CONCLUSION

After six years, thousands of hours collecting and analyzing various forms of evidence, and hundreds of conversations about approaches, interpretations, and drafts, we have learned a great deal about how college student writers develop, and we are happy to share our work with others interested in more deeply understanding how undergraduate writers develop. We come away from this work with a new awareness of the complexity of writing development, its many forms and variations, and the multiple methods that can illuminate various aspects of it. Creating this collection posed the challenge of limiting and selecting, since it was not possible to include discussions of all the data we collected.

Our project benefited from and built on previous longitudinal studies, and we hope other scholars and researchers will in turn build on this study, perhaps drawing on some of the data we offer online. We looked carefully at other studies of writing development and expected our own work to follow similar lines, and to some extent our study affirmed previous investigations. We found, for instance, that the writerly development of many students was marked by developing expertise in the discourse communities of the disciplines in which they concentrated. At the same time, though, we encountered many students who complicated the equation between disciplinary expertise and writing development by coupling it with other, more self-directed goals. We found that students developed facility with various genres, but they also created their own categories for kinds of writing. We found that patterns of students’ writerly development were multiple and irregular, but we could also discern some commonalities among specific subgroups. We expected that existing concepts would guide much of our work, and they did. Threshold concepts played a role in the questions around which chapters in this collection developed, as did rhetorical theory. These helped us develop ways to show what the learning and development of student writers looks like. However, a number of our questions—about language-level analysis, extended views of development, and multimodal writing, for instance—reached beyond them.

It would be very satisfying to conclude this collection by offering a list of declarative statements about student writing development, the sorts of statements that
could provide unambiguous support for specific curricular or policy moves. This desire for certainty takes on urgency given the growing importance of writing in this country. One assumption shared by nearly all our study participants centered on the major role writing would play in their lives beyond the university. These students probably had not read Deborah Brandt’s *The Rise of Writing*, which asserts that we are witnessing “the turn to writing as a mass daily experience” (3). This turn means that people, both at work and leisure, are spending a major portion of the day with fingers on keyboards, it means that we are living and writing among others who write, and it disrupts the long-standing dominance of reading-based literacy in favor of one in which reading frequently occurs as part of writing rather than as an end in itself. Our participants may not have read Brandt, but they enacted her claim that young adults pursue writing-based literacy, “teaching themselves to ‘write over reading,’ commandeering, redefining, and in some cases, refusing reading to advance their writing development” (14). In light of such claims, to say nothing of the current anti-intellectual climate that questions the value of higher education, we would like to offer clear and certain statements, but reading across the chapters included here reveals that nearly every possible declaration has to be qualified. The pages that follow offer several observations that emerge from this study, and each is accompanied by the “but” that demonstrates the complexity of writing development.

**College Writing Has Transformative Effects on Students**

Evidence collected by this study makes it clear that student participants developed new capacities across their undergraduate years, and many articulated their growth in definitive terms. Some described their writing experience as transformative, commenting on the ways it changed both their writing and how they see themselves. Others talked about their newfound passion for writing, claiming that writing would always be part of their lives. And still others pointed to the specific skills they had learned, such as developing an argument and tailoring it to a specific audience’s interests. Looking across surveys, interviews, and the written artifacts of participants, we found compelling evidence that a great majority of participants felt they had become different writers in college. Their claims took varying forms, sometimes analytical, sometimes emotion-filled, and sometimes surprised at what had been accomplished, but nearly always positive.

We found, for instance, evidence of students’ growing awareness of audience in interviews as well as selections of student writing, and in entry interviews
many indicated that audience awareness was a new concept, not something they had learned about in high school. When asked in interviews what constituted good writing, a very frequent and unprompted student response was “audience awareness.” As recounted in section one, the number of coded responses about the importance of audience increased significantly between sophomore and senior year across the entire group of participants. For some students, the teacher/instructor remained the primary audience, while others imagined multiple audiences as well as the possible effects their writing could have on them. Students also talked about the kinds of effects they wanted to have on audiences—to be not boring, to have a particular impact, or to reach wide groups of readers online. In chapter 2, Benjamin Keating explains how many students who participated in peer review saw their classmates as authentic audiences, from whom they learned ways to address multiple audiences. Lizzie Hutton and Gail Gibson found, as they recount in chapter 3, that increased audience awareness accompanied deepening understandings of genre, enhancing students’ confidence about addressing various audiences, as Shannon exemplified: “[I can] mold my style to any different venue or audience or purpose for what I’m writing” (p. 104). The rhetorical flexibility demonstrated by students such as these is one marker of writing development.

In addition to student claims, our study showed clear evidence of audience awareness in student writing. Ryan McCarty demonstrates in chapter 4 how students such as Kris and Jonah address audiences within their disciplinary homes by tracing the patterns of nominalization, dense noun clusters, and specialized lexical items they both use in writing for STEM readers. At the same time both Kris and Jonah extend their audience awareness by taking up other strategies. For Kris it means adopting what McCarty calls “argumentative methods from outside her usual STEM contexts” (p. 122) to reach non-STEM readers. Jonah takes a more all-encompassing approach, drawing on resources from his several writing experiences to “write with dexterity across a range of situations” (p. 128) and to address a variety of audiences.

The patterns that Laura Aull traces in chapter 5 show similar transformations in student writing at the level of word and phrase choices that signal generality and certainty. Aull’s automated text analysis of lower- and upper-division student writers shows how students move from a majority of boosters and minority of hedges in writing to the reverse as they transition from lower-division to upper-division courses so that they write in fewer generalities and begin to more closely approximate academic writing. Large-scale changes like this speak directly to the transformative shifts that signal writing development.
But Transformative Effects Are Not Uniform and Not Always Visible to Students

Despite such evidence of transformations, we have to acknowledge that they did not occur for all students. Some continued to see audience only in terms of the professor or instructor and spent considerable energy trying to figure out what the professor wanted. These students expressed frustration when they could not determine and produce what the instructor would reward with the coveted A, but they did not turn to more expansive considerations of audience. Only some students moved toward what Hutton and Gibson (chapter 3) describe as an academic-creative hybrid, where students negotiate successfully between “views of writing and their writerly growth as entailing both generative activity and adherence to communicative norms, instead of viewing these approaches as requiring an either-or choice” (p. 105).

Individual students in our study reinforce the claim of researchers such as Richard Haswell, Lucille McCarthy, Marilyn Sternglass, Anne Beaufort, Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz, and Lee Ann Carroll, that student writing development is always uneven and irregular. Naomi Silver’s investigation of students’ experiences with multimodal composition in chapter 8 displays this irregularity in very clear terms, demonstrating that the same student can “exhibit highly developed rhetorical awareness and flexibility in one mode, while demonstrating fairly early stages of rhetorical command and metacognitive awareness and regulation in another” (p. 233). This pattern of uneven development also emerges in a student such as Grace, in chapters 3 and 7, who feels capable with formulaic writing but considers herself unable to produce writing inflected by creativity.

Another feature of writing development highlighted by researchers such as Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz is the distance between what students say and what they do. In some instances, students talk about aspects of writing they do not enact in their own composing. A variation on this difference is students who accomplish things in writing that they do not acknowledge in talking about it. In chapter 6, Zak Lancaster illustrates this phenomenon in his analysis of Jon, who in his exit interview describes good writing as “you are accurately representing you on the page” (p. 175), which suggests an arhetorical view of writing. Yet Lancaster’s analysis of selections of Jon’s writing shows that this student uses rhetorical strategies very effectively. As Lancaster observes, interviews “reveal interesting and fruitful contradictions, both within [students’] talk about writing and between their talk and rhetorical performances” (p. 182).
Curriculum Shapes Writing Development

At every level the curriculum influences how students develop as writers. In our study, for instance, the fact that peer review is a significant part of all first-year writing courses, and virtually no one is exempted from first-year writing, means that our student participants had the common experience of peer review. This helps explain why peer review looms so large in students’ discussions of their writing and why a number worried about how they would replace these opportunities to share writing when they graduated. On another campus where peer review does not necessarily figure so prominently in the curriculum, students might pay it less attention. Likewise, the existence of an upper-level writing requirement, ostensibly to develop facility in disciplinary writing, had a shaping effect on the writing experiences of all study participants. As noted in the introduction to section two, and especially in Ryan McCarty’s chapter 4, the linkage between disciplinary expertise and writing development occupies a prominent position in scholarship on writing development, as exemplified by Anne Beaufort, Mary Soliday, Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz, and Chris Thaiss and Terry Zawacki. In this view, the curricula of student majors play a key role in their development as writers.

Students in our study confirmed that learning to emulate the discourses of their fields of study shaped their writerly development. Zach, who appears in McCarty’s chapter, describes himself in the exit interview, saying: “I am now a perfectly well adapted scientific writer, streamlined to convey concepts and findings in a concise and objective manner. . . . It has historically been a necessity to write this way in science in an effort to convince skeptical readers that your findings are based on truth rather than opinion” (p. 115). Zach’s prose suggests his ability to enact scientific writing effectively, and he sees it as a mark of his growth as a writer.

An especially powerful curricular force for the students in our study was the minor in writing, and comparisons of students in the two groups of writing minors and nonminors demonstrate a number of ways the curriculum of the minor shaped writing development. As Benjamin Keating documents in chapter 2, students in the minor had, overall, more positive feelings about their experiences with peer review than the nonminors. He writes: “For minors, peer review took place in a classroom setting where students were able to choose their own writing projects and claim authority over them. Overwhelmingly, they perceived peer review as a highly useful and enjoyable experience” (p. 74). It shaped the way minors understood the revision process and fostered a dialogic view of writing. Keating observes that nonminors did not experience the same curriculum and “reported more neg-
ative experiences with school-sponsored modes of peer review” (p. 74). Further, in some cases nonminors equated skill in grammar with writing competence, thereby, claims Keating, slowing their writerly development.

Lizzie Hutton and Gail Gibson add a further insight into the curricular influence of the minor in chapter 3 as they distinguish between students “who saw writing and writing development as entailing mainly learned competence in the genre-specific communication of thought” and those “who saw writing development as entailing competence in the generation of thought, and who emphasized the development of a highly personal writerly identity” (p. 93). Nonminors largely populated the first category while minors tended to fall into the second. Hutton and Gibson explain this difference in curricular terms, noting that course work in the minor remained “detached from a specific disciplinary affiliation beyond writing studies itself” (p. 93). These authors go on to explain that students who integrated the two domains of “creative” and “academic” writing also tended to be minors, who “often praised the space that the minor courses provided for their processing of these different constructs” (p. 93).

An important feature of the minor curriculum was, of course, the eportfolio, and Naomi Silver demonstrates how this requirement shaped the writerly development of minors in chapter 8. By dividing the “portfolio effect” from the “eportfolio effect,” Silver makes clear the varying paths of development followed by minors. Some students, such as Ayanna, integrated learning through processes characteristic of portfolios—collection, reflection, and selection—but failed to see writing in the eportfolio as “real” writing and ultimately created a Capstone eportfolio that cannot be described as web-sensible. A few of the minors profiled by Silver, such as Kaitlin, do come to see their work in eportfolios as “real” writing and create web-sensible projects that draw on the full resources of their platforms. The writers in the latter category develop a more capacious concept of writing and “evince a highly metacognitive relationship to the rhetorical situations they compose within” (p. 244). In contrast, students who did not become multimodal writers had a more limited concept of writing, demonstrating that even within the same curriculum marked differences in writerly development may appear.

But Students Subvert or Supplement Curriculum

Silver’s account of the varying paths of development among minors suggests one way students subverted the curriculum. A stated learning goal of the minor, “to compose in a variety of modes, including a range of new media such as blogs, inter-
active maps, online magazines, etc.,” was subverted by students who did not think of eportfolios or other multimodal projects as “real” writing and thus did not become the multimodal composers the minor was designed to produce. Keating describes a different type of subversion in chapter 2 when he narrates how nonminors looked beyond classroom-based peer review. As Keating reports, many nonminors described peer review in negative terms, recounting how their peers lacked sufficient knowledge and simply went through the motions. Accordingly, these nonminors themselves failed to take school-sponsored peer review seriously. Yet they valued peer review enough to seek it out on their own, like Charlotte, who explained, “I do use peer editing as a huge thing. . . . I like using people who I know I can trust as far as peer editing, which usually happens to be my mom a lot, or my friends that work at the Daily, or past teachers” (p. 64). From one perspective it can seem that peer review did not work for students such as Charlotte, but she subverted the classroom version of peer review by supplementing it with a self-sponsored version.

Supplementing the curriculum appears in another form as Ryan McCarty describes how students such as Zach, who proclaims himself a “perfectly adapted scientific writer,” then took up another approach to writing: “I believe that even more societal value can be drawn from scientific truths by conveying them in a way that draws on the passion of the audience, not just the rationality . . . such an endeavor must be undertaken carefully and subtly so as not to distract from the empirical evidence” (p. 115). Zach retains the scientist’s respect for empirical evidence but insists that his writerly development should include more than scientific writing. McCarty goes on to recount the several ways that students see discipline-focused writing as something to be supplemented with other approaches to develop as writers. Leo sees “every class” as contributing to his writerly development (p. 116); Katie values “the different assignments and the different audiences” she writes for (p. 117); Kris notes the importance of writing to audiences beyond the scientific community “in communicating your research” (p. 122); and Jonah aims to “learn more ways in which to perfect various forms of writing” (p. 128). As McCarty puts it, many students who attained the goal of emulating the discourses of their disciplinary communities reached beyond that to a writerly development that was “multifaceted, drawing on a range of personal interests, general education courses, courses in their majors, work experiences, and extracurricular activities” (p. 129).

In talking with students who had already graduated and moved on to the next chapter of their lives, Anne Gere in chapter 10 found more examples of students supplementing the curriculum of their disciplinary homes. Stephanie, who entered the university determined to major in actuarial math, supplemented this curricu-
lum with a major in English and found that the combination served her very well when she took a position in the insurance industry. Kris, who also appears in McCarty’s chapter, supplemented her biology major with courses in philosophy and claimed that writing philosophy papers gave her insights into the ways scientists write, and at the same time helped equip her to write for audiences outside the scientific community. Both of these lessons proved to be important as she pursued an academic career in biology. Linda, specializing in Asian studies, supplemented her major with a minor in writing and claimed that the combination served her need to develop as a fiction writer. Dan, a journalist and communications major, also supplemented his major with a minor in writing, and it was there that he encountered, and initially dismissed, the peer review that became central in his job as a social media coordinator.

**Students’ Personal and Social Development Is Linked to Writing**

The Anderson et al. study referenced in the Introduction (p. 7) found that three characteristics of good writing assignments—clear writing expectations, meaning-making writing tasks, and interactive writing processes—can “affect students’ perceived development socially and personally” (227). The authors suggest that this finding centering on social and personal development “opens a new category of the benefits of writing in college” (227), and findings from our study offer a look at this category. Interview transcripts from this study are filled with students’ expressions of pleasure, frustration, resistance, pride, inadequacy, delight, ambivalence, and a variety of other feelings. Frequently these feelings appear to have a shaping effect on students’ ways of writing and their perceptions of their writerly selves. In turn, we found claims that writing led students to various forms of personal and social development. Abby, for instance, said that positive responses to her writing “made me more confident with not only my writing abilities but what I have to say in general, people want to hear.” Madeleine, a minor, voiced this view in her exit interview: “College is such a transformative time that writing can become the mode through which you kind of make sense of what you’ve been through. I think this is what my writing experience has been like. It’s not just in the academic sense. Not that that’s not valid, because it totally is. It can also play a role in personal development and reflecting on your experiences.”

As noted in the introduction to section one, students frequently took pleasure in their ability to achieve a desired effect on or elicit a positive response from an audience. They talked about the delights of sharing writing with peers and being a
writer among writers. These positive feelings associated with writing led students to feel more capable, more socially adept, more in charge of their own learning. Of course, students’ feelings did not always take positive form. Study participants expressed resentment about peer review that was not effective and did not, therefore, confer its full benefits for their writing or themselves. In this and many other contexts students’ emotional responses contributed to or limited their writerly development and their writing development played a role in their personal and social development.

“Critical engagement,” the term Emily Wilson and Justine Post use in chapter 1 to describe the most effective student responses to instructor feedback, represents a mixture of affect and action. This engagement, which includes seeing broad purposes for writing, imagining audiences beyond the instructor, reflecting on one’s own writing, and evaluating feedback rather than accepting it without question, steps beyond the more obvious feelings of acceptance or resistance to show how writers’ personal and social development is bound up with their writerly development. Capacities such as taking a broader view, being reflective, and assessing critiques lead to personal and social growth as much as to the development of writers.

Take, for instance, Adrienne, whom Wilson and Post discuss. In her entry interview Adrienne expresses resentment because “I didn’t get the grade I wanted,” on a paper written for an English class, gives no attention to the feedback, and “quit thinking about English as a major” (p. 38). Her lack of critical engagement with the feedback is accompanied by a relatively impulsive response. Wilson and Post cite high school expectations for feedback as an obstacle to critical engagement with feedback, and Adrienne expresses frustration that her “professors aren’t filling out a checklist” (p. 46) as her high school teachers did.

Grace, a student featured in Anna Knutson’s chapter 7, also expresses strong feelings about writing in her entry interview, claiming that she “hates” writing and believes she “can’t write” (p. 193). The struggle for Grace centers on the need to reconcile formulaic and more creative writing: “It has to be organized, and then I’m always trying to figure out how to match the creativity with the organization” (p. 196). As Knutson puts it, “[Grace] does not believe that she is cognitively equipped to be creative and organized at the same time” (p. 205), and “that writing ability is natural and inherent rather than the result of process and effort” (p. 205). Like Adrienne, Grace abandons her intended major, shifting from environmental sciences to German, explaining, “I hate that this major is full of writing and persuading people and arguments. I can’t write well enough and so I just—I dropped the class, and then I dropped my major” (p. 208). Grace’s underdeveloped concept of writing took her on a circuitous route to writerly development that included eventually finding a
“reset” button in her new major and simultaneously drawing on new personal and social capacities.

Natalie, who appears in Sarah Swofford’s chapter 9, describes herself as “definitely confident coming [to college]; I also think maybe over-confident” (p. 272), but she quickly learned that the standards for writing in her high school were very different from those at the university: “I was told in high school that this is good, but it wasn’t good. Looking back, I don’t think it was good at all. I think that first year, there were lots of road bumps, and I didn’t—my confidence was knocked a little bit, but in a good way” (p. 272). Unlike Grace and Adrienne, Natalie does not proclaim herself a bad writer or take up a narrative of failure, thereby demonstrating a level of personal and social maturity. Instead she, in the terms Wilson and Post use, engages critically with the feedback she receives and describes herself as feeling “freed” as a writer.

But Students Help Shape the Terms of That Personal/Social-Writing Development Link

Although students such as Adrienne and Grace express significant doubts about their writing abilities early in their undergraduate careers, each shifts the terms of the linkage between writerly and personal/social development. In her exit interview, however, Adrienne praises feedback from an instructor who looked “at the overarching thing. She was really great at keeping in mind form,” and explains how she responded: “It was killing my darlings, but it was learning form and purpose” (p. 39). Here Adrienne engages critically with feedback that helped her improve her writing, and her response also shows that she has grown enough personally and socially to look past high school expectations.

In becoming a German major, Grace found herself in a writing environment that “emphasized the importance of ideas over perfection, and process over product” (p. 213). Knutson speculates that learning to write in a new language may “have been destabilizing enough that Grace was forced to dislodge some of her entrenched writing knowledge and approach writing anew, as a novice” (pp. 213–14), and in the process she became more receptive to instructor feedback. As Knutson notes, Grace did not describe herself as engaging in reflection, but it is difficult to imagine that reflection did not figure in her decision to switch to a major with instructors who provided individualized writing support. In this environment she could combine writerly with personal and social development.

Natalie, in chapter 9, demonstrated a capacity to engage critically with the
feedback she received and to acknowledge that it represented very different expectations from those of her high school teachers. She could have become resentful about not being well prepared for college writing, but she showed personal and social maturity by seeking to replicate in college the supportive network she had experienced in her small hometown. Because she saw writing feedback in relational terms, she sought out peers who could help her negotiate the new expectations. In so doing, Natalie connected her social intelligence with her developing understanding of writing. With this move she righted herself after having her confidence “knocked a bit” and continued on a path that combined both writerly and social/personal development.

**Language-Level Analysis Reveals Large-Scale Aspects of Development**

Large-scale language-level analysis makes visible features of students’ writing and their comments about writing that cannot be seen through examination of individual texts or transcripts. The meanings students attach to words such as *voice* or *style* or any number of others, such as *revision* or *argument*, affect how they write, how they think about what writing can do, and what developmental paths they take. Looking across a large collection of student comments, as Lancaster does in chapter 6, can provide insights into how students understand and use metalanguage about writing. Knowing, for instance, that students in a curriculum like the writing minor collectively think of style more in terms of register than do nonminor students, who think of it in more individualistic terms, can help shape the curriculum for both groups of students. Similarly, analysis that shows how students’ understanding of style shifts (or doesn’t) from a greater emphasis on its individual qualities to seeing its relationship to genre or register casts light on developmental trajectories. The insights drawn from such analysis can provide valuable information about the development of student writers. Lancaster’s finding of the often contradictory views expressed by students, as they slip from individualist to social descriptions of style and back again, and the link between these perspectives and students’ understanding of their various writing projects, suggests the value of looking closely at the role of assignments in writing development.

Seeing patterns that contribute to features such as generality and unnuanced certainty, both features of relatively inexperienced writers, can, as Aull demonstrates in chapter 5, explain student writing in ways that may lead to effective instruction. Specific words and phrases can be identified as boosters and hedges, and their frequency patterns can be measured to understand the kinds of language
choices students make. Aull shows that it is possible to identify how students’ micro-level choices illuminate “macro-level constructs like audience and purpose, showing how they are realized and discoverable” (p. 158). In showing how students use their linguistic resources, Aull suggests that the assignments to which students write exert a shaping force on their micro-level choices.

In addition to informing curricular planning and understandings of writerly development, large-scale analysis can serve pedagogical purposes. Using, or encouraging students to use, language-level analysis of writing produced in classrooms can reveal the micro-level choices that shape larger effects such as certainty, generality, writer-in-text, voice, and style. Such analysis can help students become more attuned to monitoring and appreciating their own development as writers. For instructors, this analysis can lead to productive discussions about writing and the many choices it entails. Perhaps most important, instructors can learn to create assignments that encourage students to reflect on how they represent themselves in writing for a given audience in a given genre. As both authors in section three noted, the projects or assignments that students undertake contribute significantly to the language choices they make. The importance of devoting serious attention to writing assignments or prompts cannot be overemphasized, because they contribute directly to writerly development. Dan Melzer has shown that the great majority of assignments in US colleges and universities focus on conveying information and ask students to address the teacher as examiner, giving students little opportunity to approach multiple audiences or work with various genres. Language-level examination of student writing can reveal the limitations of poorly conceived assignments and at the same time make clear to students and faculty strategies for developing more effective ways to address specific audiences in a variety of genres.

**But Language-Level Analysis Can Also Reveal Useful Information about Individual Students**

Large-scale analysis of language-level features of writing can provide useful information about patterns in groups of students, but language-level analysis of student writing can also be productive for understanding the writing of individual students. Ryan McCarty’s analysis of the ways Kris and Jonah use nominalization, noun clusters, and scientific terms, for example, illustrates important aspects of their writerly development. Similarly, Lancaster’s examination of how Kaitlin and Mariana talk about the terms *style* and *voice* provides insights into their conceptions of social and individual aspects of writing.
As this study has found, some students lack the language to describe their writing or simply don't recognize what they are doing. Other students describe writing in terms quite different from what they actually do as writers. Analyzing student writing at the level of language can clarify the complexity of writing development by showing how students are actually using language. Lancaster illustrates this point with a qualitative language-level examination of texts written by Angela and Jon. In Angela’s case, there is continuity between her expressed views about a socially inflected approach to style and her performance as a writer. But Jon projects a social or disciplinary voice in his writing even though he expresses a much more individualistic view in his interviews. This qualitative analysis validates the claim that there can be significant variation between the statements and performances of developing student writers and at the same time shows how those variations align with analysis of the writing collected from larger groups.

**Writing Development Is Shaped by Prior Experiences and Perceptions**

While it seems obvious to say that writing development at the college level extends back into high school and forward into writing after graduation, most studies of writing development at the college level have concentrated on the undergraduate years without much attention to what came before or after. At the beginning, the design for this study did not include extension in either direction, but as we examined the evidence from college students’ reflections on their writing as well as transcripts of their interviews, it became clear that students see their own writing development in an arc that extends back to high school and forward past graduation.

Students such as Adrienne and Linda demonstrated in different ways the shaping influences of high school writing on college student writers. Adrienne, whom Wilson and Post introduce in chapter 1, arrived on campus as a confident writer who had received A’s in high school and planned to be an English major. In addition to receiving a lower grade than she expected on an English paper, Adrienne explained, “I didn’t feel like [my writing] was appreciated” (p. 38), suggesting that she had experienced appreciation from her high school teachers. In her entry interview she expressed particular resentment about having to write “what the teacher thinks” (p. 38), comparing it unfavorably to the more “objective” checklists her high school teachers had used. The intensity of Adrienne’s struggles with the differences between her high school and college writing experiences became visible when Adrienne decided not to major in English. In her entry interview she explained, “I’m just less confident [as a writer]” (p. 38).
Linda, who appears in chapter 10, made few references to her writing instruction in high school, except to note that she had not received much attention or encouragement. She had, however, developed a very clear sense of her identity as a writer in high school. Her self-sponsored writing provided emotional sustenance as well as a vehicle for personal growth because in writing she found a means to deal with and move beyond the traumas and challenges she faced. For Linda, college writing offered a valuable set of opportunities for receiving helpful feedback, learning important strategies, and strengthening her identity as a writer. The apparent deficits in Linda’s high school writing experiences made college writing a welcome change.

Just as high school writing experiences shaped the ways students encountered college writing, so college writing contributed to students’ views of their futures as writers. As survey data discussed earlier shows, most students in this study felt that writing would be important to their success in life after college. Stephanie, Dan, and Linda were no exception. Although their goals varied considerably, each felt that writing would play a key role in their future lives and made choices to prepare for that future. Stephanie’s double major in math and English gave her an ideal mix of analytical and interpretive skills. Dan combined his extracurricular experience as a journalist with a major in communications and a minor in writing to give himself the broadest possible preparation for becoming a writer after graduation. Linda drew on her major in Asian studies for material to incorporate into her fiction, and the minor in writing put her in contact with committed writers who gave her a community in which to practice her craft.

But Students Also Transform Their Approaches to and Thoughts about Writing

Although she abandoned the idea of majoring in English, Adrienne did minor in writing, and between her entry and exit interviews her views of writing and herself as a writer shifted again. Rather than critiquing instructors for seemingly subjective and arbitrary feedback, she actively sought feedback very different from the checklists she had wished for earlier. Describing one instructor’s feedback, she explained, “I wanted more. ‘How is it working as a whole? What is your feeling as a whole?’ . . . I feel like I didn’t get enough feedback” (p. 38). Instead of resenting a lack of appreciation for her writing, Adrienne became a confident enough writer to seek and welcome what Wilson and Post call “tough-yet-generative feedback” (p. 39).

For Linda, the transforming effects of college built on the foundation she had
established in high school. She embraced opportunities to receive feedback from peers and instructors. As a minor in writing, she became part of a cohort of writers, received helpful feedback from instructors, and had opportunities to work on projects in which she was deeply invested. Her courses in Asian studies provided inspiration and information she could use in her writing, and she also developed a rich sense of the relationship between the verbal and visual.

Kris, who began college writing in a developmental course, found her way to more effective writing by reading extensively and taking a cross-disciplinary approach. As McCarty notes in chapter 4, one move was to consider the difference between writing in biology and in physics, contrasting a more interpretive emphasis with a more quantitative one. Another of Kris’s moves was to consider the differences between writing in philosophy and biology. This cross-disciplinary perspective gave her a window on the nature of scientific writing, and at the same time broadened her repertoire so that she could write about science for nonspecialist audiences. Throughout this process of transformation Kris remained convinced that her writing should remain her own: “You don’t automatically pick up on somebody else’s style and make that your own. You still have to form it in such a way that it’s your own style” (p. 121).

**Looking Ahead**

This collection includes a rich array of insights into college students’ writing development. Each chapter considers the study data from a different angle, contributing to a kaleidoscopic view of student writers. Despite their wide-ranging topics, methods, and conclusions, each contributor privileges the student perspective, attending closely to what student writers say and do. Yet even with the variety of insights offered, this collection touches on only a few of the many possible topics associated with writing development and draws on a relatively small percentage of the available data. To encourage other researchers to take up additional issues and questions, we are making the study data available at https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10079890 so that others can join us in investigations that can lead all of us to do even better at preparing students for the life-long journey that is writing development.

**Works Cited**


