be frustrating for them, since the international students tended to speak to one another in their own languages and struggled to carry on conversations with the instructor or other students. “I’ll have students say, ‘Wait, I’m an American. Why do I have to do this?’ And I have to be gentle, you know, and explain that it’s just a test score, and that they’ll be fine once they get up to speed.”

“Up to speed,” however, requires the abandonment, at least for academic purposes, of their home language, and several instructors said that this may not be such an easy transition. Two of the instructors allow students in first semester composition a great deal of leeway in the subjects they choose to write about. “The men will tell you about hunting,” Emerson said. “Or they’ll write about their truck.” Alex noted that her first assignment in ENG 111 asks students to research and write about their hometown. “They really like that assignment. It gives them something personal, something about themselves, to hang onto.” Morgan often uses nonfiction writing in human rights or social justice as the touchstone for her classes. For the most part, however, the instructors lament that there is no “real” connection between the work Appalachian students do in class and the lives they live outside it.<sup>3</sup> Avery, whose background is also native Appalachian, said that the most usual barrier Appalachian students face is “overcoming the vernacular” when the pull of the vernacular is very strong, since it is the students’ spoken language both at home and in their communities and churches.

“We need a way to help students understand that they need to think about the ways they choose to write and speak,” Andy said. “They’re not going to get a job because they

hope to get a job. They have to have a plan,” and that plan has to include speaking and writing standard academic English. The close tie between employment and standard academic English was voiced almost uniformly as the reason for insisting on SAE in all written work and most oral presentation work. No respondent referenced scholarship to support the view that mastery of academic English was key in job placement or income status; instead, all the respondents seemed to accept it as a given that “correct” grammar and mechanics were respected in the local job sector and did not need of support or affirmation. Further, most indicated that, with a few exceptions, students also hold this view and look to their professors for “fixing” their sentence-level errors to make their prose match that of their more urban and suburban counterparts. This was even true in literature courses with research components, where presumably the research content would be considered of primary importance. Good prose is prose that contains no regional variants or dialects, and this is the goal for first year composition courses as far as Appalachian students and their language usages are concerned. As the next section shows, however, language usage is just one marker of culture, and the other markers may be more equivocal and less unanimously supported.

### **Culture Beyond the Classroom: The Stigma of Familism and Fatalism in Appalachia**

The respondents in this study indicated, with one exception, an appreciation for the culture of Appalachia in terms of storytelling and narrative, music, and traditional

Appalachian handwork, like instrument-making or quilting. They indicated less patience with other cultural markers such as familism, localism, and adherence to tradition.

“Appalachian Culture” of course means different things to different people. The native Appalachians in this study spoke appreciatively of their family connections, the support of family members in their educational aspirations, the role of music and art in Appalachia, and the sense of community found in most Appalachian villages and hollers. Two of the four discussed the role of religion in Appalachian life, and another respondent mentioned the importance of labor (defined as manual labor) for men, and literacy for women. Underneath all of the discussion of culture, however, was the tacit assumption that students’ attitudes toward their language, which the instructors perceived as largely negative, were offset by their attitudes toward their native culture, which instructors perceived as positive. In other words, all six respondents felt that students were far more “loyal” to their home cultures than their home Englishes and far less likely to let go of those implicit cultural beliefs. Instructors’ felt that students would tolerate corrections to their grammar, but were unwilling to hear criticism of their grandmas, as it were.

The correlation between code- and culture-switching has been established by Young, Anita Puckett, and others, and all of the respondents were familiar with the basic concepts and even some of the risks. Avery and Morgan talked about code-switching specifically, discussing the need for students to acquire facility in academic English as well as Appalachian dialect. Neither, however, correlated this with culture-switching, even though Avery referenced culture-switching as one of the most difficult problems Appalachian students face. He defined this as the sense that students feel pressured to abandon their

home cultures in favor of the academy in order to be successful on campus with students and faculty. He also noted that for many Appalachian students, himself included, there is a sense of living in two worlds—the world of home, and the world of school. The pull of the home world, he said, is often, but not always, the stronger. His own experience was that home was a place to get away from, lest he find himself in the same cycle of underpaid manual labor that his parents had spent their lives performing. For Avery, college was a means of escape, even as he acknowledges the distance it has created for him personally between himself and other family members.

Most Appalachian families struggle to find a way to maintain relationships with their college students and yet uphold their family integrity, which Avery defined as facing problems as a whole unit. Alex added that she understood the nature of the conflict from her own extended family. When illness or other difficulties strike in Appalachian families, family members are expected to “be there,” and risk ostracism if they are not. Alex is flexible in her attendance policies for Appalachian students who often put family obligations first not only out of a sense of duty, but out of “the fear that they’ll have to face serious consequences” for their absence. The instructors who were not Appalachian by heritage tended to have less tolerance for the attendance problems that family obligations create. “I can see being absent for a serious illness in a family member [...] that you have some responsibility for,” Morgan stated, “but not for your brother’s girlfriend’s gallbladder surgery. She’s an adult, isn’t she? She can take care of herself.” Her frustration was echoed by Emerson, the other non-native, who said he specifically had to address family emergencies in his attendance policies, because “they’ll be out for a week because their

granny's sick or something." Andy, although Appalachian in heritage, also has little patience with student absences. "They have to choose," he said, "and it's very short-sighted to miss a bunch of classes over something that has no bearing on their future lives."

Loyal Jones notes, in "Appalachian Values" that this familism has very positive roots and is, for him, a central marker of Appalachian culture, a marker that he supports because of the loyalty it creates (55). For Appalachian students, the point is not to help the family member in some way, but to be present with the rest of the family in a show of solidarity, as Avery and Alex both noted. Appalachian culture values this solidarity more than it does either a college degree OR attendance. Alex and Avery were most comfortable with this practice, saying that they are familiar with it in their own families and respect the students' need to reassure their families and extended families that they are not going to be completely changed by college. All of the Appalachian natives were willing to grant students grace in attendance policies for family emergencies, even when those did not involve immediate family members, although Andy was most likely to accompany this leniency with extra work or projects as a way of stressing the importance of being in class.

Familism can, however, extend into less positive areas, as all four of the Appalachian participants noted. One of them faced considerably family opposition to his own college attendance based on the intellectual changes it would require, while the other was accused of sacrificing the salary he could be making out of high school in order to pursue college and thereby putting his family at a disadvantage. The males, particularly, grew up in a culture that defined physical labor as "men's work," and everything else as feminizing. Men were not teachers, not unless they were also sports coaches, particularly football. One

respondent, raised by a single mother, was expected to earn quickly in order to help his mother with household expenses and “repay” her for her years of sacrifice. While *she* did not make this demand, other family members intervened to tell the respondent that going to work was “the right thing” to do in this instance. In both cases, the strong family ties asserted themselves as corrective forces, places where the family was expected to know best, and the prospective college student should respect that fund of knowledge. Alex, because literacy can be quite gendered in Appalachia (See Anita Pucket, “Let Girls Do the Spelling”), faced less pressure in attending college. Alex, particularly, had college-educated parents, so for her, college attendance was not even debatable. Her grandparents, although not college-educated themselves, had insisted on that for their children, so Alex was the product of two generations of educational expectations.

For the Appalachian non-natives, familism was one more obstacle to be overcome, and one that held little comparative weight. Both non-natives indicated in various ways that family attachments were without question worth less in the grand scheme of a student’s life than a college degree, and felt that family members who were truly concerned about students would support those students regardless of the students’ involvement with the family at points of crisis. Morgan said “if [a student has] a test, [they] should be able to say so and not be punished for missing an evening visiting grandma.” Thanksgiving Break was frequently mentioned as a source of contention, since instructors expect that students will spend this time preparing their final papers and presentations, but students often see it as a week without obligations in which they can travel and visit family. Here again, the prevalent

view among non-natives is that college is a short-term sacrifice for a long-term goal, and serious students should always be willing to make that sacrifice.

Historicism and a sense of place also highlight the differences between native and non-native instructors. Three of the four native instructors were highly invested in allowing their Appalachian students access to their own histories and their own places. Alex's hometown assignment is an example of this, but all of the natives acknowledge the ways that their students feel attached to and responsible for a particular place. Andy repeatedly referenced his hometown and the customs that drew him back there, saying that he often has students begin their writing for his composition classes by discussing their places and their connections to them. Avery stated that his Appalachian identity still came from his native area, and he also noted that his language changes when he goes home, and he tells his students this when discussing code-switching in different contexts. Both of the non-native instructors felt that their ties to place were far more tenuous, saying that while they enjoyed growing up in their respective hometowns, those places have no special affinity for them now. It is worth noting that both non-native instructors came from large urban areas in the northeast: one followed a spouse's career south, and the other married an Appalachian native and moved into the area. These connections do not seem to produce the same sense of place that natives feel, although both indicated their satisfaction with the "quality of life" in Appalachia, referencing the slower pace, the general politeness, and the sense of community that they felt. One also mentioned the relative merit of raising children in Appalachia rather than in a larger area where there are greater dangers.

Despite at least some appreciation for place, all of the respondents referenced the relative isolation—both physical and social—that restricts students’ views and choices. Andy, in particular, noted that students in rural communities were less willing to take risks in their writing, less willing to try new things, and less willing to experience new places. He said that students were unable to see themselves as possessing opportunities beyond home. “If there's a factory that pays well, if there's a coal mine, then they see that as the ceiling, and they embrace that. They want to [get to] that ceiling position and get married and have kids like their moms and their dads and their uncles and everybody, and that's sort of it.” Emerson, too, noted that students’ ambitions are limited by their acceptance of where they are. He said, “We have those situations where students come back and say ‘You know, I live on a farm, I don't know why I'm doing this. My parents have never done this. My dad works in a factory, and he wants me to work in the factory.’”

The isolation of communities is a problem. As one respondent noted “I feel like a lot of our students live in a [small town] and they may not go thirty miles outside of that, so their whole identity is sort of in this small community. They don't see past it, and sometimes, they don't WANT to see past it, sadly.” Another respondent noted that Appalachian students rarely see job opportunities outside what their parents have done, so the work in factories or service industries seems like the only possibility, and when those jobs are not available, the students still do not want to relinquish living near their parents and other relatives in order to have a better job or higher wages. The nearness of family and the familiarity of place are more important. Morgan remarked that some of her students have never been to the next biggest town down the interstate, and certainly have not traveled

enough to understand that even though the world seems big, a lot of its problems are the same regardless of where one is.

Andy noted that the attachment to place becomes an “irrational” attachment to a future that probably won’t happen, but that does not stop students from expecting it and hoping for it, despite the evidence. This hope keeps them in place when “transitioning” to something else would be far better for both the students and the region. Appalachia, he said, “is at a crisis point. My thinking is that young Appalachian kids have to understand that you have to do something in terms of education and get an associates or a certificate or something, and your unwillingness to understand that won't make it not a fact. But if you say, well that's not the case, coal's gonna come back, that won't make coal come back, and it's just being short sighted, and then you're going to feel the effects of it even more, because of that shortsightedness. It's almost as if you have a cancerous tumor and rather than operate on it, you just hope that it will go away. It's eventually going to kill you.”

### **Culture Beyond the Classroom Part Two: Clinging to the Past and Failing the Future**

Lack of ambition, lack of vision, lack of desire to improve—these were the “cancers” that were referenced by respondents as they discussed the ways Appalachian culture gets in the way of Appalachian students’ success. While many aspects of the culture came to light in the interviews, two main negative themes stood out: Appalachia represents a kind of “laziness,” particularly in male students, that does not embrace academic excellence as a path to anything valuable, and Appalachian culture encourages a fatalism that does not

allow students to feel ambition or attempt to “get ahead” in the ways that are most common in American society.

The perception, particularly at the two most rural schools, was that Appalachian students are marked by a lack of ambition, a kind of “laziness” that is not tied to ability, but rather to attitude. All of the respondents referenced the modest goals of Appalachian students as problematic. Most only want the minimum education needed for some specific task—practical nursing, welding, instrumentation. The idea of a liberal arts education for its own sake, or for the sake of improving their minds, is foreign and dangerous. Andy remarked that his students’ families are very wary of college, since they believe college will change people. Andy said “a lot of things that you go off to college and become are not things that people in Appalachia embrace readily,” like the tendency of college students to see grey areas where things were once black-and-white. Avery noted that students often find themselves just having to be quiet when they’re at home, because they “don’t want to offend their families, so they just stay out of [discussions].” Alex remarked that students often begin their composition classes with a great deal of trepidation, watching for the first sign of “liberal brainwashing” that they’ve been told will be coming. Morgan noted that the joy she found in reading and learning seems largely absent in her Appalachian students. “They are willing to do the work, but they don’t invest anything in it. It doesn’t seem to have a larger purpose.”

The response to higher education in Appalachia seems, to the respondents, to be at least somewhat gendered. Four of the respondents noted that women seem more ready to do the work required of them than men. Alex noted that men were reluctant to read the

novels assigned in her classes, although they often commented afterward that they enjoyed them. “They’ll say, ‘yeah, that was all right, but I don’t want to read another [one]. While the women will finish the novel early and go out and buy the sequel.” Andy notes that women in his classes seem more motivated to make their own way in the world rather than depend on someone else. “My young female students seem to work harder. They want to secure their own futures and not [...] have to rely on a husband.” He went on to say that these students are “invested” in their composition classes and in their writing, although some of them are pressured by outside forces to reject education as a pathway to their goals. Morgan noted that the women seem most motivated by their own children. “They’ll say ‘I want my kid to be proud of me,’ and so they want to finish their degrees.”

One anecdote is worth mentioning in this regard, although it has to be scrubbed to protect the identity of the speaker. A particular student performed very well in the first few weeks of class, but then her writing and other work faltered and fell lower than average. When this professor spoke with her, she revealed that her boyfriend had been chastising her for doing well in school and accused her of wanting to be “better” than he was. The professor was able to reassure the student that doing well in school did not mean that she would be a bad girlfriend or wife, and she was able to finish the semester with the strong work that she had done initially. For many Appalachian female students, this is the dilemma, and several respondents noted it—to be successful in school is to alienate potential partners who do not value that quality. Conversely, Alex noted that Appalachian women do not seem to necessarily feel comfortable dating, or even making friends with, people from outside the region or culture. In this way, education can be a barrier to the thing that the respondents

noticed women seemed to value most—marriage and family. Emerson used the word “lazy” to describe women who want to settle down near their parents and raise a family, but Andy and Avery both referred to this as an attempt to preserve the culture that seems “normal” to Appalachian students. “It’s what they know,” Andy said. “This is what my parents did, and my uncles, and so it’s what I should do.” “Once they get married,” Emerson said, “the perception is that they’ve made it. They’ve met their goals; they’re never going to change.”

Change, or willingness to change, seemed to be at the heart of the respondents critique of Appalachian stasis. All of the respondents referenced a lack of ambition that seems to permeate the culture of their Appalachian students. It needs to be said here that all of the respondents shared, broadly, a definition of ambition that includes getting a four-year degree, a high-paying job, and living in an area—usually outside of Appalachia—that offers material and cultural benefits. No one defined “ambition” in terms of what students themselves might consider ambitious, and while that is beyond the scope of this study, it is an area that may be of benefit in further studies. The “traditional” American middle-class ideal seemed to be the unspoken desirable goal here, and students’ resistance to this narrative was labeled “lazy,” “short-sighted,” and the characteristic that “perpetuates poverty and isolation.” Emerson said that students from a particular rural community in his coverage area seem to lack all ambition. “They come to college because someone told them they should, but they have no real plans. They have no life goals. They’re doing all their work online, but they’re not motivated, and you have to be motivated to stay caught up online.”

Emerson, in particular, situated the lack of motivation is inherent in the students’ lives. “When school is not connected to a future, and [then] life gets hard, school is

something they can do without.” He asserted that for students at his institution, Appalachian culture gets in the way. “They won’t let go of their culture,” he said, “but they have to get past that to be an educated person.” An educated person, in his view, is one who has learned to value learning for its own sake—a kind of traditional view of the liberal arts and humanities—and who has embraced the culture of the academy and values what it values. This includes standard academic English, but so much more. At its base is the belief, shared by four other instructors, that much of Appalachian culture is white with racist overtones, and racism is something that students are limited by but, paradoxically, something they don’t want to give up. Both Emerson and Alex stressed their belief that Appalachian students are identified with whiteness and resist being changed through association with others who are not like them. It’s not just the fear of stepping outside the culture that holds them back, but the fear of losing some form of multi-generational cultural identity. Alex related an interchange with a student who said “My dad would never tolerate me dating a colored person, so I don’t. And she actually said ‘colored person.’ When I reminded her that we don’t use that term—I didn’t say ‘we haven’t used that term for fifty years’—she just looked perplexed and said ‘it’s the term I’ve always used.’”

Respondents were quick to cite anecdotes supporting their views of Appalachian students as culturally backward and situationally racist, and referenced this as a kind of intellectual laziness that is unwilling to see nuances in themselves or their culture. “Everything is black and white [for Appalachian students]” Andy said. “They are really uncomfortable with things that may go against what they’ve always been taught at home.” Avery, whose family might be considered the most typically Appalachian, noted however

that “Maybe [students] are uncomfortable with thinking differently from their family, or they think completely in line with the family line of thoughts, [but] I've seen a few instances where students have the light bulb go off, and they just sort of break from the mold. They have a completely different experience, but now of course [...] that's a life-altering or life-changing experience, and you suddenly have to reevaluate you and who you are as a person. That's hard.”

Re-evaluating one's personhood is particularly difficult for Appalachian students, Avery noted, because of Appalachian fatalism.<sup>4</sup> Avery described this as the belief that “My family's been poor, we've always been poor, it's what we are, why bother?” He went on to note that “we've got to overcome that mindset,” because no one in his belief is actually fated to poverty or any other societal position that can be altered by effort and luck. Andy credits fatalism with the opioid epidemic, saying that many Appalachians have regarded the disappearance of traditional jobs in factories or mines with total resignation. “Right now in West Virginia, what's a main cause of death? Opioid overdose, because people are giving up. The coal mines have dried up, and there aren't other industries, so what do you do? You say I'll just do this. I'll just give up.”

The opposite of giving up, according to most respondents, is fighting, but fighting back is difficult when the culture teaches that one's basic life situation can't be changed. One respondent said “I blame religion. Appalachian religion teaches that God puts you in your place, so trying to better yourself, get an education, is actually opposing God. It's hard to push against that.” Morgan mused that Appalachian students are often caught between the belief in fatalism and the sudden awareness that, as college graduates, they have many

more options than their parents did. It can be paralyzing. It is easier for students to accept those options and move on when they have family support. Andy said that his master's degree diploma hangs prominently in his mother's house, and it is the thing she is most proud of. She did not graduate from high school, choosing to go to work in a factory at 16, and Andy relates that, when he was about to graduate from high school himself, she sat him down and said "What are you going to do now? Are you going to get a job or join the army?" College, he said with a smile, wasn't even on the list. Nobody in our family went to college. But now she's so proud of me." Alex's grandparents sent her own parents to college, as we've said, so for her, college was a multi-generational experience. Avery, on the other hand, experienced great family opposition to his college career and continues to struggle with some degree of ostracism and the sense that he has "gotten above his raising."

That phrase was mentioned by every respondent as the traditional Appalachian response to ambition and one of the roots of fatalism. One's raising, the conditions and socioeconomic class in which one was brought up, is perceived by Appalachian students as another kind of ceiling. Go past that ceiling, and you are outside not only your own experience, but the experience of everyone in your family. According to the respondents, the threat of "getting above your raising" keeps people from upward class mobility, from moving into particular areas (like cities or even suburbs), and from acquiring education or, more importantly for most respondents, believing that education can be a helpful and good thing. Alex mentioned that several of her Appalachian students have said that parents or grandparents warned them about "getting above your raising" when they started college, and that family members keep a close eye on them to check for unacceptable changes,

usually with regard to religion or patriotism. “I’ve had students say that they have to drop out, because the pressure is just too great. Their families are afraid of having them in college.”

### **The Nuanced Nature of Hope: Pedagogies and Practical Wisdom**

For the students who do stay, the classroom does not seem to be a pressure-cooker of cultural and linguistic challenge. Despite the general negativity of tone when discussing Appalachia’s students, culture, and future, most of the respondents were engaged in drawing those students into lively discussions about literature and active writing activities that encourage critical thinking and analysis. Pedagogical theories were less commonly referenced, although Morgan and Avery both referenced Paolo Freire and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Morgan said “Powers that be have an investment in making sure [students] don’t know very much, and I tell them ‘The structures of power benefit from your ignorance. They need to hear that.’” Avery, too, wanted his Appalachian students, particularly, to realize “that there’s a real gap between the haves and the have-nots in this country. Part of that is the haves manipulating the system, but part of that is apathy on behalf of the have-nots, and I think [that comes] from what some writers like John O’Brien would call Appalachian fatalism.” Avery’s view of fatalism is that it can be countered by education, saying that his pedagogical theory, personally, is what he tells his students: “if we want our region to be stronger, it starts right here in the classroom, with us working hard to achieve the goals we set before us.”

Avery and Morgan both worked as graduate teaching assistants in university programs where GTAs received a great deal of training in composition theory and pedagogy. Avery's program, particularly, involved weekly meetings with a teaching mentor and several classroom observations each semester. His university used a portfolio grading system in all first year composition courses, but he said that this doesn't translate to the community college experience. "If I had a room full of what we would call 'distinguished students,' maybe a portfolio system would work real well, but not with my students." Morgan's program also included mandatory work in the university writing center, where she developed what she called a "Socratic method of working with students" that emphasized creating a text through discussion and imagination rather than mere error-correction. She added that this dialogic method of teaching is still her current practice, since she conferences with students about their writing several times a semester, always with an eye to the larger issues of organization and audience.

For the other four other respondents, theory "just goes out the window," as one said. "We have to teach the students we have, not the students we wish we had, so we do whatever works." None referenced a particular theory or compositionist in connection with his or her work, but Emerson noted that there is no room in a 7/8 teaching schedule for attempting to develop a working theory of writing. The respondents, including Avery, felt that having a particular pedagogical slant or a preference for a theory of rhetoric or composition is something instructors do at the four-year level, not at community colleges. The perception was that university instructors have more time both for professional development and for conversation with other practitioners. We also need to remember that

four of these respondents trained in English programs that emphasized literature rather than composition or rhetoric. Two of the four did not teach during their graduate years, and the other two taught literature courses.

It is not surprising, then, that five of the six respondents use literature as a springboard in their courses. The one respondent who did not indicate that the VCCS course plans (Appendix B), did not have a literature component, and we will discuss this approach later in the section. Of the other instructors, four of the five use Appalachian or southern literature as the focus of their courses and the fifth uses young adult fiction that is appropriate for students in the ENF courses.

Andy began his teaching career using more traditional novels, like Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but found that students were not particularly interested in those, something that Avery, who teaches at a different college, also noted. Andy then switched to novels like Ron Rash's *Saints at the River*, which resonates with his Appalachian students, he says, because Maggie Glenn, the protagonist in the story, "went to college and then people in her community viewed her differently." Andy went on, "I think that's one of the things students in Appalachia have to contend with." Alex teaches Susan Pfeffer's *Life as We Knew It*, and finds that her ENF3/ENG111 students are genuinely outraged at the relationship of Miranda to her stepmother and the situation the family finds itself in when their normal community becomes dystopian. Alex notes that the Appalachian women in the class will buy the sequel before the class is finished, while the men tend to say "Well, that wasn't terrible." Another of Alex's students told her he had never read a novel before and enjoyed it. "But I'm not planning to read another one."

Avery, on the other hand, had taught Appalachian literature for several semesters and noticed that his students were not enjoying it. He dropped several titles from his course, saying “I worry that there might be an aspect of shame in Appalachian literature. Appalachia is not in vogue where the big picture is concerned in our nation; it’s viewed as being backwards, and I’m afraid that it is [viewed that way] by our younger generation.” Social media and exposure to other, more glamorous and exciting lifestyles seems to have dimmed students’ enthusiasm for their own culture, so Avery has switched to more mainstream novels for class. “At the end of the day, I still need them to learn to be better writers, and if I’m killing out their enthusiasm and motivation in the course [by using Appalachian literature] it hurts.”

Morgan’s belief is that classroom readings should push students to question themselves and their beliefs, so one of the novels she typically assigns is *The Sparrow*, a science-fiction novel by Mary Doria Russell that calls into question beliefs about the morality of intercultural (interplanetary) contact and, indirectly, the goodness of God. Morgan notes that sometimes she questions herself about these choices. “I’ll reread the novel and think, ‘my goodness, do I have the right to ask them to read this?’ But they do well, even if some of them are clearly disturbed by it.” Another novel she has found to be useful with students is *The Other Wes Moore*, a nonfiction account of a Baltimore resident who finds a namesake with a completely different life path. “I’m using that in an English 111 class with the theme ‘Destiny or Choice,’ which has been an interesting though experiment in terms of how much of our life trajectory is preordained and how much of it is what we choose. It’s a very American attitude to believe that [...] the individual is completely in charge of her own

destiny, and Wes really does a fantastic job of illustrating how webs of social connection and social capital are really inextricable from [...] a person's success." Her Appalachian students respond to the "Destiny or Choice" curriculum differently, she said, based on what they believe about themselves. While she did not see Appalachian fatalism as a factor in students' performance as a whole, she noted that students' lack of experience with and exposure to other places and viewpoints tends to limit them in believing that they have only the choices their parents had.

In a particularly poignant anecdote, Morgan recounted driving through the rural communities near her home and said "I had this idea in my mind, but I think I was really unprepared for the isolation and the desolation of some of those places." She said that an hour's drive did not pass a single school, clinic, or grocery store, but she DID see a man collecting water in milk jugs from a mountain stream. "And I thought to myself, well, if you came from here, if your family came from here, [...] what conclusions would you come to about your place in the world and what it meant to be who you were and where you were from? What would you aspire to?" Her experiences have created changes in her pedagogical practices, so that now she tries to expose students to possibilities they might not have considered, always aware that education might be, for them, "a source of diminishment or shame or negligence" instead of an invitation to a brighter world of choices. Their families' and communities' attitudes toward education shape not only her students' dreams, but their *ability* to dream, and for Morgan, literature and reading are ways to kindle that ability, at least in some students. "I don't have a ton of students who are motivated to learn because they are genuine curious about other cultures or the world, or a concept, a discipline,

something like that. [...] But I do think this means something to them, and if they have an aspiration, well, I can work with that.”

Andy and Emerson, however, found students’ *lack* of aspirations to be barriers to any sort of pedagogical interventions. Andy noted that education itself seems to be so problematic for Appalachian students, and that many students “turn their backs on education. ‘I don’t need to read this and understand it, because I’m going to do [factory work] for a living and this is irrelevant.’ And then you don’t invest in yourself.” Emerson noted that in supporting, rather than challenging, the Appalachian culture of the region, the colleges perpetuate the myth that manufacturing and mining jobs will come back. Because the students have not been able to visualize themselves in a specific career or even a particular future, “school, in their minds, is something they can do without. They don’t have a clear picture of what they want to be doing in ten years,” so they have no ambition that would help them get there. Andy calls the detachment from education a “crisis point,” in Appalachia, and adds that the region “has failed to transition, and it’s almost too late. [...] I think education is so key for this region, and again, the behavioral aspect [of Appalachian culture] that doesn’t embrace it is problematic.” He went on to say that as an instructor, his job was not only to deliver content to students, but to connect the content to the students’ lives in ways that would make it meaningful. He wants to deliver a first year composition experience that allows students to “see opportunities for themselves, to be invested in their own futures.”

The actual teaching of writing seemed to take a back seat to the counter-narrative to Appalachian culture that respondents wanted to offer their students. Only one participant,

Morgan, refused to comment on or grade students' work for sentence-level difficulties. The rest admitted to spending more time than they wanted on relatively superficial issues of basic grammar and mechanics. Larger issues, like audience and purpose, were much more difficult to address, since, as Morgan and Alex both said, students don't read, and if they are not regular readers, they have never seen words like "there," "their," and "they're" in context, and don't know what to do with them. Further, not reading leads to an inability to imagine themselves as writing for an audience. They have never BEEN an audience, and in some cases do not have a very clear grasp of what one is. For Alex, teaching *Life As We Knew It*, helping students identify with the novel and its characters is an ongoing struggle, because books seem always to have been written for someone else. "it's written from the perspective of a 16-year-old girl, and some of [the students] really get into it, even the guys, but some are like 'what is this?'" Andy, too, noted that it is sometimes difficult for Appalachian students to see that something might be "for them." He hopes that his choices for readings will connect to some point of students' lives, but acknowledges that he can never be sure where those points of connection are.

Writing pedagogies were much more standardized than reading ones, because the course plans leave little room for variation. Students need to produce a minimum of 20 pages of formal prose, usually in the form of four or five major essays. The one respondent who did not use literature in his course had his students writing in specific rhetorical modes—narrative, description, comparison and contrast, and argumentation. Each of these had readings assigned on the topic—how to write a description, for instance—but the

assignment sequence generally built essays from prompts he provided rather than from readings or discussions.

If we had to create a name for the pedagogies that emerged here, it might be “Pedagogies of Exposure.” All of the respondents wanted to connect their students to their culture, but also to the larger world through literature and discussion, and all felt that the relative isolation of both home communities and habits, like not reading, contribute to students’ lack of success in both writing and college. In order to counteract what every respondent saw as an Appalachian bias against education, five of the six the respondents sought to make education relevant and make writing both useful and expressive.

The sixth, whose interviews, it must be said, reflected discouragement with both students and the system, said that his college’s current climate was not conducive to what he considered a useful education. “You’re not really educating [students], you’re just training them, so from a philosophical standpoint, I have a problem with that personally.” He continued, “I have a problem with the institution buying in so strongly to the idea that we’re just going to do this [credential graduates] because then they can go to work, and that’s not a good way of bringing about success for our students, but that’s where we are.” This respondent also felt that his institution contributed to the exploitation of resources in his community, because it was not focused on civic or liberal education, but only narrowly interested in credentialing workers. “The whole thing is about driving up tax revenue, so that flies in the face of everything we know about solid education. It certainly wasn’t what Jefferson was about when he invented this system of mentoring in public education. We’re on the losing end here.” This respondent felt that his pedagogy was being dictated by his

school's administration and that he had very little latitude in designing courses with components of social justice or cultural awareness. He was also the only respondent who spoke under conditions of anonymity because his department faces cuts, and he does not wish to be among them.

### **Resources and Professional Development**

The feeling of the anonymous respondent that he could not speak freely for fear of being considered surplus to requirements was not an anomaly. Declining enrollments were an issue for respondents across the board along with the insecurity that comes from shrinking budgets and the relative expense of full-time faculty vs. adjunct faculty. All of the departments in this study have declined in full-time members in the last ten years, most being reduced by half, and one by two-thirds. It is probably not surprising, then, that none of the faculty members interviewed had strong theoretical underpinnings that were part of his or her daily classroom practice. One even joked, "If I'd known you were going to ask a theory question, I would have read up beforehand!" Avery said "That's a hard question, because I'll be honest with you, the theory just kind of goes out the window for me. Over the years, I've learned to just simplify the act [of teaching]." Morgan said, at the very end of the interview, "Oh! I should have talked about *Pedagogy of the Oppressed!*" She went on to say that she tries to use her semester-long themes to give students the idea that literacy is power, but in some classes, issues arise that make thematic discussions difficult. "They're very invested in this idea that there is a right way and a wrong way (to write and think), and please just tell me how you want me to do this." Independent thought can be difficult to

encourage, and she has noted that students have not been given much leeway for such thought in their high school or community experience.

The two instructors who referenced theory specifically—Avery and Morgan—were also the two who had had significant training as GTAs in graduate school. None of the other respondents referenced theory at all, unless it was the larger socioeconomic theories of exploitation and resource banditry that have characterized Appalachia in the past. Theories of writing were scarce on the ground.

Resources were also scarce, although the respondents' stated resource needs were modest. Morgan, Alex, and Andy have taken advantage of several VCCS programs to do Master Teacher Seminars and Morgan participated in a faculty exchange with Ghana in 2012. These programs are funded through the System Office in Richmond and are not part of local college's budgets.

For the rest of the respondents, the question about resources elicited some puzzlement. Avery ties his understanding of Appalachia to history and would like some more education on the history of the people groups that populated the region during America's westward expansion. "I know a lot about where I come from," he said, "but I'd like to understand, say, the Welsh. There are a lot of students with Welsh ancestry, and I'd like to know more about that. I know almost nothing." Alex, having come from a secondary school background, thinks the most important resource for her student would be "a classroom set of books, so [students] wouldn't have to buy their own. I don't want a reader, but a set of *The Little Seagull Handbook* would be great; I'd love to have that." Alex would also like to see smaller class sizes and embedded tutors in every section, not just ENF courses. Embedded

tutors are an extra pair of eyes and hands, and an extra brain in the classroom, she said, and they can often help students with “rudimentary” writing issues while the rest of the class does something else.

The only other resources mentioned were smaller class sizes.<sup>5</sup> Several respondents would like to work with smaller classes or fewer classes. One respondent said that his college allows 30-35 students in online ENG 111 sections, even though the online sections are actually more difficult for instructors than face-to-face sections. Morgan said “we know that feedback is important, but it’s hard to give good feedback to a big class.” She has been doing conference grading, however that, too, is constrained by the large numbers of students in some sections. In Chapter Six, we will discuss what this relative deficiency not only of resources, but of the desire for resources, might mean in terms of attitude and performance.

### **Some Conclusions**

In the interview sessions, respondents spoke freely about the frustrations of working within the confines of Appalachian culture as they understand it. Because the responses were, to a large extent, unprompted, they represent a wide range of beliefs and the contradictions inherent in those. Where Emerson sees laziness, Alex sees hard workers. Where Avery and Andy see fatalism, Alex sees realistic appraisals of students’ chances in the real world. Everyone saw familism as a bad thing to a greater or lesser degree, but the native Appalachians were more willing to grant space to that set of beliefs in order to keep

students from feeling that college was diametrically opposed to their family's integrity and value system.

The range of attitudes demonstrates just how complex the idea of "Appalachia" is for those who live and work in this narrow slice of the region, but it must be noted that with the exception of Avery, none of the participants currently identifies as Appalachian themselves other than by ancestry. This tends to foster an observational viewpoint of "outsider" rather than one who can speak to the culture from within. Everyone, including Avery, referred to Appalachian students with third person pronouns—"they" struggle with standard academic English; "they" possess certain characteristics that come from Appalachian culture. The concept that we who live in the region might share some of these characteristics is not one that comes readily to mind.

Another linguistic component that emerged from every interview was the tendency to use a kind of "lowering" language for students and their cultures. Not only were their abilities and ambitions "low," but they "refuse change" and "don't want to be 'educated.'" Students' experiences were "limited," and "provincial." They "lack motivation" and have "no connection to a future." Their abilities are "poor," and their preparation for college work is "woefully inadequate." The communities and schools, especially the K-12 schools<sup>6</sup> that many students attended, are "substandard" and "unambitious" for students or themselves. These terms will be more fully unpacked in Chapter Six, as they are useful for coding, but they reveal a cultural viewpoint that places the college and its members, culture, and conventions on one side, and Appalachian students, their families, and their home cultures on the other side of a gulf that seems to be one of *quality*. The college is the

repository and dispensary of knowledge and skills, while the student is the passive, humble, and grateful recipient of the Same. No respondent referenced what he or she learned from students themselves, or what abilities and experiences students bring to enrich the classroom. When asked about their best moments with students, respondents referenced “the lightbulb going off,” or “that ‘aha’ moment,” when students come to an epiphany or understanding of some sort. Reciprocity was not mentioned, only lack.

In terms of composition, or students’ writing abilities, the language was similar. Their abilities were generally “poor” or “substandard.” Their writing reflected an “unsophisticated” world view and was riddled with sentence level “errors” that deviated from standard academic English. The students were too quick to “write the way they speak” and needed to “get away from the vernacular” in their written work. Students are “voiceless” and emerge from a “voiceless culture,” and this lack of belief in their own experiences has led them to “not trust their own opinions,” and “not be able to accurately locate main ideas or topic sentences.”

Of course, there were positive notes as well, although these did not make up the bulk of the conversations. Alex described Appalachian students as “hardworking and humble” and “sincerely interested in improving.” She also noted that students were also “respectful” and “quick to accept correction.” They are “realistic” in their awareness of their abilities and in some cases, of their preparation for college. They admit that “high school didn’t teach us anything,” and are willing to ask for extra help because of that lack of preparation.

On a balance, however, the interview data show that Appalachian students do not have the privilege of neutrality when they come into the classrooms. Most of the

respondents were quick to note that they always know who their Appalachian students are, even if they don't self-identify, because of their speech patterns, writing ability, and experience. Several respondents referenced particular communities in their service areas as having larger deficits than other areas. With regard to this, the communities with K-12 schools fared worst in popular opinion. Because of their small size, and because students tended to have the same faculty members over and over during the course of their primary and secondary education, the schools' reputations within the VCCS are tainted with allusions to favoritism, nepotism, and grade inflation. In addition, two respondents said that the faculty in K-12 schools were not as well-prepared as, or as "good" as faculty in the secondary schools in the service areas. Emerson noted that K-12 faculty seemed to be "mailing it in," where teaching was concerned, leaving students who wanted to attend college woefully underprepared and inexperienced with college-level writing. Avery said that homeschooled students from the K-12 school district outperformed their publicly educated peers on every metric and wondered why more parents in the area did not choose homeschooling over the local school. The teachers there, he said, were not very well educated themselves, and shared the community view that a high school diploma should suffice in most employment situations appropriate for their students.

This chapter highlights respondents' *perceptions* of Appalachian culture, and we need to remember that those are not necessarily reflections of reality, either in the colleges themselves or in the communities they serve. In Chapter Six, we will examine some of the surprising ways difference between perception and practice plays out in the numerical data,

and how that data might become the impetus for further study and collaboration among first-year-composition faculty.

**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup>In order to protect the respondents in this study from repercussions at their particular schools, some personal data has been elided. While gender has been preserved, since the respondents were evenly split between male and female, race has been removed from the discussion, not because it is not important, but because it would immediately identify the one faculty member of color in the four schools studied. This highlights a larger systemic problem that is beyond the scope of this study but that definitely deserves detailed attention.

<sup>2</sup> The Virginia Community College System does not have tenure as it is construed at four-year institutions. It does, however, have “long-term contract” positions that are evaluated every five years via a portfolio of teaching, college service, professional development, and community involvement components.

<sup>3</sup> This is also true of non-Appalachian students, and the disconnect between “school life” and “work life,” or “home life” has been documented by Nathan Shepley, Todd Snyder, and others.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Davies and others have noted that Appalachian fatalism in Southwest Virginia comes from the influence of the Primitive (used in the sense of “original”) Baptist Church, an entity that believes strongly in a rigid Calvinism that precludes human free will. Primitive Baptist congregations also believe in a strict separation of genders and reinforces strict gender roles for men and women. While the religion itself is far less commonly practiced

than in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the attitudes it fosters have become ingrained in Appalachian culture so that people of other religious persuasions may hold these beliefs without realizing from whence they come.

<sup>5</sup> First-year composition courses are capped at 24 students, however when sections are cancelled due to low enrollment, the caps are sometimes raised in other sections to allow those students to register.

<sup>6</sup> Many rural communities in Southwest Virginia do not have separate schools for elementary, middle, and high school students. Instead, these are combined into one building, sharing faculty and resources. Damascus, Rural Retreat, Troutdale, and until recently, Fries and Whitetop are communities with K-12 schools.

## Chapter Five: The Canary in the Data Mine

### Introduction and Preliminary Findings

In addition to the qualitative discussion in Chapter Four, an important component of this study involves the investigation of quantitative data regarding student success in the Appalachian region. To that end, we have three important sets of data. The first is the qualitative interview data we have already seen in Chapter Four. This chapter digs more deeply into that data and looks at the qualified analysis of respondents' language in interviews coded by myself and an independent coder. Finally, the aggregate student data obtained from all three schools in the study is presented to determine how these students have fared in composition classes (measured by grades) and in college as a whole (measured by four-year completion rates). As we said earlier, Critical Regionalism provides a lens for data, because it allows us to examine the ways the students in the region fare precisely because they are in the region and participate in the region's culture and economy. The emplaced-ness of Appalachian students, and the emplaced-ness that their professors attribute to them, are at the heart of this study. While other factors—poverty, first-generation status—can contribute to students' failure to complete their coursework, these factors exist in both the Appalachian and non-Appalachian groups, and in nearly the same proportions (with the exception of Montgomery County, where the presence of Virginia Tech affects student demographic data).

Our hypothesis is that students from areas traditionally considered agricultural Appalachian graduate at lower rates and have more instances of unsatisfactory

performance in first-year composition courses. Our null hypothesis is that there will be no statistically significant relationship between these populations. What we discovered in the data is that there is a strong and direct correlation between Appalachian communities and graduation rates, with those rates hovering between 10-18% lower than the graduation rates for non-Appalachian students.

Perhaps the most interesting and surprising finding, however, is that contrary to expectations, the successful completion rates in first year composition are identical for the two groups, Appalachian and non, demonstrating perhaps that despite the demonstrably negative bias against Appalachian language among instructors and the definitively negative lens through which instructors' view Appalachia, individual students are able to be successful in composition classes even if they do not go on to be successful in college. In the total data set, 68.9% of students earned a grade of C or higher, while students from Appalachian communities earned grades of C or higher 69.9% of the time. The 1% difference in the two groups is not statistically significant.

The lack of difference in these two groups is a crucial finding, precisely because the difference, but we must qualify it by saying that when cross-referenced with graduation rates, there is a demonstrable difference—93% of non-Appalachian students who are successful in composition courses graduate, but only 60% of students in the Appalachia group with successful composition grades graduate. There is clearly a barrier for Appalachian students in graduation, however it is not first-year composition, and the exploration of that barrier calls for further study. Another important qualification is that the course completion rates were only equal to non-Appalachian rates when we aggregated

data for every community. When we analyzed the data for the eight largest communities who contribute students to the community college system, a different picture appears, one in which composition grades are much less satisfactory. These eight communities will be outlined below in a separate section because they contain over half of the agricultural Appalachian students, and yet they have successful completion rates between 10-30% lower than the average of the entire group.

The final section of this chapter will discuss the findings in the interviews themselves with composition faculty at all three schools. These data were coded independently with an agreement factor (presented in a later table) of 87%. The coding serves to quantify in a replicable way the tone of the language used to discuss Appalachian students, language, and culture, and to include references to standard academic English as the *lingua franca* of college, particularly of the first-year composition program.

### **Discussion of Instructor Data**

The second data set is the data from respondents' interviews, coded to determine the number of negative and positive references to Appalachian culture and language, the number of specific references to Appalachian students, and the number of references to standard academic English as either "standard," which is the neutral position, or "correct," or one of its synonyms, which indicates a belief in a single grammatical standard. Because "negativity," and "positivity" can be slippery concepts, the coders independently developed indices of key words and phrases that indicate positionality, and these were used in the final coding. The overall correlation of first coder to second coder was 87.4%, which was above

the target of 85% as per standard research practice. The only exceptions lay in the area of negative comments about standard academic English, where the difference between two instances and three had to be discussed and the coding changed to reflect differing interpretations of the dataset. There were four total disagreements, and these were resolved by recoding these areas independently after refining the coding definitions, which brought the number of disagreements down to two. The text for the coding was obtained by transcribing the relevant portions of the interviews. It is crucial to note here that my second coder, working independently with the transcript data, also arrived at these categories and devised a method of tabulation that was identical to my own, indicating that the correlations are strong and fairly easily identified.

The process for coding began in marking each interview transcript any items that seemed relevant to this study of Appalachian-ness. After an initial read-through, I went back and coded everything that referred to Appalachia in some way, either directly or by a direct inference from other material in the section, and also everything that referred to pedagogy and pedagogical practices. The results of this initial coding were that several overarching themes emerged from the data, and after these were labeled and combined, to give the categories referenced in the data above: Appalachian students, Appalachian culture, Appalachian language and dialect, and standard academic English.

The preliminary result of the coding revealed that 79.5% of the references to Appalachian students themselves were negatively worded or had negative connotations. Participants also exhibited even more negative language about Appalachian culture, with 88.0% of the respondents' references being negative. When a specific Appalachian community was

referenced by name, those references were overwhelmingly (95.6%) negative. Finally, all of the respondents at some point used “good,” or “correct” when referencing standard academic English, and only 30% of the comments about SAE could be considered negative, all of these coming from the same respondent who, while also using the term “correct” in 19 instances, was the only participant to mention that standard academic English is only one of many Englishes and as such is only contextually “correct.” The numeric results of the coding are presented in the following tables, demonstrating the number of times respondents used positive and negative terms in their responses.

#### **Instructors’ Responses About Students and Culture**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Positive Responses</b>	<b>Negative Responses</b>
Appalachian Students	10	39
Appalachian Culture	8	59

#### **Instructors’ Responses About Appalachian English and Standard Academic English**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Positive Responses</b>	<b>Negative Responses</b>
Standard Academic English	19	8
Appalachian Englishes	3	19

The coding agreement for data are presented in the following table. The goal for coding was 85% agreement, although in most cases it was much higher than that. The last

row of the table expresses agreement in terms of % agreement, with anything above 85 representing the ideal fit. Some markers could not achieve that number because there were very few indicators found by either coder for a specific theme. Thus, where one coder found three markers and the other two, the difference will be 33.3% no matter how often the coding is revisited. Since the interview questions did not directly address standard academic English or Appalachian English other than as part of the culture, those areas had proportionally fewer markers and therefore higher percentages of disagreement, even though the numbers of markers were very similar. The terms used for coding follow in another table and are the terms used to determine the counts in each.

	Appalachian Students		Appalachian Culture		Standard Ac. Eng		Appalachian Englishes	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
1st Coder Raw Count	9	39	9	56	20	7	2	19
2nd Coder Raw Count	10	39	7	62	16	9	3	19
% Difference	10.0	0.0	12.5	5.0	11.1	12.5	20.0	0.0

*Figure 1 Agreement of first and second coders using terms found in Appendix D.*

Within these categories, then, the determination had to be made whether the words, phrases, statements, and sections could be considered positive or negative in their intention, since the study ultimately seeks to examine what attitudes underlie instructors' work. Because "positive" and "negative" can be slippery concepts, specific words became touchstones for determining which a particular statement was. Generally speaking, the context of the speakers' statements left little doubt about the positivity or negativity of a particular phrase. Most were unequivocal: "Their abilities are poor," "they have lower academic ability," "they are just so low in their ability." In every case, the "they" referred to

is Appalachian students as an aggregate group, and the abilities are those required of first-year composition.

A complete list of terms can be found in Appendix D, but the following table includes the most common positive and negative indicators for the categories, each one appearing in two or more interviews. The coding was based on the terms in the complete list, but interestingly enough, the positive terms in each category are here in their entirety, since there were many fewer items in those categories. The total number of mentions for the most common terms are listed.

Category	Positive	Negative
Appalachian students	Disciplined (3) Does well (2) Embrace heritage (3) Hardworking (at jobs) (2) Hardworking (in class) (2) Humble (4) In touch with their roots (2) Not entitled (2) Respectful (2)	Ashamed (of previous writing experience) (3) Can't oppose their families (6) Can't question their beliefs (3) Don't prioritize class attendance (4) Don't read (3) Isolated (2) Lack (ability) (2) Lack (curiosity) (2) Lack (initiative) (3) Lack (motivation) (4) Lazy (5) Poor (6) Reluctant students (4)
Appalachian Culture	Family oriented (5) Respectful of heritage (4) Aware of ancestry (2) Has a sense of rootedness (2)	Believes that things don't change (4) Desolate/desolation (4) Discourages higher education (5) Educated people are evil (4) Getting above your raising (6) Gives up (4) Isolated/Isolation (6) Neglect/neglected (5) Poor (6) Shame (4) Suspicious of education (4)
SAE	Blemish-free (2) Correct (6) Correcting grammatical Errors (6) Fixed errors (6) Good (5)	Just one of many grammars (1) Standards-based environment is Unfortunate (1)

	Graded for grammar (4) Grammatically correct (5) Of the highest order (2) Pure (2)	
Appalachian English	Don't judge students by speech (2) It's okay to speak at Home (2)	Has to change (5) Holds (students) back (4) Incorrect (6) Looks bad (6) Lots of errors (4) Remove dialect from papers (3) Twangy (1)

*Figure 2 Main Terms From Interviews*

Descriptive remarks that contained no weighted language were considered neutral and were not coded. Often these were biographical statements by Appalachian natives who described their home and family life as it connects to Appalachia. One example of this is a respondent's statement that "I grew up in as working-class of a family as one possibly could in the coalfields of Southern West Virginia." While clearly material to a discussion of Appalachian-ness, the factual nature of the statement is neither positive nor negative and both coders independently excluded such statements, although they are important in the qualitative chapter for situating a particular respondent's life and work. While respondents tended to be positive in their comments about their own families, they also included negative remarks, like one respondent's father's intense dislike of his children's choices in non-Appalachian music. These references were coded as negative, especially since they referenced culture.

## **A Discussion of the Faculty Respondent Data**

The remaining statements indicate, as we discussed in Chapter Four, that the attitudes of the respondents to Appalachian students and culture are overwhelmingly negative. Appalachian students were most frequently characterized in two ways: lacking ability in writing and reading, and lacking motivation to do college-level work. The latter category also includes the related belief that college is not a priority for Appalachian students. These types of remarks accounted for about one-third of the total responses. Another significant percentage of remarks, about 20% of the total, laid the blame for lack of writing and reading ability both on the students' secondary schools, particularly K-12 schools, as we've said, and another 20% of remarks placed blame on the students themselves, who are described as "reluctant" to code-switch or to allow themselves to be involved with reading material that "might not meet their family's approval." All of the respondents referenced in some way the belief that Appalachian students are unmotivated by college. The respondents' remarks indicating that they (the respondents) believe that students do not believe that college can substantially alter their economic, social, and cultural prospects accounted for another 15% of the total in the Appalachian Students category. The remaining responses about students were mostly in individual anecdotes about poor student performance and the unwillingness of student to commit to the kind of work and attendance expected in first-year composition courses.

The positive remarks, which were much fewer in number, mostly discussed students' perceived characteristics and willingness to be taught. Sixty percent of these remarks referenced "good manners," "humility," "respectfulness," and "relief" at finding their

composition professors less forbidding than they had expected. All of these remarks came from the Same respondent. One other respondent, who had the other 40% of the positive comments, discussed students' amenability in class and their willingness to do whatever was asked of them, out of duty if not enthusiasm.

Respondents were much harder on Appalachian culture. Comments about cultural laziness or fatalism were involved in 40% of these responses. The respondents attributed to students a cultural belief that college represents "getting above your raising" and as such would be unhealthy and unhelpful for the Appalachian community as a whole. Four of the six referenced "getting above your raising" as the way Appalachian families control family members, and three of the four used it both to discuss the acquisition of education and socioeconomic mobility out of the working class. One (Appalachian) respondent used the phrase to describe Appalachian fatalism, saying that working to bring oneself out of poverty might be seen by family members as an unwillingness to share the poverty that past generations have grappled with. To "get above your raising" in this sense is to refuse to participate in the cycle of poverty and therefore to somehow deny the familial character that has been built by such suffering. A further use of the term arose with one respondent who said that a student's family said "Look at you, getting above your raising," when she went to college because she was violating the family's expectations for women. The student was told explicitly "by her mother, her aunt, her uncles" that she had a duty to marry and have children, not attend college and pursue some (to them) largely irrelevant career.

Markers about education as it concerns Appalachian students and culture made up another 40% of these comments. The respondents expressed the belief that most

Appalachian students see education as a tool at best and a threat at worst. Respondents believe that Appalachian families think that college itself is “evil” because education “creates shades of grey when everything should be black or white. If it’s not this, it’s this. You can’t wrestle with the stuff in the middle.” The theme in many of the responses was that the region’s inability to “embrace education” has led to “cycles of exploitation,” “shortsightedness,” and “failure to transition.” Education, all respondents felt, would be an important healing step, if not a cure, to Appalachia’s economic and depopulation woes. One respondent likened the resistance to education as “not treating cancer. If you ignore it, it will kill you.” Two respondents voiced the belief that education improves character, one saying that college makes a student “a better version” of himself or herself. The second noted that education was the only hopeful force in Appalachia, and the region will not be able to “better itself” without committing to higher education and shedding its fears of what education will do to its young people.

The very few positive comments about Appalachian culture, fewer than ten in number, all referenced loyalty as the major virtue in most communities and families. In some cases it was loyalty to family occupations and roles or to family land, and in others it was loyalty to traditions within the larger community, including religious traditions. One respondent spoke of a “web of connection that is clearly meaningful,” but not readily accessible to outsiders.

Language forms part of the barrier between Appalachian students and their culture and the academy. Virtually all of the references to SAE were positive; the negative markers were so coded because they either disprivileged SAE as the “only correct” English, or they

referenced standard academic English as a barrier between Appalachian students and success in first-year composition. All of the speakers at some point referenced academic speech and writing as “correct,” or “error-free.” Participants unanimously indicated their belief that students’ inclusion of dialect speech was erroneous and two respondents said that much of their grading time was spent “correcting errors” in grammar and word choice that were markers of dialect speech. A third respondent said that students with “many grammatical errors” were often referred to the writing center for work with a tutor to remove dialect markers and traditionally Appalachian verb features. Another respondent said that he allows students to use dialect in his creative writing classes, “but only as dialogue. The prose between the [dialogic] sentences had better be correct.” Every respondent voiced the opinion that standard academic English was professionally and academically necessary, and in the absence of any sort of leading question, no marker indicated a belief in a rhetorical use of dialect or alternative Englishes.

Since no question in the interview set specifically mentioned Appalachian English, there were fewer markers that specifically addressed either its spoken or written forms. When those references occurred, however, 86.3% of them were negative, some very strongly so. One respondent said that he “tolerated” Appalachian English in his students’ speech, but expected their written work to be “error-free.” Another commented on the “Appalachian drawl, [that students use while] looking at the floor and mumbling.” The positive markers were both in reference to code-switching, which was seen as the only appropriate way to navigate first-year composition. In the first instance, the respondent remarked that “when I’m in my group of ‘Appalachian’ friends and family, I turn the

professor off. I'm going to turn to 'ain'ts" and "y'alls" and all that stuff." But, he goes on to say, in the professoriate, and by extension in the world of college, those language markers are not appropriate and have to be changed in order to allow the speaker or writer to be successful. The second person said that in class it is important "to be upfront about code-switching and that the forms or language are differently valued in an artificial way [...] so you have to master more than one dialect," and standard academic English is just a dialect that happens to be required by college. This respondent also mentioned that academic writing required a "formal" register for both professors and students, and standard academic English was the language that communicated this formality. The expectations, she said, are the same for students and faculty when it comes to language. Respondents indicated that this means both spoken and written language, although spoken language could be less formal in certain contexts. Four of the respondents said they identified Appalachian students by accent or (spoken) language use, but none offered examples of specific language markers.

In terms of both language and culture, most respondents used the word "change" to describe students' relationships to written or spoken English. No marker pointed to changing the approach to academic English, but only to changing students' home English to match that of the academy. In addition to "changing" the ways they write and speak, respondents said students needed to "let go" of Appalachian vernacular patterns and "old ideas" that are no longer of service. Students' language "can't be informal, can't use slang," Language use has to be "of the highest order" because the stakes are so high. Students

must learn to “consider the audience. Who’s going to read this, and what will they think of you when they do?”

### **Appalachian Students and Graduation Rates**

The following table is a brief overview of the student data. The total number of records indicates all students who took first year composition courses at any of the three colleges for the period 2013-17. Of the 15,757 records were returned that met this criteria, however many of those records were students co-enrolled at one of the college from home zip codes far outside the region. The total number of in-region students identified by home zip code can be found in the “Regional Students” column, and this group includes students who are co-enrolled in Virginia Tech and Radford University, as well as students in counties where urban populations include large numbers of non-Appalachian residents. Smaller, rural communities make up the data sent for the final column, students who are at least Appalachian in their communities of origin.

Total # of Records	Regional Students	Appalachian Students
15,757	4,745	1,994

*Figure 3 Breakdown of Data*

In order to verify our data, we used the Chi-Square test to obtain p-values that determine the likelihood of our null hypothesis being verified. The following table shows the results of the test and our confidence in our data. The degree of freedom merely indicates how many numbers in the grid are independent, and since we were testing a binary, the presence of one value automatically determines the presence of the other. The returned p-value of .001 indicates that there will be a correlation between students’ graduation rates

and their residence in Appalachian communities. The lower the p-value, the more likely it is that there is a correlation between our variables. (The alpha-level we are using here is .05, which is the lowest degree of uncertainty we are willing to accept. A p-value of .05 means that there is a 95% chance that our null hypothesis is incorrect.)

	Value	Degree of Freedom	p-value
Pearson Chi-Square	19.478	1	.001
Number of Valid Cases	15,533		

*Figure 4 Chi-Square Test for Appalachian Region and Graduation from Two-Year Program*

We can say definitively that there is a strong correlation between rurality and graduation and completion rates. Graduation rates are low for students across the Southwest Virginia portion of the VCCS, averaging 32.9% for the three schools in the study (Impact 1). Data readily available from the VCCS indicates that graduation rates for all students, regardless of community of origin, are 43% for Wytheville, 29.8% for New River, and 25.9% for Virginia Highlands (Cohort 1). The composite graduation rate for students from the Appalachian areas served by these schools is 18%, an appreciable difference of 14.9%. We will discuss the limitations of this data in a moment, however the stark difference indicates that Appalachian students are under-performing in community colleges as compared to their more urban and suburban peers, and further, that they are doing so consistently, despite their colleges' overall graduation rates.

One explanatory note we may need here is that Wytheville Community College, with its graduation rate of 43%, is one of the highest in the system; however this may be attributed to the emphasis at WCC on certificates in its physical therapy aide and dental

hygiene programs, which turn out large numbers of highly motivated graduates. WCC has recently reduced its transfer offerings to one major, general studies, in an effort to concentrate its efforts on two-year terminal degrees.

The following table compares the numbers of students enrolled from each community and the numbers of students who actually go on to graduate. In many of the smaller communities, like Ararat, the numbers are equal, since the one student who attended from this community graduated. Seven communities show no graduations, because while several students attended, none of them were able to earn a degree within the four years of this study.

**Percentage of Students Graduating By Community**

	Total # of Students	Students Graduating	Percentage of Students Graduating
Ararat	1	1	100
Atkins	8	2	25
Austinville	10	1	10
Barren Springs	4	0	0
Bastian	4	2	50
Bland	3	2	67
Cana	2	0	0
Catawba	3	0	0
Ceres	7	0	0
Check	15	2	13
Chilhowie	157	25	16
Crockett	2	0	0
Damascus	68	13	19
Draper	42	10	24
Dugspur	5	2	40
Eggleston	5	2	40
Elk Creek	1	1	100
Elliston	34	3	9

Emory	1	0	0
Fancy Gap	3	0	0
Floyd	115	23	20
Fries	2	2	100
Galax	13	2	15
Glade Spring	151	18	12
Hillsville	25	6	24
Hiwassee	39	9	23
Independence	4	3	75
Indian Valley	10	1	10
Ivanhoe	3	1	33
Laurel Fork	1	1	100
Marion	141	22	16
Max Meadows	17	3	18
MCoy	1	0	0
Meadows of Dan	5	1	20
Meadowview	143	31	22
Mendota	16	4	25
Mouth of Wilson	2	0	0
Narrows	70	14	20
New River	1	1	100
Newbern	3	0	0
Newport	24	6	25
Parrott	9	0	0
Pearisburg	103	30	29
Pembroke	62	15	24
Pilot	28	8	29
Pulaski	281	40	14
Rich Creek	24	6	25
Riner	76	9	12
Ripplemead	13	5	38
Rocky Gap	2	0	0
Rural Retreat	3	0	0
Saltville	133	22	17
Shawsville	19	4	21
Staffordsville	5	3	60
Stuart	1	0	0
Sugar Grove	7	1	14
Troutdale	5	0	0
Whitetop	3	1	33
Willis	34	6	18
Woodlawn	5	1	20
Woolwine	1	0	0

Wytheville	18	3	17
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*Figure 5 Comparison of Student Enrollment and Graduation Rates*

In an effort to compare like data, this data set has excluded a number of factors that could affect the results. These will be addressed later, but the dataset excluded urban and university communities that were likely to have large non-native populations. It also excluded dual enrollment high school students. While the study originally included data from Southwest Community College in Richlands, this data ultimately had to be removed because the school's data was collected in such a way that it was impossible to remove the coal-producing communities and community sub-sets from the larger dataset, and SWCC includes its dual enrollment data with grade reporting. This brings up the important point that individual colleges do report data differently. While every attempt was made to apply filters across the colleges, there is a margin for error that cannot be entirely eradicated. In addition to variations in dual enrollment reporting, all three of these schools share service areas, most notably being the way Smyth County is divided between Virginia Highlands and Wytheville, and Carroll County students are equally likely to attend New River or Wytheville. Secondly, some students will be enrolled in two colleges simultaneously, and they may show up twice in the dataset, although that would be a statistically insignificant number. Students in non-degree transfer programs who do not take first-year composition have been excluded, and this has affected data for Wytheville most significantly, since comparatively few of its students are in transfer programs. After all exclusions were applied, I am confident that each data point in the set (a zip code reference), represents a program-placed student who has declared a major and been enrolled in a specific degree curriculum.<sup>1</sup>

## Discussion of Student Data: Graduation Rates

A request for graduation and first-year composition completion rates for students by zip code returned 14,175 records for students at three colleges in a four year period from 2013 to 2017. Of those student records, 4,745 met the criteria for Appalachian rurality set out above, meaning that the students' home zip codes were within the seven-county region of the study, and they did not come from one of the excluded communities in Figure 3. As noted previously, communities likely to have large numbers of non-native residents were excluded. Most of these are urban communities like the cities of Bristol and Radford that, while they are regional hubs for natives, also have universities that bring in significant non-local populations. This is also true of the towns of Blacksburg and Christiansburg, where many Virginia Tech students and faculty are located. One Christiansburg zip code WAS included because it is a very rural area and meets the criteria for local populations. The town of Dublin was excluded because a statistically significant number of the students enrolled at NRCC used the town as a secondary address, indicating a primary address elsewhere in the state. Dublin is also the industrial center of Pulaski County and attracts non-local residents in that way. The town of Wytheville also has a large non-native population, even though the number of individual records from the town itself was fairly small, probably due to the prevalence of dual-enrollment classes as a means to non-degree transfer.

Zip Code	Locality	Reason for Exclusion
24211 24212	Abingdon (town)	Regional commerce and industry center Presence of local universities (King, ETSU) Presence of local college (Emory & Henry)
24060 24061 24062	Blacksburg (town)	Presence of local university (VT) Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine
24201	Bristol	Regional commerce and industry center

24202	(city)	Presence of local universities (King, ETSU)
24073	Christiansburg (town)	Regional commerce and industry center Presence of local universities (RU, VT)
24084	Dublin (town)	Presence of Volvo North America Presence of local university (RU)
24141	Radford (city)	Presence of local university (RU)
24382	Wytheville (town)	Regional population center Transportation hub

*Figure 6 Zip code exclusions and rationale*

After these communities were excluded, the dataset for the region included 2,007 students representing 62 rural communities in Southwest Virginia. Some of these communities had fewer than five students attending community college. Ararat, as we have said, had only one student enrolled in a community college for the entire four-year period, despite having a population of 2,622 people in the 2010 census. Small sample sizes like this meant that some communities graduation rates, expressed as percentages, are artificially high or low and that, therefore, the numeric data is more important. The common factor here is that most of these graduation rates fall well below the 33% average for the three schools, indicating that Appalachian rurality does indeed play a role in graduation rates. The areas with the highest graduation rates contributed only a handful—in most cases fewer than five—students, which can inflate the perception of student success. In order to obtain a more clear picture of graduation rates in the region, we look at the eight largest communities, whose total numbers of students and their graduation rates are juxtaposed below.

Locality	Total Students	Number of Graduates	Percentage of Students Graduating <sup>1</sup>
Chilhowie	157	25	15
Floyd	115	23	20
Glade Spring	151	18	12
Marion	141	22	14
Meadowview	143	31	21
Pearisburg	103	30	29
Pulaski	281	40	14
Saltville	133	22	16
<sup>1</sup> In four years			

*Figure 7 Communities contributing the largest numbers of graduates*

These eight communities were the home locations of 1,224 students, 61% of the total number of students in the study area. These students graduated at an average rate of 17.2%, however several communities fell far short of this mark. The Glade Spring area of Smyth County had the lowest overall graduation rate at 12%, while the towns of Pulaski and Marion had graduation rates of only 14 percent each. Of these communities, Pearisburg alone matched the 32.4% graduation rate of New River Community College, where most of these students attend. The relative success of Giles County students may be explained by the existence of the Access to Community College Education (ACCE, pronounced “Ace”) program that has been operating at Giles County High School for six years. ACCE gives qualifying students two years’ paid tuition provided they graduate within those two years. These students must also maintain a 2.5 GPA and perform 80 hours of community service annually. A student who drops out or fails to maintain either the GPA requirement or the community service requirement is dropped from the program and required to repay his or her tuition. The combination of student responsibility and community partnership has been

effective in moving students to graduation, although that is a side-issue for this study and certainly an opportunity for further study.

### Discussion of Student Data: Successful First-Year Composition Completion Rates

Our Chi-Square test for student grade data was less conclusive than the data for graduation rates, with good reason, as you will see. Our null hypothesis is that there will be no statistical difference between Appalachian and non-Appalachian pass-fail rates. The p-values returned on the test for this data were .119, and this indicates that there is no difference between these populations. In fact, as later graphs will show, there is virtually no difference in the middle grades of C-D, but we do find an important difference in A-F grades that the Chi-Square test does not reveal.

	Value	Degree of Freedom	p-value
Pearson Chi-Square	2.430	1	.119
Number of Valid Cases	15,533		

Figure 8 Chi-Square Test for Agricultural Appalachian Regions and Pass/Fail in College Composition I.

The successful completion (passing) rate for all students in the 62 communities was 65.3%, while the success rate for non-Appalachian students (the total dataset minus the students in the Appalachian zip codes) was 70.6%. Success, in this instance, is defined as earning a transferrable grade of C or higher. Grades of D, F, and W were counted as unsuccessful. There were a very small number of I grades that were considered F grades, since within the data frame of the study, 2012-17, the I grades should have converted to Fs. Even considering the statistically insignificant finding in the data subset, a deeper dive into

the data reveals a measurable difference in the pass rates for Appalachian and non-Appalachian students.

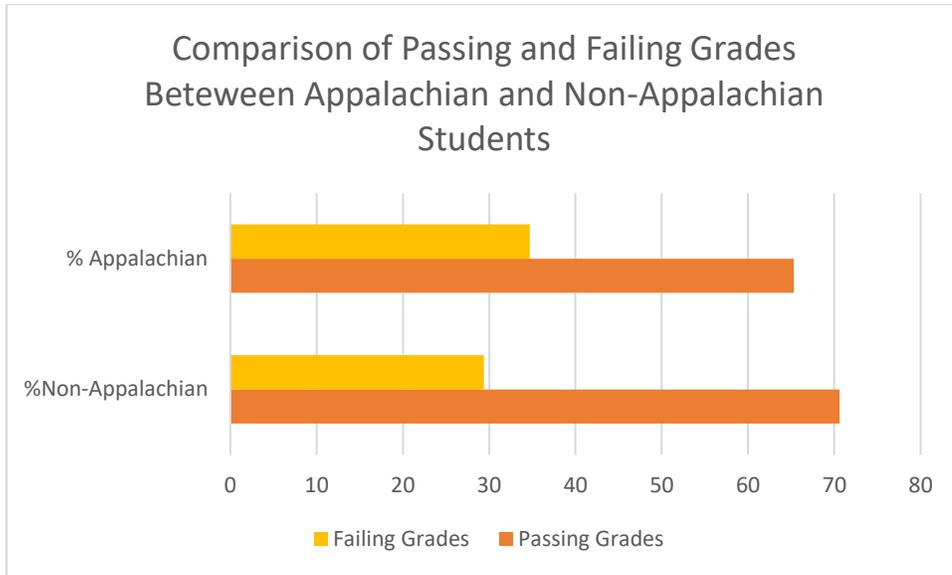


Figure 5 Demonstrates the difference in pass/fail rates for non-Appalachian and Appalachian students in the dataset.

This Same data can be broken down into a more illustrative view that indicates where the differences actually lie between Appalachian and non-Appalachian students. In the table below, we see the grades as percentages of the total number of students in each group. The non-Appalachian group, which again, excludes the communities in this study, has a notable difference in A grades and a less marked, but still substantial, difference in F grades. Appalachian students, while they seem to be passing first-year composition courses at almost the Same rate as non-Appalachian students, are not earning as many A grades and are earning more failing grades.

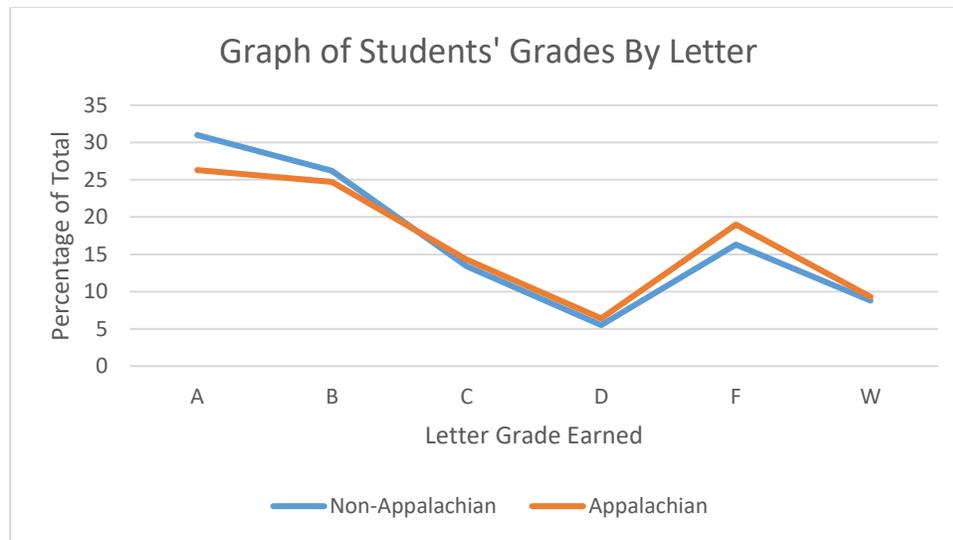


Figure 6 Appalachian students grades mapped onto the curve of grades awarded to non-Appalachian students.

The graph highlights a difference of 5% in A grades awarded in first-year composition courses. While the curve is virtually identical for C, D, and W grades, non-Appalachian students also earn slightly more B grades and 3% fewer F grades. It is, therefore, apparently slightly more likely that Appalachian students will fail a course and quite a bit less likely that they will earn an A grade, even though they pass the course. When we look at only the pass-fail rates, we might miss this important deviation at both ends of the scale.

It is also important to note that Appalachian students do not withdraw at greater rates than the non-Appalachian student population. Of non-Appalachian students, 8.8% withdraw from first-year composition courses, while 9.3% of Appalachian students do so. At the community college level, withdrawal can be both student- and instructor-initiated, and is, in fact, more commonly initiated by the instructor for failure to attend.<sup>2</sup> One might expect these rates to be higher for Appalachian students due to the attendance concerns voiced by the respondents, but that is not indicated by the numbers.

For six of the eight largest Appalachian communities the percentages of successful grades in first-year composition are far lower than the 65.3% average of the total Appalachian group and much lower than the 70.6% of the non-Appalachian group. Two communities, Pearisburg and Floyd, exceeded the averages, and we will discuss possible reasons for this difference in our analysis below. The table below compares these eight communities to each other and to the average.

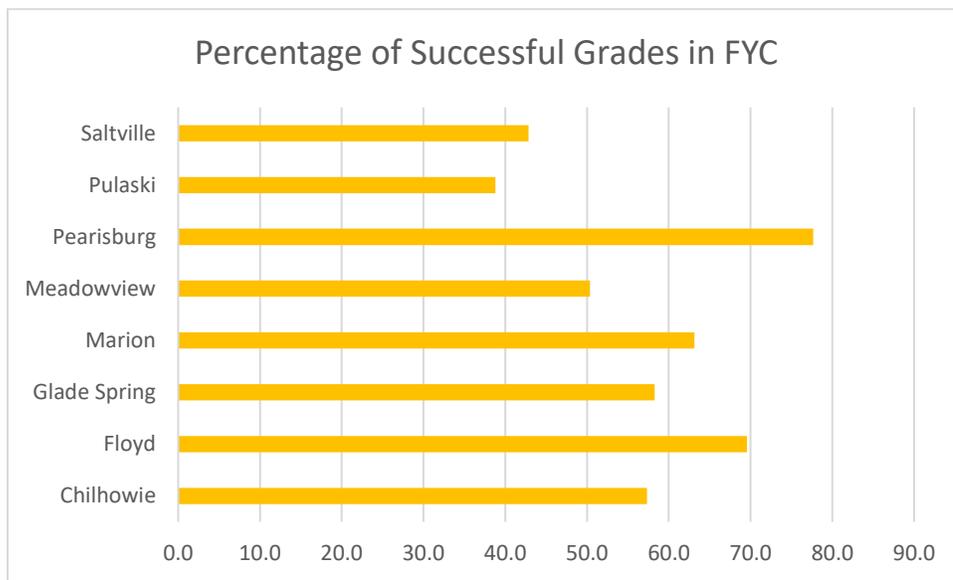


Figure 7 Number of successful grades (A-C) as a percentage of total grades. The average for the group is 67.2%.

In this analysis, we note that the communities of Pulaski and Saltville fall well below the average for the rest of the communities, with only 38% of the Pulaski group successfully completing first year composition with a passing grade and 43% of the Saltville group doing so. Meadowview had only 50% of its students complete their FYC requirements successfully, and both Chilhowie and Glade Spring were under 60%. The outlier, Pearisburg, may be attributed to the ACCE program requirements, since these carry an overall GPA stipulation. It would be difficult to attribute these numbers to high school preparation, given that none of these communities contains a secondary school that *only* serves that community. All of the

secondary schools serve multiple zip codes, and students from these areas performed better in their first year composition courses than these students.

The most common factor that the six communities share is a larger share of the population living in poverty than their surrounding counties. This will be discussed at length in Chapter Six, however we should note that Saltville, Virginia, has a poverty rate of 34%, nearly triple the national poverty rate of 12% and definitely triple Virginia's statewide poverty rate of 11%. Pulaski town has a poverty rate of 21%, which is far higher than the 15% rate county-wide, although both are higher than state and national rates. Poverty, more than instructor bias, may be at the heart of Appalachian students' low achievement rates in these communities.

### **Qualifications and Limitations of the Study**

The quantitative data used in this study is as accurate as it can be given some significant limitations that need to be acknowledged here. First, the student data can only demonstrate rurality, not heritage. No college in the service region asks students to identify by regional heritage, and other identity questions such as race, ethnicity, and gender are optional on college applications and other documents. Using the more remote, less populated, and more traditionally Appalachian zip codes as described in Chapter One seemed to be the best, but not a perfect, way of getting at Appalachian student data. Without doubt, some non-Appalachian students have been included in these datasets. The removal of urban and university areas is only a partial solution to the problem of determining Appalachian-ness.

A further qualification has to be made in the linkage of individual zip codes to individual schools. In order to definitively identify which students attended which college, we would have to use student ID numbers rather than zip codes as the primary identifier and then crosslink these to the college or colleges in which the students are registered. I decided that using student IDs was both unnecessary in terms of yielding the information needed and likely to cause harm in that the students' grades and outcomes could be easily linked to individual participants in the study. Out of respect to the concerns raised by my participants, several of whom are in precarious employment situations, and to protect the identities of students who already may feel singled-out, I chose to frame the dataset in the aggregate rather than the specific.

Considering the three colleges as a group rather than individually also limits the study in that participants will not be able to see with certitude how students performed in their first-year composition programs. This data can be approximated by using all of the zip codes in the college's service area as a basis for calculation; however, the colleges all share enrollees, and there is no absolute guarantee that a student in, say, Hillsville, will be attending Wytheville Community College. That student is almost as likely to attend New River or Paul D. Camp. For that reason, the consolidation of data made sense within the scope of the project.

Finally, the respondent data would ideally be improved by having full participation from all three schools; however, I realize that this is an unrealistic goal in human subject research. I was able to interview half of the English faculty at Virginia Highlands, one-third of the faculty at Wytheville, and 60% of the faculty at New River. This is not surprising, given

that participation in the study was voluntary and, as I have noted previously, there is a certain amount of paranoia among English faculty due to budget cuts and increased pressure for completed diplomas and certificates. A participant at one school in the study was reluctant to be identified in any way, and in fact, has not been. His responses have been tabulated anonymously. In total, of all the full-time English faculty at three schools, I was able to interview half, and clearly more participation would be useful.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this study is to determine what practices and attitudes involving Appalachian culture are informing first-year composition instruction at the two-year level. To that end, the quantitative data is a secondary, but important, component. The numeric data gleaned from instructors remarks gives weight to the supposition that Appalachia is still stigmatized and is still seen by educated insiders and outsiders alike as a place of resistance—to higher education, to difference, and most importantly, to change. The data show that the respondents believe Appalachia to be its own worst enemy, unwilling to make the necessary concessions to educational and economic realities. Composition instructors' language concerning Appalachia and Appalachian students indicates a high level of negativity toward Appalachian culture and dialect, and a significantly negative bias toward Appalachian students themselves. The quantitative data represent a measurable, if not completely objective, view of those attitudes and biases.

The student data has a number of valuable components, and this study only scratches the surface of its utility. For our purposes, the study has demonstrated that

Appalachian students graduate at far lower rates than non-Appalachian students, and that while students from all areas tend to pass first-year composition courses at the same rate, Appalachian students from the most distressed and in some ways most culturally “Appalachian” communities do not. While other factors certainly enter into these students’ failure rates, we cannot discount the fact that many of the communities whose students do not perform well are stigmatized within the region. Pulaski, in particular, is stigmatized within its own county and the successful completion data suggest that Pulaski students may face bias in the classroom.

The larger, and more positive, inference from the data, however, is that despite their overwhelmingly negative perceptions of Appalachian culture, individual professors do not grade their Appalachian students’ work more harshly than non-Appalachian students in the aggregate. Despite the respondents’ demonstrated belief that Appalachian students are lower in ability and preparation than other students, the data indicate that Appalachian students still manage to earn at least a C in their college courses. A further dive into the data suggests that Appalachian students earn proportionally fewer A grades. In the next chapter, we will discuss areas of further study (of which there are many) and the ways that this data can inform many different views of the region’s students and their performance.

Since this is not an applied study, the data results are particularly interesting and counterintuitive. It would seem that such negativity would have to have an ill effect on performance in first-year composition, but that has not been the case, so also in Chapter Six, we will interrogate those results to determine what practices and pedagogies have been successful and, if possible, why. When discussing students as a collective, professors are

likely to voice frustrations, stereotypes, and biases; however, when dealing with individual students, those who are faces in a familiar classroom, the dynamic is likely far more considerate and personal. The difference may be as simple as the difference between “the Appalachian student” and “Andrew.”

## Chapter Six: Pedagogies, Questions, and Rhetoric

### Assumptions, Stigma, and the Professoriate

This study of composition faculty in the agricultural areas of Southwest Virginia asked three questions: what attitudes do professors in community colleges hold toward Appalachia and Appalachian students, what are professors doing in their composition classrooms with and for those students, and how do these practices affect them? The qualitative data reveal that professors at the two-year level cling to a model that privileges standard academic English acquisition rather than rhetorical deployment of Englishes, and they also have deeply held negative stereotypes about Appalachian language and culture. The quantitative data lead us to believe that these negative attitudes, in turn, result in no difference in overall grades, but do reveal bumps on both ends of the grading spectrum—more Appalachian students fail and fewer Appalachian students make A grades. Even allowing for other factors—poverty, first generation status, and under-preparedness—the data reveal differences based in students’ regional identification and their professors’ reactions to regional identity.

If there can be said to be a central conflict between first-year composition instructors and the Appalachian culture in which they find themselves, it is the conflict between the academy and the family, or more precisely, the culture of “holme.” In this struggle for students’ minds, all of the professors in the study expressed a strong belief that embracing standard academic English, and with it, academic culture, offers a more secure economic

future, and along with that belief, the professors felt that students should be more willing to leave the region in order to secure employment. The rootedness that Luhman, Tuan, Locklear, Hazen, and a host of others have mentioned is not enough of a reason to resist either the standardization of language or the pull of better employment and more academically acceptable living conditions in non-Appalachian environments. In every case, the participants in this study felt that their world—that of academic pursuits and more urbane and sophisticated pleasures—was superior to their students' worlds, which were often limited to a single community in a single Appalachian county.

### **Exploring the Question at the Institutional Level**

Where do these beliefs and practices come from? The research here gives us several productive areas for exploration, since it is unlikely that these ideas are arising in such uniformity from such a diverse group of respondents. The first area that suggests itself is the institutions themselves—the three colleges in this study—that have long neglected the theoretical and philosophical for the practical. One important note here is that this does not so much indicate a lack of interest in the former as it does a lack of resources to pursue them. The institutions themselves, as we have said, have little time to prepare instructors for their classroom roles, because course enrollments fluctuate for a month around the beginning of each semester—two weeks before classes start and two weeks after. The “preparation” instructors get often consists of a course plan and a deadline, which leaves the instructor struggling to fulfill the most basic of teaching roles. Most people who have

taught at the two-year level recognize the frustration and tension that come with having little preparation for teaching and less support, but it is part of community college existence. Community colleges live on the margins, without endowments and with all of their operating revenue either directly coming from or driven by enrollment. There isn't enough money for instructor training or in-house seminars and workshops. The Virginia Community College System sometimes provides these things, but they require travel to Richmond, since much training is done in the VCCS main offices there, and again, there is little money available to reimburse instructors for travel, accommodations, and meals. Conferences suffer for the same reason, with instructors often paying out of pocket to attend conferences of interest to them.

In a way, instructors at the community college level have some of the same precarity of their Appalachian students. Shrinking enrollments may mean job losses, and certainly mean that innovation and investments in student success come on the instructor's own time, after other college work is finished. When faculty are consistently teaching overloads and sometimes expected to teach as many as eight sections, it's not surprising that there isn't time to reflect on the students being taught or the cultures they come from. Two respondents actually referenced this with regard to theory. They do what works and have little time to experiment to find new options for themselves and their students. Contingent labor, as Marc Bousquet and others have noted, is the backbone of much college teaching, and this is no less true of community colleges than of four-year institutions. Adjunct faculty, as we will discuss later, form a special population within the college, largely invisible to full-time faculty and administrators due to the odd hours they teach and the need to teach at

more than one site in order to make a living. It is too much to expect that these workers can somehow make extra time for research, study, and reflection, given the constraints of their employment.

A further source of professors' stigmatization of Appalachia is a lack of familiarity with the Appalachian communities in which the colleges are embedded. While most instructors had anecdotal data about students, they had very little specific contact with Appalachian culture itself. They tended to live at some distance from the schools in which they teach, and, as most people do, surround themselves with friend networks that reflect their academic and intellectual interests, not the culture of the area. The colleges themselves are isolated from the culture to a large degree, offering a sort of standard menu of academic options that reflects decisions made at the state level rather than at the local level. The course plans in Appendix B are one example of this standardization—syllabi may, and do, differ, but the basic structure of first year composition is imposed at the state level. Only Virginia Highlands has a program directly designed to involve the community in its operations, in the form of advisory committees made up of business and civic leaders. These committees are formed primarily to ensure that certain majors are providing the training businesses need in their workers, not to connect the culture of the campus to the culture of the community. One school has devoted much of its time and resources to two programs—nursing and dental hygiene—at the expense of transfer programs, because these are the needs it perceives in the community. The lack of contact between the colleges and the communities they serve can lead to stereotyping and generalization.

A third problem that can lead to negative assumptions about the local Appalachian culture is the lack of connection between faculty members even in the same college, and the lack of a forum to share information and ideas. This is related to labor concerns, since so much work is done by adjunct teachers who have, as we have said, far less time and energy for professional relationships and activities. As Bosquet noted for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the demand for academic labor has increased, but that labor is increasingly supplied by contingent faculty who are more readily controlled (1). Jeffrey Klausman takes that further by insisting that there is no room “at the two-year level, for ‘teacher-scholars’ who think independently and question methods and aims” (399). This kind of thought-work requires money and time, the two resources that are in increasingly short supply, and it also requires institutions willing to make the effort to implement the work of its teacher-scholars.

The reality is that teaching at the two-year level can be a very isolated activity. The heavy course schedules mean that there is not much time between classes for discussions, or even lunches, with fellow faculty members, and the English departments at all three schools are scattered between multiple buildings. Instructors are given office space based on availability rather than discipline, which can result in interesting cross-disciplinary friendships and collaborations, but does not foster much work within departments to shape curricula and share ideas. For adjunct faculty, the isolation is even greater, since many of them are only on campus for a handful of hours each week, most of those spent in class. For New River, the isolation is compounded by the existence of the Christiansburg Mall Site, where most full-time faculty teach at least one class, and where office space is virtually non-

existent. Professors who teach on both campuses spend a lot of time in transit, with few ways to connect with other faculty.

It is true that faculty connections can sometimes be echo chambers, where the stereotypical views of Appalachian culture or students are reified; however, there is also the possibility for the Brownian motion of conversation to dull some of the sharp edges of stigma and judgment. Particularly, it would be important for the faculty members who are Appalachian by heritage to find ways to be in conversation with their non-native colleagues about the realities of Appalachian experience rather than the suppositions only.

### **Exploring the Question at the Ideological Level: The Influence of J.D. Vance: Who's To Blame for Appalachia?**

Many of these suppositions have arisen from the work of J.D. Vance in his bestseller, *Hillbilly Elogy: Memoir of a Family and a Culture in Crisis*. All of the faculty members in this study had heard of Vance's work, and the majority had read it. Morgan expressed no interest, and Andy said "A friend read it and said I'd hate it, so I haven't touched it." The other respondents have a fairly uncritical reception of Vance's assessment of Appalachia's problems. The faculty members tend to concur with Vance that Appalachian people make their own difficulties and tend to vote and act against their own interests. Several people referenced Vance with regard to the problems of opioid abuse in their own communities and the involvement of students and others in drug-related enterprises, but only Andy indicated an awareness of the factors that may lead to opioid abuse—the hopelessness and poverty

that have been, to at least some degree, externally imposed on the region but internalized by Appalachian people as somehow their own fault. Emerson said that he saw in Vance the way that Appalachia's refusal to change causes the region to "fall into cycles of exploitation [...] because when they don't want to change in a progressive way, they fall back" which in turn causes "political and industrial leadership to just throw them into this position [of exploitation], and we're back in the 1950's." He added, "I'm not surprised it's happening, and I'm not surprised it's happening here."

Earlier in this study, I said that while students are not reading Vance, their professors are, and this is informing professors' attitudes about Appalachia. That assertion turns out to be even more true than I suspected. The prima-facie acceptance of Vance as an authority on Appalachia has led to an unquestioning acceptance of his descriptions of life therein and the kinds of people who find themselves living it. Vance's belief that Appalachian people can, on their own merits, be successful if they work hard is echoed in nearly all of these conversations with instructors, as is the belief that problems with lack of ambition and lack of vision for the future stem from inherent deficits in Appalachian culture and people rather than in the ways the region has been marginalized and isolated. The belief that education can fix all of Appalachia's ills seems to be rooted in the very Vance-like idea that opportunity and education are universally available if people can take advantage of them.

It is worth noting that none of the respondents were familiar with *Appalachian Reckoning: A Region Responds to Hillbilly Elegy*. This collection of essays, short fiction, photography, and poetry provides a multifaceted response to Vance's work and asserts a

view of Appalachia that is far more self-actualized and self-aware than the region is usually credited with having. One focus of *Appalachian Reckoning* is its challenge to the notion that Appalachia's problems stem from the people themselves rather than the institutions that surround them or the extractive industries and absentee landowners who continually fight to keep tax bases and wages low, despite the impact this has on education and community services. When one of the most Appalachian of the respondents remarked that the problem with the gap between the haves and the have-nots is the apathy of the have-nots, the obvious question one might ask is whether another emotion is more likely to be successful. Of what use is ambition in a region where institutions, like colleges, can be complicit in exploitation because their practices are rarely examined to determine if they are fair to indigenous populations? *Appalachian Reckoning* suggests that the region needs a new kind of activism that takes on issues of rampant capitalism, cultural commodification, and environmental exploitation through activism and art, and it further suggests that these pathways need to be authentic ones, particularly in terms of language use and means of organizing and distributing labor.

It is difficult to have this kind of activism in a region where, as Amy Clark and Kirk Hazen have discussed, linguistic bigotry dictates that Appalachian voices are not the sorts of voices that should be heard. This study revealed that two of the most stigmatized communities are the towns of Pulaski in Pulaski County and Saltville in Smyth County, precisely because those areas are pockets of Appalachian dialect and, to some degree, unacceptable folkways like suspicion of outsiders and closed mindedness about education and employment. Students from those areas are most stigmatized by their professors for

being uncommitted to school and uninterested in developing a future, especially one that might lead them outside the region. If we look more closely, however, we see that the median income for Pulaski County is \$49,691, while Pulaski Town has a median income of \$40,711. Even more crucial, the poverty rate in the county is 13.9%, but the town has 21.3% of its citizens living below the poverty line. In Saltville, the statistics are even more grim. The median family income is \$34,417 and the poverty rate is 34.5%, one of the highest in Virginia. (For comparison, the median income for the United States is \$48,150 according to the 2017 U.S. Census.) Insofar as poverty and Appalachian-ness are correlated, these two towns might reflect a pattern of economic, rather than academic, misery that translates into a lack of college success. As Alex, who is also an elected member of a local school board and the only respondent with strong community connections, put it, “We can’t expect these students to do well in class or take their course work seriously if they don’t know where they’re going to sleep tonight or if they’re going to have enough to eat.” She went on to acknowledge that her community does face a stigma in education, because there is a lack of awareness of the problems poverty creates. “It impacts everything from transportation to child care to sleep patterns and mental illness,” she said. “One of my friends is a school counselor, and she said that 10% of the 8 to 18 year olds she works with have significant mental illness due to poverty-induced stress.” In other words, no matter how much Vance and others like him assert that any individual can work hard and be successful, the well-fed and comfortably-housed will always have an advantage over the hungry and cold.

What these attitudes toward *Hillbilly Elegy* mean, if they mean anything beyond what the respondents saw as an analysis of the current Appalachian situation, is that the

respondents are determined to make space in their courses for progressive ideas and alternative futures for their students. All respondents said that the way Appalachia embraced the presidential candidacy of Donald Trump was not so much an unintelligent abdication of its own interests as it was an expression of how forgotten and abandoned the region feels. People in Appalachia wanted someone, anyone, to hear them when they said they wanted to work in traditional industries, like coal, and preserve their traditional ways of life. Andy said that the politicians know they can never make this happen, but they play upon the dreams—he calls them delusions—that it will be possible to make a living in the old way, right into the future. The respondents all expressed the hope that by introducing progressive alternatives, they can help students see that they can craft different, but still valid, futures in their own regions. Technology, biology, and information science are three avenues they mentioned that could be important in a reinvention of Appalachia. The key, the essential ingredient, the single most powerful djinn of all the djinns, however, is learning to embrace education as a worthy goal, something for which lesser goals may be at least temporarily sacrificed.

### **Ways to Be and Not to Be Appalachian in the Classroom**

While all of the respondents in the study indicated some sympathy with those whose poverty and isolation have created barriers to college education, all were still in agreement that when Appalachian culture and academic culture were in conflict, the academic culture should be victorious in all circumstances. Because of the assumption we discussed earlier,

that the life of the mind is primary and the life of the body, as it were, secondary, there was very little questioning of the need for culture-switching and the importance of making college one's priority rather than family, community, or other work. To miss class for a family emergency, especially since Appalachian families define "emergency" broadly, is "shortsighted" and "not in [students'] best interest." Morgan admitted that she did not understand what repercussions there could be for Appalachian students who choose school over family, but emphasized that "my family would never ask me to put them first; it was always understood that the academics were the most important thing." She was surprisingly unwilling to see that Appalachian mores might be different and that those consequences might be severe. Avery had noted that some of his uncles have not spoken to him since he graduated from college, and yet this is a risk that he, too, feels students should be willing to run for the sake of education.

There is, therefore, a clear way to be—and not be—Appalachian in the first-year composition classroom. It is important not to be Appalachian when it comes to class attendance, to privileging family matters over educational matters, and to considering where and how far one might be willing to move in order to find employment and cultural activities that reflect entre into the middle class. It is particularly important not to be Appalachian in following the sort of traditional family trajectory of manual, or at least blue-collar labor, marriage, children, followed by a revered senescence surrounded by another generation of the Same. Students are praised for "breaking the mold" and "going against what they've always been told." Questioning and challenging deeply held beliefs is important to academic culture and results in a deepening and enriching of understanding in

many areas. Academicians find little to be threatened by in such inquiry, because they have either always been part of a social class that finds a critical approach to information and belief a laudable practice, or they have already done the work of getting past family and community outrage at the rejection of deeply held values. It might be quite difficult to understand, then, how students and their families can both view college as “evil” because it creates not just conflict, but a very real rift between those who can critique themselves and their culture and those who see such critique as demeaning. In a very real way, code-switching, particularly in the way Avery discussed it, is far easier to get away with than culture-switching. The latter requires almost an ability to bifurcate one’s brain, so that the things one has learned and the limitations one sees more clearly now are not communicated to one’s family and community. Instead of being “a better version of you,” the Appalachian student in this position might become a “dual version of you,” where you mimic the attitudes that are acceptable for home, but hold far different ones for yourself because of your education. One version is acceptable in one place, the other not, and the student has the unhappy task of constantly juggling these to make sure (s)he is fitting in wherever (s)he is. It is unlikely that the respondents would endorse such practices outright, but that is the position they insist students should be able to adopt in the classroom—one kind of mind for school, another for the home community.

In the classroom, the Appalachian student must also be able to code-switch. Appalachian dialect has no place in the academy, and no one is referencing any rhetorical practices at all that would give some space for students’ native Englishes, whatever they are. The default assumption is that students will understand the primacy of standard

academic English and embrace it as yet another path to the good life that is obtainable only through education. Native rhetorical patterns, such as narrative, are also disprivileged, since storytelling is a “simple” device that students must quickly move beyond. The respondents’ lack of deep knowledge of Appalachia’s native rhetorical patterns is partly to blame for this, and as we’ve said, it’s hard to find time to increase one’s knowledge base when one is teaching eight courses with five separate class preparations. Nevertheless, the unwillingness of respondents to see utility and rhetorical strength in local patterns of speech and organization can further marginalize Appalachian students and lead to the sorts of conflicts where the student recognizes the way his or her narrative pattern matches the assignment, but the instructor, expecting the more academic pattern, cannot. And of course, the converse is also true, part of being able to write for college is learning to generate rhetorical strategies appropriate to the exigence. As one respondent said, “you simply can’t make everything a narrative. Some things don’t fit.” This seems like a place for dialogue, although when time and resources are in short supply, it is much easier for both the Appalachian and the academic to devalue each other’s ways of writing and fall back on conflict rather than collaboration. Confrontations over code-switching are not welcome in the first-year composition classroom, because they’re time-consuming and because, as Andy said “this is the code you have to use. Nothing else is going to get you that job or that scholarship or that spot in graduate school.”

The negatives notwithstanding, there are ways to be Appalachian that do meet with instructor approval in the classroom. Most of these ways, however, have a distant flavor of classism about them that is difficult for faculty to see. The respondents appreciated

Appalachian students who were “mannerly” and “respectful,” and who came to class with a kind of requisite humility. Students were praised for acknowledging their deficits in writing and speech and for being willing to “correct” those in accordance with standard academic English and the course plan. They were also praised for recognizing their under-preparedness and the weaknesses of their previous writing instruction, especially in K-12 schools. This humility, which occasionally bordered on shame in the respondents’ comments, makes it much easier to convince students of the necessity for code- and culture-switching. The students who received the highest praise were those who accepted their professors’ valuation of themselves and their culture and in some way made an effort to adopt academic culture and its values. Most of these students are female, and both Andy and Morgan referenced female students who were more than willing to cast aside their home cultures in order to be successful in class. Both respondents suggested that this was due to the women’s desire to “have my kids be proud of me” by doing well in first-year composition or completing a degree. Both respondents expressed the hope that this desire to have children be proud of their parents’ educational attainments signals a change in the dominant mentality of opposition to education. They also hoped that a generation or so of this would erode the fear of and contempt for education entirely.

### **Making Things Work in the Classroom: Some Thoughts on Transformation**

Since the respondents feel that a humanities-oriented education is the key to the transformation of Appalachia, whatever that looks like, they have all developed classroom

practices that are designed to challenge and confront students' beliefs about themselves and their region. Literature, code-switching, and real-world problem-solving seem to be the preferred tools for the respondents in this study, and while no one advocated the wholesale abandonment of Appalachian culture, everyone agreed that many aspects of it can go away and not be missed, and therefore they use their courses to bring students into contact with ideas, cultures, theories, and points of view that they had not previously considered. Avery, who called his class a "democracy" in the sense of one person, one opinion, said that he tells his students each semester that they have to at least give some attention to ideas that offend them, because behind each idea is a group of people who, on the whole, is not any better or worse than the group that students often casually reference as "us."

### **Literature: Bringing the World to the Appalachian Classroom**

In developing courses that are both relatable and challenging, the respondents sought to counter the isolationism and "contempt" that they believe Appalachian culture has for the outside world. Andy noted that "When you go to a really small, isolated high school, I feel like you don't have a perspective on what might be possible or what you might be capable of doing, or what's out there in the world." Morgan said that she owes much of her personal philosophy to her "incredible privilege" of being able to travel widely outside the United States and being able to see herself in relation to a large number of different cultures, languages, and world views. She and Andy both use literature to bring some of these ideas that they've experienced into students minds. When students realize that they

are, in a real way, an audience for someone else's work, then they can see themselves as writing for an audience. Reading for class doesn't require travel, but rather a willingness to see what else is out there in the world, and all of the respondents except Emerson have found ways to include novels and nonfiction works in their first-year composition curriculum despite the lack of any mention of such in the course plan. Most respondents see the course plan as a rough guide, anyway, and the trick is finding a way to create a working classroom dynamic that meets the course plan goals without relying on rote tools that have already failed students in secondary schools.

One way that three of the respondents have created engagement is with Appalachian literature, or at least an introduction via short story to Appalachian literature. While it may not be as mind-expanding as *Sparrow*, using literature from the region is a way to make a connection between literature and students' lives. Andy said that "When you can see yourself in the literature, it sort of helps a little bit." He added that "a lot of things [students] go off to college and become are not things that people in Appalachia embrace readily, sometimes to the point of fighting [about it]," and for him, the important thing was to show through the literature the ways that other people have faced these challenges. There is a temptation in Appalachia, he said, "not to see past this small community [...] and anything that exists outside that, they just sort of scoff at." His solution is to show through literature that the outside community is in many ways like the inside one—people struggle to grow up, to differentiate themselves from their parents and grandparents, to discover their own ways in the world. "When Hamlet says 'to be or not to be, that is the question,' then that's something you really need to understand, why he's going through that. Reading

is productive.” Like Avery, he sees the transformation that occurs in reading and writing as a good and necessary thing that can turn a student’s world upside down, but only in order to rearrange it in a better configuration.

Avery tell his students that they don’t really have to fear education, because “you can still be YOU, just a better version of you, a more educated version, or a more empowered version of you with an education.” Literature is a means to this kind of transformation, since through fiction, students see other people trying on new identities and roles, and it is safer to do this on the printed page than out in the open where everyone—family and church and community—can see what’s going on, but possibly not the experimental nature of it.

Literature can also be confrontational, at least where the culture is concerned. Alex uses excerpts from *Hillbilly Elegy* in her first semester classes and often tells her students “This is what the outside world thinks of you. Do you agree with it? Is this the way you see yourself or your family?” She notes that most students are aware of the perception of Appalachia by outsiders, but feel powerless to change or challenge it. Reading about it, for them, is a rather depressing activity, because they are not able to challenge the perspective in any meaningful way as first-year college students, but they are, she hopes motivated to resist the stereotype, to be more open to new ideas and to changes, and to be less threatened by difference.

## Code Switching As Classroom Strategy

Literature is not the only classroom strategy that found broad agreement and reference among the respondents. Teaching students to code-switch is the root pedagogy for each respondent, regardless of his or her attitude about students' home culture, and the main goal for Appalachian students' written work is to rid it of Appalachian markers. This was true whether the respondents had first taught in public schools or had come to community college teaching from other colleges or universities. All the respondents believe that without code-switching, students will continue to be labeled negatively and will be denied opportunities and employment because of their language skills. Further, there does not seem to be even a rhetorical, audience-appropriate use of Appalachian language in the writing classroom, since all audiences are presupposed to be academic, even professorial, rather than audiences of peers or members of the students own communities. To write for college, at the community college level, is to write standard academic English only, and to progress toward a goal of linguistic indistinguishability.

To be fair, the respondents offer students a rationale for this that is compelling. Opportunities certainly can be denied or limited due to language use, and even the most open-minded academic has difficulty appreciating the leveled "was" or the perfective "seen" when they seem to be used unconsciously. The approaches to grammar and mechanics in the courses varied, however. Emerson meticulously marks student papers for sentence-level issues, while Morgan never does so and references literature that says students learn little or nothing from this practice. Alex, because she often teaches in the ENF curriculum, spends a lot of time on sentence-level issues because some of the submissions

are difficult to understand due to sentence-level constructions and misconstructions. The most common strategy, and the one that seems to work, though, is modeling. All of the respondents use their own work to demonstrate to students how academic writing is done and why its conventions are what they are. Morgan also noted that it is very important that students see that their instructors, too, have to follow the conventions. In their professional communications, they cannot fall back on text-speak, slang, or informality. In using their own work, the respondents stress a commonality with their students and work to bring college and life into contact at the point of writing—it is not an esoteric skill that students will never use again, but a vital part of their professional lives from now on, whether those are spent in nursing, welding, or medical school.

### **Real-World Problem Solving**

All of the respondents wanted to connect writing to students' actual lives. The goal of the writing assignment, Alex said, is to help the students think of themselves as people who can use writing as a tool, one they can master and shape to their own purposes. One of the most successful strategies she has found for connecting writing to lives is something called "The Hometown Assignment," where students write about the place they're from and what it means to them. As an introductory assignment, it gives students the comfort of familiarity along with a challenge to develop something new. For all of the respondents, creating writing assignments that work across a wide spectrum of ability levels was the challenge. In the community college setting, instructors do not have the luxury of students

who have similar backgrounds and abilities, students who scored within a narrow range on the SAT and who already have a grasp of academic English. Instead, the ENG 111 classes have grandmothers and newly minted high-school graduates, people with intellectual challenges and those who have never written for any audience, let alone an academic one. Most assignments have a menu of options that allow students some leeway in crafting their essays, a practice that benefits all students, not just Appalachian ones.

Another practice, perhaps of more questionable value, is a sort of sliding-scale of evaluation. On that scale, students who make an effort are rewarded, and two of the respondents directly referenced helping struggling students to earn a useful C instead of the failing grade they might otherwise have done. What this seems to do in practice, however, is create a two-tier system in classes, where students who are already proficient writers are held to a higher standard, and in a sense equipped for a different level of work than those whose writing and language use fail to meet the classroom standard. There is a sense among respondents that for many students, particularly Appalachian ones, but also students who are underprepared and perhaps clumsy with words, that “good enough” works. Despite the discussion of the need for professionalism and academic rigor in research and writing, the respondents had a “good enough” standard for their students who were either not in the transfer curriculum or not likely to work in areas where writing was a requirement. It would be nice, one said, if everyone could get up to the same speed, but realistically, that’s not going to happen.

What happens instead is that Appalachian students fall into the unfamiliar world of reading critically and writing analytically and learn pretty quickly that they don’t have those

skills. Some develop them as they work through their first-year composition sequence, and others fail or disappear. The respondents don't have time to track down the vanished ones to see which parts of the pedagogy failed, and indeed, with those course loads, who would have? They continue to teach an approximation of the students they have, aiming at the middle group in the hopes of not losing the top students and perhaps working a miracle with the bottom ones. As Alex noted, the range of abilities and backgrounds makes teaching at the two-year level a lot like teaching in public schools, where the range of ability levels creates an enormous challenge.

### **Resources to Meet the Challenges**

One of the specific goals of this study was to determine not only what was happening in first-year composition classrooms, but what resources were available and what resources instructors would like in order to help them meet their students' needs. Respondents did not spend as much time focused on this question as I had thought they might, most feeling that since money is tight at all three schools, there would be no point in speculating about what resources would help. The resources that instructors mentioned, however, very neatly separated into two groups—material and intellectual. In some cases, “things” would be handy, but for most, the desire was for more professional development, more collegiality, and most importantly, more time.

In terms of material resources, the most-often-referenced need was for technology. In this regard, there was a significant difference between New River and the other two

schools. Respondents at Virginia Highlands and Wytheville both wanted computer labs as standard practice for their writing classes, since while some writing classes are taught in labs at those schools, not all of them are, and teaching in a lab requires a special classroom request and other accommodations. At New River, all first-year composition classes are taught in labs, which also serve to limit class sizes, since the English classrooms seat 24 students at 24 computers. For respondents at the other schools, class sizes can be as large as 30 students, especially when multiple sections have to be combined because of low enrollments.

This leads us to another resource request, that of limiting class size. Combined sections and online sections can be overwhelming, both for students and faculty. Online sections, particularly, are often overloaded, and since these generally require a lot more work on the part of the instructor, they become a source of burnout and frustration. Everyone voiced his or her unhappiness with the difficulty of responding adequately to large numbers of essays in a timely manner, particularly since nearly everyone's learning strategy relies on giving students detailed feedback about their writing in order to make improvements on the next text in the sequence.

The most expensive item on the material resource wish list was the inclusion of an embedded tutor in every first-year composition course, but especially in the first semester courses. The embedded tutor functions as a teaching assistant, but without any evaluative role. Currently only New River uses embedded tutors, and then only in ENF 3/ENG 111 combination courses. Instructors in those courses appreciate "the extra pairs of hands and eyes" that allow them to give marginal students more individualized instruction and free the

instructor for other tasks. Most respondents felt that embedded tutors would be beneficial to Appalachian students in working on sentence-level writing issues and on becoming familiar with the technologies used in the classes. Since many students have little familiarity with the colleges' learning management systems, instructors spend a lot of class time demonstrating how these work and where classroom items may be found. The VCCS has moved in recent years to Online Educational Resources (OER), and these, too, require time to help students learn to access and download them. The assumption that first-year students are technologically literate has proved false, and most respondents say that students have great familiarity with the apps on their phones, but much less ability to navigate a computer desktop and use writing software like Microsoft Word. Embedded tutors often help with technology issues and can ease students fears in less threatening ways than the instructors can.

These material resources would be important to the respondents, but the deeper needs they referenced were intellectual. All of the respondents referenced the lack of professional development at the two-year level as an ongoing issue. Again, the lack of financial security at most two-year colleges has created an atmosphere of caution, if not fear, and the dominant ethos is to keep one's head down and do the work of teaching without complaining. Conferences and professional development opportunities, specifically graduate-level courses on composition theory and practice, were high on the respondents' wish lists, but low on the colleges' lists of priorities. They are expensive in terms of both money and time, and those commodities are, as we have noted, in short supply. These aren't the only problems, however. Many composition and rhetoric graduate programs are not set

up to accommodate working professionals. Most respondents wished for the ability to do quality graduate-level course work online or nearby in the evenings, and these options are scarce or non-existent. Andy mentioned being accepted to a (fairly) local PhD program, but being unable to actually enroll because all of the classes were taught on campus and during the day.

The timing of professional development would be less an issue if the professoriate had more actual time. All of the respondents are dedicated academicians, intellectually curious and, as Morgan said “a certain type of person who is attracted to learning.” What thwarts the actual engagement of these interests is the massive time commitment of teaching even a 5/5 course load, not to mention the incredible expectations of a 7/8. It is no wonder that the respondents tended to fall back on stereotyping for their views of Appalachian students—stereotypes save time, and these men and women *have* to find ways to do that in order to stay afloat in the sea of expectations they face at their colleges. College service is also required of them, and if one person makes up half of a department, then the burden of college service work is quite heavy. Standing committees, search and interview committees, policy review panels, and faculty assembly obligations each took shares of the respondents’ time, so much so that they voiced the belief that their institutions were undermining their ability to teach. Relief from some of these obligations was an important “resource” that the respondents wanted.

Finally, many respondents wanted a way to understand, get inside of, or learn the history of Appalachia and Appalachian culture. Avery, a history buff already, especially wants to learn the backgrounds of his Appalachian students in terms of their indigenous cultural

histories. He has spent years researching his own family's background and what led them to immigrate to the United States, and feels that a similar understanding for his students would benefit him in the classroom. Morgan wants to understand Appalachian family structures that seem so foreign to her own experience. Emerson would like to learn the history of his own county to understand the factors that have led so much industry away from the area. These things require not so much money or time, but expertise. One productive avenue for further study would be the exploration of "intellectual content delivery systems" that could provide background information on students and areas to instructors' inboxes with a minimum investment of time or inconvenience.

### **Looking Ahead: More Applications and Opportunities for Further Investigations**

So many avenues of further study have suggested themselves in this work that it is almost overwhelming to list them all. I won't try, but instead want to suggest general areas of inquiry that may profitably be explored with reference to the gaps that were indicated in the review of extant literature in Chapter Two. These general areas of focus have within them many multi-layered sub-areas that might be a chapter on their own, had we world enough and time, because the intersection of Appalachia, first-year composition, and the two-year college has barely been explored. This study merely begins the process of discovery.

The first area acknowledges that this study's focus on instructors leaves the area of student responses unexplored. Amanda Hayes' study follows one student, so there is clearly

an opportunity here to expand the study of Appalachian-ness in the community college composition classroom to include many students. Specifically, It would be worthwhile to attempt to track down and interview students who have been on both ends of the grade spectrum—those who have done well, and those who have failed—to discover the students’ own attitudes about their culture as it encounters the first-year composition classroom. The reasons for withdrawal and failure might provide the groundwork for further explorations in pedagogies and practices that benefit Appalachian students and whether there is a component of Universal Design that can be applied to benefit all students and writers of all levels. As it is, Hayes’ study remains a singularity.

A second focus must be, of course, the relative lack of scholarship about pedagogy and two-year college composition courses. Dunn and Lindblom have merely scratched the surface of the problem with standards-based pedagogies and Appalachian students, and they have noted that merely acquiring a facility with standard academic English does not mean that students will deploy that English in their professional lives, or that such deployment will result in better jobs, improved living conditions, or even transition to a higher social class. The implicit belief of all of the respondents in this study is that these things will follow language acquisition as a matter of course, but there is no scholarship yet that either disproves this theory or bears it out. Using standard academic English as a way up and out of poverty seems to be more a matter of lore than research.

As a side issue here, the focus on student adaptations rather than faculty attitudes or practices reinforces a power dynamic that is all too familiar to Appalachian students. The people in power—instructors—demand that those without power—students—make all of

the linguistic and cultural modifications themselves. The implication is that the instructors' language and culture are not in need of modifying, but instead are the standard by which other languages and cultures are measured, and as we have seen, these positions foster a culture of lack among Appalachian students. Despite my use of Booth, Freire, and hooks to cobble together a rhetorical theory that can inform pedagogical practices for Appalachian students, there is no cohesive theory of Appalachian rhetoric that takes the linguistic and the cultural into account, and such a theory is desperately needed. Connecting Booth, Freire, and hooks is merely a first step, a way to explain the relational aspect of Appalachian culture as it can be deployed in the composition classroom—a theory of Appalachian rhetoric would look more closely at the scope of language practices in the region and examine the inherent patterns that can be extrapolated to theory and applied more broadly.

Finally, the extant scholarship still lacks an exploration of the intersection of socioeconomic class and composition. The preliminary data in this study suggest a strong connection between success in college composition and membership in a socioeconomic class that has at least a passing familiarity with or home use of academic English. On the other side of that coin, the data indicate that the areas with the highest poverty rates have the lowest success rates in first-year composition, and while we have briefly touched on the issues of precarity that no doubt contribute to this, a further study might isolate practices, like online classes, that limit the need for transportation or a stable residence and might increase participation and completion. (Of course, the online classes require fast and affordable internet service, which is in short supply in Appalachia.) Current scholarship has focused on traditional face-to-face courses delivered in traditional institutions, and this gap

reflects, again, the implicit belief that students should be able to adapt themselves to the learning environment rather than expecting that environment to make some accommodation to them.

### **Pedagogy, Poverty, and Some Concluding Theoretical Suggestions**

The respondents in the study indicated in their remarks that they feel that poverty plays a substantial role in their students' academic lives, and not just in terms of precarity. Poverty comes in many shapes—socioeconomic, educational, intellectual, cultural, and spiritual. It has a way, too, of changing one's focus from the future to the present, and as two respondents said, if the present is bleak, then there is no ability to believe the future is better. It's a form of Appalachian fatalism. Avery said "when you've been poor all your life, and your family is poor, it's what you are." Education, he said, threatens that identity, because when you read more and experience the broader world, you become more aware of yourself *as* a self, separate from your family and what it wants. When that happens, "the light bulb goes off, and they just sort of break from the mold, but now, of course, [...] that's a life-changing experience, and you suddenly have to reevaluate you, and who you are as a person."

The underlying premise is that what goes on in first-year composition class on any given day is more valuable than anything else that could be going on outside it, and from the perspective of the academic good life, that would be true. Whether that is the student's perspective is grounds for another study, but all of the respondents seem to feel that

students have devalued education, and college, because of their cultural backgrounds, and it is this devaluation, more than any other factor, that keeps the students and the region from being successful. As Emerson says “We know that those who are emotionally connected to a career and a future and have bought into that are more likely to endure the problems and hardships that come with any education in the process of becoming that thing. But the majority of our students are not that.” Most students, he says, struggle with difficult assignments and courses, and then either stop coming to class at all, or “shut down” and attend class without learning anything, simply because they are not invested in the process of becoming.

“Becoming” something else, or something different, lies at the heart of the pedagogies expressed by the respondents, although only Avery acknowledged how much it might cost students, not only in the short run—missing family events and so on—but later on, when students find they may not fit in academia or their home communities. College changes you, Andy says. “I think you can embrace your heritage without having it weigh you down,” he continued. He added that students have to be able to embrace the parts of their culture that work for them, and reject the ones that don’t, but this fails to acknowledge the difficulty of rejecting not a static object, like corn bread, but a family ethos, like doing manual labor if you’re a man. Choosing not to participate in livelihoods that have been traditional and “approved” in some way is often interpreted as criticism of the traditional ways. When Andy says “I don’t think that people from Appalachia have the ability to look at things critically,” he means both analytically AND with an eye to what can be accepted and rejected. This means that Appalachian students even at the two-year college level are being

asked to confront their culture by challenging that culture and devaluing it in comparison to the culture of the academy. Instead of using the home culture as a lens or even a terministic screen, it becomes something like a mask that has to be removed.

If, in the absence of a theory of Appalachian rhetoric, we reach for some other theory to diffuse this conflict, then perhaps the rhetoric of assent will help us find a way forward through what appears to be a stalemate between the respondents' views of Appalachian students and culture and their privileging of both academic English and academic culture. In *The Rhetoric of Assent*, Wayne Booth proposes that the traditional, oppositional models of rhetoric be abandoned in favor of a rhetoric that seeks to understand rather than “win.” In that scenario, the challenge of the writing classroom is no longer the convincing of Appalachian students that standard academic English and academic culture are the preeminent values. Instead, the first-year composition classroom becomes the place of a “listening rhetoric” that has the goal of hearing and understanding alternative positions rather than ranking them in a hierarchy or using one to eliminate all the others. In such a classroom, there is a rhetorical place for Appalachian language and culture, and, paradoxically, a safe space in which to examine it critically and analytically.

What we need in the two-year composition classroom is not as simple as “agreement” about which English to use or which rhetorical strategies to deploy. It can't be summed up in a pithy sentence or distilled to a single statement. Instead, like the region of Appalachia itself, a pedagogy of Appalachian composition must be multi-layered, flexible, and above all, “listening.” It involves a very hooksian view of teaching, wherein the instructor is available to learn as much from students as students learn from the class itself.

The fundamental idea, the one that creates connection and space to grow and change, is that learning happens in both directions. As instructors listen to their students, they hear all of the Appalachians speaking, and as students listen in return, they truly can choose the components of writing instruction that help them and use those to make sense of their home culture and their roles in it. Perhaps in this way, the stigma of being Appalachian can be diminished in the writing classroom and instructors can refine those practices that include *all* students. It requires, perhaps, that everyone loosen their grip on their versions of big-T truth about composition and rhetoric and seek an understanding of each other's positions instead. In view of the power differential, it's important that instructors lead the way in this endeavor and that their commitment be to the process rather than the product.

The instructors in this study want the best outcomes for their students and want for them to succeed both academically and personally. The real question that remains here at the end is whether they, and others who also bring their anti-Appalachian biases into the field, can quiet the strident voices of stereotype and stigma long enough to hear the quieter, less refined voices of their Appalachian students, and, hearing them, find a way to pause in the turmoil of college teaching and really listen to them.

**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup>Financial aid regulations that went into effect in 2017 require that *all* students receiving Federal financial aid be program-placed, and further, financial aid will no longer pay for courses outside a student's declared program of study. This may mean that some students who were previously non-degree transfer students are now placed in degree programs that

they have no intention of completing, and there is, unfortunately, no way to separate those students from terminal-degree students.

<sup>2</sup> Students who register for classes and receive financial aid must also attend class or have their financial aid withdrawn. Instructors are *required* to withdraw non-attending students to prevent financial aid fraud, which has been a fairly common problem at the two-year level due to open admission practices and a high number of students who receive Federal financial aid.

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## Appendices

## Appendix A: Complete List of Rural Communities in the Agricultural Appalachian Service

Jurisdiction	Zip Code	Region	Excluded
Belspring	24058	NRCC	
Blacksburg	24060	NRCC	x
Blacksburg II POB	24061	NRCC	x
Blacksburg III POB	24062	NRCC	x
Blacksburg IV POB	24063	NRCC	x
Christiansburg POB	24068	NRCC	x
Check	24072	NRCC	
Christiansburg	24073	NRCC	x
Eggleston	24086	NRCC	
Elliston	24087	NRCC	
Floyd	24091	NRCC	
Glen Lyn	24093	NRCC	
Copper Hill	24097	NRCC	
Indian Valley	24105	NRCC	
McCoy POB	24111	NRCC	
Narrows	24124	NRCC	
Newbern POB	24126	NRCC	
Newport	24128	NRCC	
New River POB	24129	NRCC	
Parrott	24132	NRCC	
Pearisburg	24134	NRCC	
Pembroke	24136	NRCC	
Pilot	24138	NRCC	
Radford	24141	NRCC	x
Radford II POB	24142	NRCC	x
Radford III POB	24143	NRCC	x
Rich Creek	24147	NRCC	
Riner	24149	NRCC	
Ripplemead	24150	NRCC	
Shawsville	24162	NRCC	
Staffordsville	24167	NRCC	
Bristol	24202	VHCC	x
Abingdon	24210	VHCC	x
Abingdon II	24211	VHCC	x
Abingdon III POB	24212	VHCC	x
Draper	24234	NRCC	
Damascus	24236	VHCC	
Mendota	24270	VHCC	
Whitetop	24292	WCC	
Pulaski	24301	NRCC	

Atkins	24311	WCC	
Austinville	24312	WCC	
Barren Springs	24313	WCC/NRCC	
Bastian	24314	WCC	
Bland	24315	WCC	
Cana	24317	WCC	
Ceres	24318	WCC	
Chilhowie	24319	VHCC	
Cripple Creek	24322	WCC	
Crockett	24323	WCC	
Dugspur	24325	WCC/NRCC	
Elk Creek	24326	WCC	
Emory POB	24327	VHCC	x
Fancy Gap	24328	WCC	
Fries	24330	WCC	
Galax	24333	WCC	x
Glade Spring	24340	VHCC	
Hillsville	24343	WCC	
Marion	24345	VHCC	x
Hiwassee	24347	NRCC	
Independence	24348	WCC	
Ivanhoe	24350	WCC	
Lambsburg	24351	WCC	
Laurel Fork	24352	WCC	
Marion	24354	WCC	x
Max Meadows	24360	WCC/NRCC	
Meadowview	24361	VHCC	
Mouth of Wilson	24363	WCC	
Rocky Gap	24366	WCC	
Saltville	24370	VHCC	
Speedwell	24374	WCC	
Sugar Grove	24375	WCC	
Troutdale	24378	WCC	
Willis	24380	NRCC	
Woodlawn	24381	WCC	
Wytheville	24382	WCC	x
Rural Retreat	24386	WCC	

**Appendix B: Course Plans for First Year Composition in the Virginia Community College System**

**NEW RIVER COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

**DUBLIN, VIRGINIA**

**COURSE PLAN**

Course Number and Title: \_\_ENG 111, English Composition I (3 credits)

Prepared by: English Faculty Spring, 2015  
(Instructor) (Date)

Approved by: \_\_\_\_\_ Spring, 2015  
(Dean) (Date)

**I. Course Description**

Develops writing ability for study, work and other areas of writing based on experience, observation, research, and reading of selected literature. Guides students in learning writing as a process: understanding audience and purpose, exploring ideas and information, composing, revising, and editing. Supports writing by integrating, composing, revising, and editing, as well as by integrating experiences in thinking, reading, listening, and speaking. Prerequisite for ENG 111: satisfactory score on appropriate English placement examination and 4 units of high school English; keyboarding skills are recommended. ENG 111 is a prerequisite for ENG 112. Lecture 3 hours per week.

**II. Introduction**

ENG 111 will prepare students for all other expected college writing and for writing in the workplace through understanding the writing process and creating effective texts.

To enroll in ENG 111, students must achieve satisfactory scores on the VPT-English placement test or the SAT, as established by the VCCS and adopted by their college, or have successfully completed ENF 1, ENF 2 or be co-enrolled in ENF 3.

English Department strongly recommends that students who are unfamiliar with writing on a computer take a word processing course.

### III. Student Learning Outcomes

Goal One: The Writing Process

English 111 will help students discover that writing is a process that develops through experience and varies among individuals.

Upon successful completion of the course, the student shall be able to:

- A. Demonstrate prewriting skills
  - 1. limit topic
  - 2. develop topic
  - 3. write a thesis sentence
  - 4. write a plan or outline
  
- B. Write unified compositions by making each sentence contribute to the thesis statement.
  
- C. Write coherent compositions through
  - 1. clear, logical order
  - 2. appropriate use of transition
  - 3. clear pattern of organization
  
- D. Write paragraphs which demonstrate the use of primary and secondary supporting detail.
  
- E. Write effective introductory and concluding paragraphs.

- F. Write, using standard English and correct mechanics.
- G. Demonstrate the revision and editing process.

#### Goal Two: Critical Thinking for Writing

English 111 will develop students' ability to analyze and investigate ideas and to present them in well-structured prose appropriate to the purpose and audience.

Upon successful completion of the course, the student shall be able to:

- A. Demonstrate the ability to read, summarize, and respond to college-level texts – their own and others – of varying lengths.
- B. Produce 15-20 pages of finished, graded text, including at least one documented essay.
- C. Demonstrate rhetorical modes, including argumentation.
- D. Demonstrate knowledge of aspects of literature through class discussion and writing assignments based on assigned readings.
- E. Demonstrate the proper treatment of borrowed material to avoid plagiarism (forms, etc., for documentation will be taught in English 112).

#### IV. Instructional Methods

- A. Lecture and class activities
- B. Peer evaluation and group discussion
- C. Instructor/student conference

#### V. Instructional Materials

**Textbook:** *The Little Seagull Handbook* 2nd Edition by Richard Bullock, Michal Brody, Francine Weinberg (Norton)

Individual instructors may indicate additional required materials, such as notebooks, dictionaries, etc. This information will be shared with students at the beginning of the semester.

**VI. Course Content**

- The writing process: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, reflecting
- Finding and narrowing a topic
- Rhetorical modes
- Purpose, audience, and voice
- Focus and unity
- Organization, including openings and closings
- Transitions
- Primary and secondary details
- Summarizing
- Appropriate use of sources
- Clarity: syntax, semantics, and diction
- Sentence variety and coherence
- Critical reading
- Peer collaboration
- Grammar and mechanics
- Following assignment requirements
- Document design and appropriate format

**VII. Evaluation**

A. The final grade for the course will be determined as follows:

4-6 major composition assignments, totaling 15-20 pages of graded text (two of which must be written in class)	60%
Daily and other assignments and quizzes	10-30%
Final examination	10-30%

(By the end of the semester, the student should have written in class, using Standard English, a well-developed, coherent, and unified five-paragraph essay reasonably free of major mechanical errors.)

B. The following grading scale will be used: A = 90-100

B = 80- 89

C = 70- 79

D = 60- 69

F = 0- 59

NOTE: Evaluation and attendance policies will vary according to individual instructors. These policies will be distributed in each class at the beginning of the semester.

NOTE for ENG 111 students also placing in ENF 3: ENF 3 and English 111 must be taken concurrently, per VCCS mandate. Also, students must pass both ENF3 and English 111 to receive credit.

### **VIII. Attendance**

Regular attendance at classes is required. When absence from a class becomes necessary, it is the responsibility of the student to inform the instructor prior to the absence whenever possible. The student is responsible for the subsequent completion of all study missed during an absence. Any instruction missed and not subsequently completed will necessarily affect the grade of the student regardless of the reason for the absence.

### **IX. Cheating Policy**

Cheating includes:

1. Giving or receiving information pertaining to tests; and
2. Plagiarizing, which is defined as taking and using as one's own the writing or ideas of another. (Definition adapted from the American Heritage Dictionary.)

Any student found cheating on an assignment may receive a grade of zero for that assignment with no opportunity to make it up. Blatant plagiarism can result in a grade of “F” for the course.

## **X. Withdrawal Policy**

### **Student Initiated Withdrawal Policy**

A student may drop or withdraw from a class without academic penalty during the first 60 percent of a session. For purposes of enrollment reporting, the following procedures apply:

- a. If a student withdraws from a class prior to the termination of the add/drop period for the session, the student will be removed from the class roll and no grade will be awarded.
- b. After the add/drop period, but prior to completion of 60 percent of a session, a student who withdraws from a class will be assigned a grade of “W.” A grade of “W” implies that the student was making satisfactory progress in the class at the time of withdrawal, that the withdrawal was officially made before the deadline published in the college calendar, or that the student was administratively transferred to a different program.
- c. After that time, if a student withdraws from a class, a grade of “F” or “U” will be assigned. Exceptions to this policy may be made under documented mitigating circumstances if the student was passing the course at the last date of attendance.

A retroactive grade of “W” may be awarded only if the student would have been eligible under the previously stated policy to receive a “W” on the last date of class attendance. The last date of attendance for a distance education course will be the last date that work was submitted.

Late withdrawal appeals will be reviewed and a decision made by the Director of Student Services.

### **No-Show Policy**

A student must either attend face-to-face courses or demonstrate participation in distance learning courses by the last date to drop for a refund. A student who does not meet this deadline will be reported to the Admissions and Records Office and will be withdrawn as a no-show student. No refund will be applicable, and the student will not be allowed to attend/participate in the class or submit assignments. Failure to attend or participate in a course will adversely impact a student’s financial aid award.

### **Instructor Initiated Withdrawal**

A student who adds a class or registers after the first day of class is counted absent from all class meetings missed. Each instructor is responsible for keeping a record of student attendance (face-to-face classes) or performance/participation (DE classes) in each class throughout the semester.

When a student's absences equal twice the number of weekly meetings of a class (equivalent amount of time for summer session), the student may be dropped for unsatisfactory attendance in the class by the instructor.

Since attendance is not a valid measurement for Distance Education (DE) courses, a student may be withdrawn due to non-performance. A student should refer to his/her DE course plan for the instructor's policy.

In accordance with the No-Show Policy, a student who has not attended class or requested/accessed distance learning materials by the last day to drop the class and receive a refund must be withdrawn by the instructor during the following week. No refund will be applicable.

When an instructor withdraws a student for unsatisfactory attendance (face-to-face class) or non-performance (DE class), the last date of attendance/participation will be documented. Withdrawal must be completed within five days of a student's meeting the withdrawal criteria. A grade of "W" will be recorded during the first sixty percent (60%) period of a course. A student withdrawn after the sixty percent (60%) period will receive a grade of "F" or "U" except under documented mitigating circumstances when a letter of appeal has been submitted by the student. A copy of this documentation must be placed in the student's academic file.

The student will be notified of the withdrawal by the Admissions and Records Office. An appeal of reinstatement into the class may be approved only by the instructor.

### **XI. Disability and Diversity Statements**

If you are a student with a documented disability who will require accommodations in this course, please register with the Disability Services Office located in the Counseling Center in Rooker Hall for assistance in developing a plan to address your academic needs.

The NRCC community values the pluralistic nature of our society. We recognize diversity including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, social class, age, gender, sexual orientation and physical or mental capability. We respect the variety of ideas, experiences and practices that such diversity entails. It is our commitment to ensure equal opportunity and to sustain a climate of civility for all who work or study at NRCC or who otherwise participate in the life of the college.

**Evacuation Procedure: Please note the evacuation route posted at the classroom doorway. Two routes are marked in case one route might be blocked.**

**NEW RIVER COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
DUBLIN, VIRGINIA**

**COURSE PLAN**

Course Number and Title: ENG 112 - College Composition II (3 cr.)

Prepared by: English Faculty Spring, 2018  
(Date)

Approved by: \_\_\_\_\_ Spring, 2018  
(Dean) (Date)

**I. Course Description**

Continues to develop college writing with increased emphasis on critical essays, argumentation, and research, developing these competencies through the examination of a range of texts about the human experience. Requires students to locate, evaluate, integrate, and document sources and effectively edit for style and usage. Prerequisite: Students must successfully complete [ENG 111](#) or its equivalent, and must be able to use word processing software. Lecture 3 hours per week. 3 credits

**II. Introduction**

ENG 112 will prepare students for all other expected college writing and for writing in the workplace by engaging the writing process, rhetoric, critical thinking, and research.

To enroll in ENG 112, students must successfully complete ENG 111 or its equivalent, and must be able to use word processing software.

**III. Student Learning Outcomes**

Upon successful completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- A. **PROCESS: ENG 112** will help students recognize that writing is a process that develops through experience and varies among individuals. Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to meet the following objectives:
1. Engage in all phases of the writing process: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and reflecting.
  2. Incorporate reading and experience into their writing processes.
  3. Conform their texts to instructor-specified document formats.
  4. Create, save, and print texts using word processing technology.
- B. **RHETORIC: ENG 112** will teach students to recognize and apply rhetorical principles in order to improve the quality of their writing. Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to meet the following objectives:
1. Write for a variety of rhetorical purposes
  2. Employ a clear focus that guides their choices of evidence, language, organization, and rhetorical and persuasive strategies.
  3. Effectively apply organizational strategies to open and close their texts and to move the reader between and within ideas, paragraphs, and sentences.
  4. Synthesize information from a variety of sources.
  5. Write a minimum of 15-20 pages of finished, graded text
  6. Write a text of a minimum of 1,000 words that incorporates documented research.
  7. Appropriately employ grammatical and mechanical conventions in the preparation of readable manuscripts.
- C. **CRITICAL THINKING: ENG 112** will develop students' ability to analyze and investigate ideas and to present them in well-structured prose appropriate to the purpose and audience. Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to meet the following objectives:
1. Develop strategies for critical thinking, reading, and writing processes.
  2. Examine and analyze their experiences and readings as sources of material for writing.
  3. Competently read, summarize, analyze, evaluate, and write about college-level texts – their own and others' –of varying lengths.
  4. Examine subjects from multiple perspectives and formulate and express their own perspective.

5. Apply their knowledge of composition to class discussions and peer response workshops.
- D. **GOAL FOUR: RESEARCH: ENG 112** will develop students' ability to locate, evaluate, use, and document information to support their thinking and writing. Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to meet the following objectives:
1. Learn and apply methods of research, using primary and secondary sources in print and electronic formats.
  2. Identify the merit and reliability of sources.
  3. Appropriately employ the mechanics of introducing, integrating, and documenting source material.

#### IV. **Instructional Materials**

- A. No textbook is needed for this course

#### V. **Instructional Methods**

- B. Lecture and class activities
- B. Peer evaluation and group discussion
- C. Instructor/student conference

#### VI. **Course Content**

- The writing process: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, reflecting
- Finding and narrowing a topic
- Purpose, audience, and voice
- Focus and unity
- Organization, including openings and closings
- Argumentative and persuasive strategies
- Locating print and electronic source material
- Evaluating sources and evidence
- Synthesizing sources
- Summary, paraphrase, and direct quoting
- Bibliography / list of works cited
- Clarity: syntax, semantics, and diction
- Sentence variety and coherence
- Critical self-awareness

- Critical reading
- Peer collaboration
- Grammar and mechanics
- Following assignment requirements
- Document design and appropriate format

## **VII. Evaluation**

A. The final grade for the course will be determined as follows:

35% - Research project/s

35% - Minimum of three major argumentative papers

15% - Daily assignments and quizzes

15% - Final Exam

(The student will demonstrate the ability to read and paraphrase an article and correctly incorporate information into a short in-class paper. Also the student will exhibit knowledge of correct documentation within the paper.)

B. The following grading scale will be used: A = 90 - 100

B = 80 - 89

C = 70 - 79

D = 60 - 69

F = 0 - 59

NOTE: Evaluation and attendance policies may vary according to individual instructors. These policies will be distributed in each class at the beginning of the semester.

## **VIII. Attendance**

Regular attendance at classes is required. When absence from a class becomes necessary, it is the responsibility of the student to inform the instructor prior to the absence whenever possible. The student is responsible for the subsequent completion of all study missed during an absence. Any instruction missed and not subsequently completed will necessarily affect the grade of the student regardless of the reason for the absence.

## **XI. Cheating Policy**

Cheating includes:

1. Giving or receiving information pertaining to tests; and

2. Plagiarizing, which is defined as taking and using as one's own the writing or ideas of another. (Definition adapted from the American Heritage Dictionary.)

Any student found cheating on an assignment may receive a grade of zero for that assignment with no opportunity to make it up. Blatant plagiarism can result in a grade of "F" for the course.

Personal electronic devices cannot be accessed during final exams, tests, and/or other assignments as indicated by the instructor.

## **X. Withdrawal Policy**

### **Student Initiated Withdrawal Policy**

A student may drop or withdraw from a class without academic penalty during the first 60 percent of a session. For purposes of enrollment reporting, the following procedures apply:

- a. If a student withdraws from a class prior to the termination of the add/drop period for the session, the student will be removed from the class roll and no grade will be awarded.
- b. After the add/drop period, but prior to completion of 60 percent of a session, a student who withdraws from a class will be assigned a grade of "W." A grade of "W" implies that the student was making satisfactory progress in the class at the time of withdrawal, that the withdrawal was officially made before the deadline published in the college calendar, or that the student was administratively transferred to a different program.
- c. After that time, if a student withdraws from a class, a grade of "F" or "U" will be assigned. Exceptions to this policy may be made under documented mitigating circumstances if the student was passing the course at the last date of attendance.

A retroactive grade of "W" may be awarded only if the student would have been eligible under the previously stated policy to receive a "W" on the last date of class attendance. The last date of attendance for a distance education course will be the last date that work was submitted.

Late withdrawal appeals will be reviewed and a decision made by the Coordinator of Admissions & Records.

### **No-Show Policy**

A student must either attend face-to-face courses or demonstrate participation in distance learning courses by the last date to drop for a refund. A student who does not meet this deadline will be reported to the Admissions and Records Office and will be withdrawn as a no-show student. No refund will be applicable, and the student will not be allowed to attend/participate in the class or submit assignments. Failure to attend or participate in a course will adversely impact a student's financial aid award.

### **Instructor Initiated Withdrawal**

A student who adds a class or registers after the first day of class is counted absent from all class meetings missed. Each instructor is responsible for keeping a record of student attendance (face-to-face classes) or performance/participation (DE classes) in each class throughout the semester.

When a student's absences equal twice the number of weekly meetings of a class (equivalent amount of time for summer session), the student may be dropped for unsatisfactory attendance in the class by the instructor.

Since attendance is not a valid measurement for Distance Education (DE) courses, a student may be withdrawn due to non-performance. A student should refer to his/her DE course plan for the instructor's policy.

In accordance with the No-Show Policy, a student who has not attended class or requested/accessed distance learning materials by the last day to drop the class and receive a refund must be withdrawn by the instructor during the following week. No refund will be applicable.

When an instructor withdraws a student for unsatisfactory attendance (face-to-face class) or non-performance (DE class), the last date of attendance/participation will be documented. Withdrawal must be completed within five days of a student's meeting the withdrawal criteria. A grade of "W" will be recorded during the first sixty percent (60%) period of a course. A student withdrawn after the sixty percent (60%) period will receive a grade of "F" or "U" except under documented mitigating circumstances when a letter of appeal has been submitted by the student. A copy of this documentation must be placed in the student's academic file.

The student will be notified of the withdrawal by the Admissions and Records Office. An appeal of reinstatement into the class may be approved only by the instructor.

Any student found cheating on an assignment will receive, **at a minimum**, a grade of zero for that assignment with no opportunity to make it up. Blatant plagiarism can result in a grade of "F" for the course.

**XI. Disability and Diversity Statements**

If you are a student with a documented disability who will require accommodations in this course, please register with the Disability Services Office located in the Advising Center in Rooker Hall for assistance in developing a plan to address your academic needs.

The NRCC community values the pluralistic nature of our society. We recognize diversity including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, social class, age, gender, sexual orientation and physical or mental capability. We respect the variety of ideas, experiences and practices that such diversity entails. It is our commitment to ensure equal opportunity and to sustain a climate of civility for all who work or study at NRCC or who otherwise participate in the life of the college.

**Evacuation Procedure: Please note the evacuation route posted at the classroom doorway. Two routes are marked in case one route might be blocked.**

## Appendix C: Interview Questions and Demographic Data for Respondents

How long have you been teaching for the Virginia Community College System? Where did you do your graduate work, and how well did your graduate teaching experience prepare you for teaching at the community college level?

What pedagogical theories or strategies underlie your teaching of composition?

How would you characterize your writing classroom? What goals do you set for your writers?

Describe your familiarity with Appalachian culture. Where do you see it in the writing classroom?

What do you see as the greatest challenge for Appalachian college students in composition classes?

What strategies have you used to meet those challenges, and what have the outcomes of those strategies been?

What resources do you have, or would you like to have, for teaching Appalachian students?

What, if any, knowledge about Appalachian language or culture would you like to have that you do not have now?

Respondent	Degree	Appalachian	Race	Gender
1	MA	Y	African-American	M
2	PhD	Y	White	F
3	MA	N	White	M
4	MFA	Y	White	M
5	MFA	N	White	F
6	MA	Y	White	F

### Appendix D: Complete List of Coding Terms

Category	Positive	Negative
Appalachian students	Disciplined Does well Embrace heritage Hardworking (at jobs) Hardworking (in class) Humble In touch with their roots Not entitled Respectful	Ashamed (of Appalachian culture) Ashamed (of previous writing experience) Can't look at Appalachia critically Can't oppose their families Can't question their beliefs Don't believe in lifelong learning Don't believe in the value of education Don't prioritize class attendance Don't read Fearful (of change) Fearful (of difference) Give(giving) up Isolated Lack (ability) Lack (curiosity) Lack (drive) Lack (experience) Lack (familiarity with other cultures) Lack (independent thought) Lack (initiative) Lack (motivation) Lazy Limited resources Low (ability) Low (expectations) Not motivated Poor Reluctant students Resistant to change
Appalachian Culture	Family oriented Respectful of heritage Aware of ancestry Has a sense of rootedness	Believes that things don't change Delusional about the return of industry Desolate/desolation Discourages higher education Educated people are evil Experiences cycles of exploitation Getting above your raising Gives up Has failed to transition

		<p>In crisis  Is unwilling to seek higher education  Isolated/Isolation  Neglect/neglected  Poor  Really irrational  Shame  Suspicious of education  Unsupportive of education  Unwilling to transition</p>
SAE	<p>Blemish-free  Correct  Correcting grammatical errors  Fixed errors  Good  Graded for grammar  Grammatically correct  Of the highest order  Pure</p>	<p>Just one of many grammars  Standards-based environment is unfortunate</p>
Appalachian English	<p>Don't judge students by speech  It's okay to speak at Home  Culturally appropriate</p>	<p>Drawl  Error-ridden  Has to change  Holds (students) back  Incorrect  Looks bad  Lots of errors  mumbling  Must be overcome  Remove dialect from papers  Twangy  Work with a tutor on errors  Resume with AE goes in the trash</p>

**Appendix E: Raw Data By Zip Code**

Attached as a separate file.