

HOW DO I READ? WHAT COLLEGES CAN LEARN ABOUT SUPPORTING THE
TRANSITION TO COLLEGE READING FROM FIRST- YEAR STUDENT'S
SELF-REPORTED READING LIVES

By

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LEARNING FROM STUDENT'S SELF-REPORTED READING LIVES

Abstract

In order to succeed in college, students need to be able to read closely, critically, and independently. Unfortunately, large scale studies of graduating high school students in the United States have indicated that many are underprepared for college and career reading. When these students enter college, they often find themselves in a space that is heavily dependent on reading and yet provides little support for the new content, context, and forms of reading they will encounter. These students bring with them a lifetime of literacy experience though, which can help faculty and learning designers to understand how they read.

Using a mixed methods approach, this study looked at the personal reading lives of first-year college students. For the purpose of the study, an individual's reading life was separated into four dimensions including belief and confidence in their skills, habits during reading, preferences, and motivation. In the fall of 2018, participants completed a survey which asked about their reading lives as well as their preferences for instruction. The survey was followed by focus groups held in the spring of 2019.

Overall, the study participants had a positive view of reading and their reading skills, however the focus group discussions indicated that students became aware of the need to improve their reading skills as the year progressed. This study found that students valued their college faculty and expected them to act as content experts, teachers, and learning support, and valued reading-based activities that were social in nature and connected them to content, faculty, and peers. Students had strong preferences about the types of materials used in classes as well as classroom practices. The study results yielded several suggestions for improving teaching and building reading-centered learning experiences and the professional learning needed for faculty.

Keywords: college, high education, university, reading, literacy

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How Do I Read? What Colleges Can Learn About Supporting the Transition to College
Reading from First- Year Student's Self-Reported Reading Lives

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

A student's reading life is complex and built upon a foundation formed by their personal, social, and educational experiences that may not translate, without support, to college success. The non-academic world that our students live in is both text-driven and multimodal and is interwoven with digital technology; most students navigate this world comfortably and successfully. When these students enter college, however, they are expected to adopt a new form of discourse, one that requires extensive, sustained and critical text reading skills for success (National Center on Education and the Economy [NCEE], 2013; Springer, Wilson, & Dole, 2015). Unfortunately, research shows that first-year students are likely to enter college without the types of reading skills they need to be successful (ACT, 2014; ACT, 2015; ACT, 2016; ACT, 2017; Jackson & Kurlaender, 2014; Moore et al, 2010; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2008; NEA, 2004; NEA, 2007; Wilkins, Hartman, Howland, Sharma, & Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest, 2010).

If higher education demands certain reading skills and behaviors that are not common among young adults entering college, then a critical activity for college courses is helping students transition into the types of reading expected, while taking advantage of the literacy skills students bring with them. Unfortunately, students seldom find support to help them bridge the mismatch between the literacy skills that they have and the expectations of the college and university world, leaving them unprepared, unsupported, and at risk for failure (Bosley, 2008; Quick, 2013) in an academic world that is designed to be primarily book centered (Hull & Nelson, 2005). It seems that first- year courses, especially those that fall into general education

programs, are positioned well for faculty to design and integrate activities that take advantage of literacy skills and habits that students bring with them to college.

While colleges and universities usually do not do a good job in supporting students in transitioning from high school to college reading, college faculty can be in a position to support students if they can identify student needs and strengths and adapt classroom activities accordingly. It is possible to integrate reading support into all areas of a college program, especially in General Education foundational courses. In fact, a study done in 2006 by McCrudden, Schraw & Hartley which looked at incorporating pre-reading instruction in college courses found that integrating reading support increased reading performance without increasing the amount of time for reading. With professional learning support, instructors could create lessons that give students vocabulary, schema, and skills in the context of course content, in turn giving the students an opportunity to move beyond memory and rote recitation to be able to use their knowledge in new and novel ways. Knowing more about the reading lives of college students can help faculty choose effective teaching methods, create activities that support reading, and harness students' strengths and interests. More information about the parts of a student's life that are invisible to faculty and yet pivotal to their work can help faculty themselves move from a static presentation of content to a focus on learning.

If, as literacy experts such as Freire and Macedo believe and Leu et al (2017) says, literacy itself "becomes new every day of our lives" (p. 1), then we need to understand student's reading lives and the strengths, skills, as well as the needs that they carry with them. That same knowledge about our students is necessary to support faculty in designing meaningful learning experiences that build on student's strengths and experiences. Given the fact that most traditional college students were born into a world with mature, robust information and

communications technology, it seems an apt time to examine what students have to say about their reading and literacy skills (Belshaw, 2014).

College Reading Expectations

Freire and Macedo's (1987) book *Literacy: Reading the Word and The World* opens with a statement about critical reading. It speaks of reading as more than a mechanical skill, stating:

Reading does not consist merely of decoding the written word or language; rather, it is preceded by and intertwined with knowledge of the world. Language and reality are dynamically interconnected. The understanding attained by a critical reading of text implies perceiving the relationship between text and context (p. 29).

This definition of reading both incorporates and extends the static, technical definition of decoding and basic comprehension and acknowledges that reading is an act of understanding which requires deeper skills to move beyond the explicit wording. This depth of comprehension and meaning-making is the basis of academic reading in college; without critical reading, it is difficult to succeed in a higher education environment.

Two studies have identified the skills that enable this type of reading in a higher education environment. In a study of first-year college courses, Springer, Wilson, and Dole (2015) defined four core skills related to critical reading that students need to have or acquire in order to succeed, including the ability to read complex texts strategically and independently, to employ close reading habits, to synthesize ideas, and to develop reading stamina and wide reading. Another study, conducted by the National Center on Education and the Economy (2013) identified the need for college students to be able to retrieve, interpret, synthesize, and analyze information as key skills for college students. These skills are consistent with Freire & Macedo's (1987) version of reading literacy and provide guidance for college faculty on how to

view reading and reading skills and move beyond the fixed reading definition inherent in college courses.

The State of College Reading

There are a number of large-scale research studies that show that students entering and in their first year of college are not prepared for the reading expected of them. Two studies completed by the National Endowment for the Arts found that young adults of traditional college age are reading less and have less developed reading skills (NEA, 2004) and that only one-third of graduating high school seniors read proficiently (NEA, 2007). Other studies have found that between approximately 40% and 52% of all students entering college do not have the reading skills that they will need to be successful (ACT, 2014; ACT, 2015; ACT, 2016; ACT, 2017; Jackson & Kurlaender, 2014; Moore et al, 2010; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2008; Wilkins, Hartman, Howland, Sharma, & Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest, 2010). The numbers vary between studies, based on time, population studied, and methods used, however, there is ample evidence that students are not ready to meet college academic expectations. While some of these students require remediation to be considered college ready, the majority are not identified as remedial and yet do not have the skills and habits needed for college reading.

Support, or Lack of, for College Reading

Despite the number of students who are unprepared for college reading, colleges and universities often are not prepared to support these students. Many college and universities offer little to no support for struggling college readers and those that do, tend to focus on remedial or developmental non-credit classes (Bosley, 2008). Remediation is geared toward ensuring that

students have decoding, fluency, and basic comprehensions skills. For the majority of students entering college, remediation is not appropriate or what they need.

Nevertheless, students with intact basic reading skills need help in transitioning from high school reading to college level academic critical reading, based on the deficits identified by the research (ACT, 2014; ACT, 2015; ACT, 2016; ACT, 2017; Jackson & Kurlaender, 2014; Moore et al, 2010; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2008; NEA, 2004; NEA, 2007; Wilkins, Hartman, Howland, Sharma, & Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest, 2010). This entails support for building schema, increasing reading comprehension, and analytic, evaluative, and synthesis skills. Supporting students in gaining these skills is important, as students who are capable of college work but require support and explicit direction are more likely to struggle in college (Quick, 2013). Most students who are not identified as remedial but who lack critical reading skills often struggle alone, without receiving support or intervention (Bosley, 2008). The students who are not in need of remediation but still require support are, in many ways, more at-risk than those who have been identified as remedial and offered remediation.

Though college faculty members are positioned to help students with critical reading skills, they are not trained or prepared for the task and do not believe that reading support is part of their job. Faculty members rarely have formal training in teaching generally and reading specifically, and tend to see their roles as content experts rather than support for vulnerable or at-risk students (Blanton & Stylianou, 2009; Quick, 2013). This puts faculty, who have the most contact with students, in a position where they may be unaware of student needs, unable to support students in reading course materials and working with courses that have not addressed reading beyond the cursory level in either design or feedback. Faculty members are likely to

believe that poor student performance in classes is due to a lack of engagement as opposed to reading challenges or the need for support and assistance.

The Literacies Students Bring with Them

If students are not bringing the skills and habits they need for college work, a natural question is “what skills and habits are they bringing with them?” and “how do they view their own skills?”. The most glaring difference between traditional-age college students and those that teach them is a difference in engagement with technology. While technology tends to be one of many tools for faculty, it is much more central in the lives of the students they serve. The ECAR study from Educause (2017) found that the overwhelming majority of undergraduate students own smartphones (97%) and laptops (95%) and on campus, all students have access to technology and the Internet and are familiar with these devices for productivity and communications. For these students, technology is the foundation of how they think, communicate, organize, and create. They expect to have access to technology, and the ubiquitous nature of technology is a part of how these students relate to every part of their world. This does not mean that they are experts on technology, or even aware of their technological skills--or lack of them. What it means is that these students tend to think in terms of the digital world and expect to have a constant connection to information, communications technology, and each other. We do not know how college students regard themselves as readers, although older literature on high school students shows that they are likely to claim dislike for reading, have unrealistic expectations about reading habits and skills, and overestimate their reading abilities (Burgess & Jones, 2010; Hooley, Tysseling & Ray, 2013).

This connection to technology, and the multimodal communication that comes with it, develops literacy skills that are outside of the expectations of traditional college classrooms.

Young adults who grew up heavily immersed in technology are likely to think multi-modally in their social and personal lives and expect their literacy activities —reading, viewing, or listening— to be highly personal, collaborative, interactive and within their control. They expect to be connected to others at will and to choose to be an active participant in activities, such as commenting, dialogue, and sharing while engaging with digital sources (O'Brien & Voss, 2011; Walsh, 2009). Young adults tend to read laterally, moving from source to source, integrating text with video, images, and sound at will and expect control, immersion, and interaction- things that traditional unimodal reading lacks (Clark, 2010). These skills, habits, and expectations may serve them well in their personal and social lives, but in the world of higher education, where things are sequential and linear, where students are expected to be passive recipients of information, and information is often presented in a unimodal manner, these habits may be a barrier to success. Still, the multimodal skills of a young adult's personal world can be valuable in higher education if integrated with sophisticated reading skills and activities that take advantage of both types of reading. The very skills needed for reading in their multimodal personal lives, including collaboration, viewing, listening, and responding (Walsh, 2009) are an ideal foundation for critical reading in college. Using these skills as a foundation requires that students and faculty be aware of the differences and work together to bridge the unimodal, deep reading required of college and the skills and habits developed by students who live in a rich digital world and have a way of effectively understanding each other.

Understanding the literacy skills and habits that students bring with them to college offers an opportunity to build on strengths, within the context and methods that students are familiar with. While first-year students are not necessarily experts in the digital world, they do have a unique view of our shared world, and much of this is built on reading. Using the critical thinking

skills developed by multimodal literacies may be a way of addressing how a new version of college-level reading can be built on the ever-changing foundation of society's literacies especially within the realm of higher education. In other words, how can we use the strengths that come with the digital literacies to meet the current reading needs of college students, and to encourage college teaching that evolves along with literacy itself?

If we consider reading literacy as an ever-changing, deictic process, then there is a need for a constantly evolving understanding of reading and its role in education, and for research that looks at the same. It appears clear that many students do not have the skills or habits that they need for successful academic reading to meet college expectations. Based on the very limited literature on reading in college, it also appears that college and universities treat reading as a static skill, with the belief that once a student can read they are literate and able to complete the work. Students themselves are not static, and constantly integrate what they read, view, and hear into their literacy practices. If we consider reading as a static skill, which once attained is complete, we miss opportunities where we can encourage learning and limit ourselves to studying deficits. Instead, if we define it as a constantly changing, dynamic skill that is responsive to context and method, we can move from thinking about technical deficits and focus instead on building on skills that students are developing outside of the classroom to meet the needs and expectations of higher education. To do this though, we must have a way to measure and understand the reading lives of our students, to know what literacies they bring with them to the classroom.

Research Setting

This study was set in a mid-sized public university in New Jersey. This university is known to have low selectivity and has a low retention and graduation rate. In 2015-16, the

university had an incoming first time, full-time population of 1490 students. While 18.9% (282) required remediation, anecdotal conversations with both students and faculty indicate that college reading was a challenge for the majority of first-year students. The assessment data collected by the general education program indicated that college reading was an area in need of development as measures of areas linked to critical reading were lower than expected. Specifically, students struggled with working with texts and evidence throughout first-year courses. After review of the findings, the program decided to begin to address this issue with a course designed to increase critical reading ability, using themes relevant to students to develop the reading and information literacy skills necessary for college success.

While a course on critical reading is a good first step for introducing the concepts and strategies, critical reading is not a topic that should be presented once and then assumed to be done. Critical skills, including reading, take time to build and should be carefully integrated into all learning activities. Faculty in the university showed both interest and trepidation in supporting reading because they do not view reading support as part of their disciplinary expertise. In spite of this, college faculty tends to be careful, critical readers themselves and with support and learning opportunities could provide students with a rich reading environment in their courses.

In order to help faculty to integrate reading support and instruct students on critical reading strategies, faculty need both support and a chance to learn about critical reading. Given the quickly changing nature of literacy and the idea that reading itself is more than a specific skill to be taught once, faculty can benefit from information about how students view their reading skills and what preferences and motivational elements they can incorporate into instructional activities.

Research Questions

The overarching research question for this study is: What aspects of a student's reading life can we use to address the design of learning activities in a college classroom to help students transition from high school to successful reading in college academic classes?

The following research questions guide the study design:

1. What beliefs do students have about reading and themselves as readers?
2. How do students view their reading habits, skills, and motivation?
3. What are student's views on college teaching and reading support?
4. How does reading context, such as non-academic and academic readings, shape the skills and strengths that students report?

To answer the overarching question and sub-questions, I chose a mixed-method approach. In the quantitative section of the study, first-year students, recruited through first-year general education courses, had the opportunity to complete a survey questionnaire that asks about background, reading habits, skills, and expectations. The qualitative section included 3 focus groups comprised of first-year students who were interested and willing to talk about their reading lives, habits, beliefs, and feelings about reading.

Understanding our students is a key part of making sure that learning activities are relevant and effective (Fink, 2013; Wiggins and McTighe, 2005). Data collected in this study was used for recommendations to support faculty in integrating reading instruction and support in the college classroom. In the future, results of this study will be used to design a brief questionnaire to assist students and faculty to understand college literacy skills to adjust study habits and teaching and learning work to take advantage of student strengths while closing gaps between college expectations and student performance.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Over the past twenty years, there has been a renewed concern about reading and literacy itself. Some of this concern is due to the increasingly digital and multimodal world we live in. Literacy skills are formed by the environment, education, and experiences a child has and the influence of an individual's personal beliefs. For this reason, reading theorists such as Freire and Macedo (1987) view literacy as a constantly changing skill and reading itself as a skill that is tightly connected to the context it exists in.

As literacy is a constantly changing skill, the idea of what literate means also changes. That said, there is evidence that students are not prepared for the literacy demands and expectations of college, especially regarding reading literacy. This literature review examines studies on college reading, college students, and digital and multimodal literacy related to college reading. Articles included in this review were identified through the Rutgers library database, using keywords including college reading, critical reading, multimodal literacy, digital literacy, and college readiness. Studies reviewed in this section were published between 2005 and 2018 in scholarly peer-reviewed journals. Because the focus of this research study is non-remedial college students (those that either were not identified as remedial or have completed remedial coursework and are considered college level), results specific to remediation and remedial students have been omitted unless they have a direct relationship to critical reading in the general college population. To provide context and background, important studies and works from other times may be incorporated into this section. This literature review first presents college reading skills, followed by research on deficits. Next, research is discussed that focuses on small, detailed studies of high school and college students and their reading beliefs,

preferences, and habits. This literature review ends with a discussion of multimodal and digital literacy related to reading.

College Reading

While higher education tends to treat literacy as an unchanging skill which does not require instruction, support, or development, literacy outside of higher education tends to be deictic and multimodal (Hull & Nelson, 2005; Leu et al., 2017). Reading, as part of this multimodal world, both supports and relies on other forms of information transfer including sound, image, and video. Words act as part of the method of messages in text but are not always the main modality in today's informational world (Lolhentington & Jenson, 2011; Walsh, 2009). Unfortunately, as Clark (2010) states, "The ideas of the academy are far behind social and cultural innovation, not leading them" (p. 28). This idea is apparent in the way that college and university instructors treat reading as an unchanging and unimodal skill.

Freire and Macedo (1987) and others who studied literacy (Belshaw, 2014; Clark, 2010; Walsh, 2009), look at literacy, and reading as the foundational skill of literacy, as a constantly changing process. They view reading as intertwined with the context of the text and reader and the society that they inhabit. For many, this means that literacy is closely coupled not only with individuals but also with the tools and technology they use. This view of reading requires more than decoding and basic comprehension and requires the reader to constantly reconstruct their understanding of their world as well as the words they read. Key to this view is the idea that literacy enables individuals to have power in their world. This definition of reading matches what research on college reading requirements has identified as necessary for college success. To succeed in college, students need to be able to read critically, closely, widely and at

length with the ability to work with information acquired through reading in new and novel ways (NCEE, 2013; Springer, Wilson, & Dole, 2015).

The National Center on Education and the Economy (2013) looked at reading and writing as part of their research on the requirements of community college classes. This research used seven community colleges in seven different states as a sample and worked with a variety of first-year core courses for the data collection. Three studies were conducted in their research including analysis of text complexity, use, tasks assigned and how student work was graded and assessed by faculty. Of note in the results is the ideas that while the texts assigned in college were noticeably harder than high school readings, students were not asked to engage in deep and complicated tasks in many classes and as a result, students lost the opportunity for deeper learning. The NCEE identified four key skills that were necessary for the types of texts and outcomes for the courses in the study, including the ability for students to retrieve information, interpret and synthesize it and analyze the information as key reading skills for college students. Given the general education articulation agreements between community college and four-year institutions, it is likely that course texts and the skills necessary to read them are similar in both environments.

In their review of college readiness and reading, Springer, Wilson, and Dole (2015) identified four core skills related to critical reading that are necessary for college success. To succeed in college, students need to be able to read complex texts strategically and independently in order to manage the reading without support. Close reading habits, such as the ability to look more deeply at a text for the unspoken meanings, are also necessary for the college reading. Synthesis skills are a key part of reading and allows students to make connections across texts.

Finally, students need to develop reading stamina and wide reading habits to build vocabulary, schema, as well as the ability to focus and manage reading without support.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) produces research on literacies known as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The OECD defines reading literacy as the ability to understand, use and reflect on written texts to for various goals including the development of knowledge and active participation in society. This definition is consistent with critical reading. In the 2012 PISA, approximately 6,000 randomly selected 15-year-olds, from 161 schools, participated representing the United States. The 2012 PISA study looked at mathematics, reading, science, and problem-solving. The United States ranked as average regarding reading, with an overall rank of 17 in the PISA results, out of the 65 countries participating. Reading results on the PISA for the United States have been consistent over time, and the United States was noted for having advantages in educational access and funding, while showing significant issues in educational equity, with concerns about how minority students are educated and their ability to perform. PISA, while not providing specific data that is useful to college instructors, is a way to gauge the performance of potential college students and provides a comparison of US students in an international context. PISA provides context for other studies, such as the NEA reports, and large-scale reports from other agencies. It is interesting to note that the PISA 2018 was focused on reading literacy, and contains items looking at digital and multimodal literacy as it pertains to reading though the results are not yet available for review.

Whether we use the theoretical definition of Freire and Macedo (1987) or the research-based needs identified by Springer, Wilson, and Dole (2015), the NCEE (2013), or the OCED (2012), it is clear that academic critical reading, the type needed for college, requires reading text

beyond the mechanical, receptive-informational level. This type of reading requires an understanding of the context the text was written in, with the ability to connect it to other ideas, while analyzing the purpose, evidence, and potential biases of the text itself. College and adult critical reading also requires that learners connect readings and prior knowledge while building habits that enable them to manage complex texts and read beyond one singular text to find meaning (Freire & Macedo, 1987; NCEE, 2013; Springer, Wilson, & Dole, 2015). Academic critical reading is an advanced reading skill, befitting a college student, but it is not a skill that most students have when they enter college.

Reading Deficits

While reading is a key skill for higher education, the research literature on reading and college readiness includes numerous studies that point to reading deficits among high school students, young adults, and college students. Large studies of students have found that between 40% and 52% of graduating high school seniors are not prepared for and lack the skills and habits needed for college (ACT, 2014; ACT, 2015; ACT, 2016; ACT, 2017; Jackson & Kurlaender, 2014; Moore et al, 2010; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2008; NEA, 2004; NEA, 2007; Wilkins, Hartman, Howland, Sharma, & Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest, 2010). Also, three national surveys of adults have noted trends in reading that are concerning (NEA, 2004; NEA, 2007; NEA, 2008). Seven large-scale studies are reviewed below, including one that contradicts some of the preceding literature, to give context for reading skills in high school.

National Endowment for the Arts

The National Endowment for the Arts conducts on-going research to understand the engagement of adults in the United States with literature, theater, and art. Three reports released

by the NEA are relevant to the current study and discuss the state of literacy and recreational reading. The first of these reports, issued in 2004, was called *Reading at Risk*. This report was based on data collected by the Census Bureau in the arts engagement surveys of 1982, 1992, and 2002 and presented a trend that showed that adults were reading less and reading less well. More than 17,000 individuals participated in this study and found that less than half of adults in the US read for recreation and that young adults of traditional college age had the lowest levels of reading and the biggest change over time. This report was followed by *To Read or Not Read*, which was published in 2007 and used the data from large national studies collected by federal agencies, academic institutions, and major organizations. This report presented a clear and consistent message; that while all Americans were spending less time reading and had lower reading comprehension skills, young adults were reading significantly less and with less skill. Nearly half of young adults read no books for pleasure, many did not read anything for pleasure and less than one-third of high school seniors read proficiently. Regardless of the source, the results were clear and consistent throughout this study, showing that young adults are reading less and have less reading comprehension skills. The third report, *Reading on the Rise*, was published in 2008 and used data collected by the Census Bureau using the same method as *Reading at Risk*. This report showed an increase in overall reading but also noted a new split in the population- for the first time we saw that there were two distinct groups, readers and non-readers. These reports are important in marking what student and young adult reading was like in the first decade of the twenty-first century and the concerns that they were publicly shared by the NEA.

These reports together paint a grim and sometimes confusing picture of reading among young adults. While some of this may come from the definition of reading related to fiction

books used in the first study, *Reading at Risk*, the variety of data sources used in the second study, *To Read or Not to Read*, which used different types of data tends to make this unlikely. There are two likely explanations for the results of these study- either people were reading less over the years between 1982 and 2002, or reading itself had changed- regarding what people considered reading, what they were doing with reading, and what type of texts they were reading. The final report, *Reading on the Rise* showed an overall increase reading but also noted a new split in the population- for the first time, we saw that there were two distinct groups, readers and non-readers. While the turnaround is positive, there are still many adults who do not read for recreation. These readers fall into the “non-reader” category. The split between readers and non-readers may be of great concern to college educators in the upcoming years, as the disparate skills and habits may influence college success. It is likely that college students will fall into both reader and non-reader categories and as such, could require very different support and educational experiences. These reports generated concern and rightly so, but the arts engagement focus of the data and the large sample size make it difficult to predict the impact on higher education beyond creating awareness.

Large-Scale Educational Studies

While the information in the NEA reports is compelling, the potential impact of reading on college readiness and reading is more clear in studies done with populations in high school and the first year of college. The results from large-scale studies conducted by educational companies and researchers working with specific state populations are consistent with the results from the NEA reports of 2004, 2007, and 2008 as they also found declines in reading skills and habits.

State-wide studies. Among the research on reading are two important large-scale studies of college readiness focused on Texas. Texas has one of the largest school systems in the country, serves a large number of underserved minority students, and tracks and makes public data on their students through a centralized system. At the time, Texas identified college readiness as a priority, leading to research and intervention over the past fifteen years. As such, it provides an interesting exemplar to look at student performance.

The first study, published in 2010 by Moore et al, evaluated the college readiness of students in the Texas public education system. One of the areas evaluated was reading. Using data from all high schools throughout Texas, accounting for all graduating seniors, this research found that overall, 44.76% met the state requirements for college readiness in reading. This number varied by race and ethnicity, with 33.97% of African-American seniors and 37.04% of Hispanic seniors, whereas white students had a higher percentage of students who were college ready, at 53.21%. The researchers attribute this to the marginal resources and racialized policies and practices that exist in the Texas system, which provided much less support and resources for African-American and Hispanic students. This study was, even by the author's admission, less sophisticated than they wanted, because of the way the data was aggregated in the state system. Even so, the analysis process was fairly straightforward and clearly showed that many students are not college ready in reading and that there is a gap in readiness based on race and ethnicity. Individualized student data was not available for this research, and it could have provided more detail on how students were unprepared and how they were taught. Like other large-scale studies, there is a lack of depth to the data, in large part because of the size of the population studied however reading remains a concern for college readiness, especially given the differences in preparation based on ethnicity.

The second study of Texas seniors was published in 2010 by Wilkins, Harman, Howland, and Sharma and took a different approach to examine reading levels. In this study, Lexile measurements of common college first-year textbooks in the University of Texas system were calculated and then matched against reading comprehension scores from the state standardized test given to all exiting 11th graders. This study looked at the readiness of high school juniors based on their ability to decode and comprehend at a basic level the textbooks in use in the public college system. The findings indicated that reading was an issue for many students, with only 51% of 11th-grade students were able to read 95% of the textbooks at 75% accuracy, and 80% able to read 50% of the textbooks at 75% accuracy. Like previous large studies, the data from this study were aggregated before analysis making it impossible to present results by factors such as gender, race/ethnicity, and college plans. This study limited the definition of reading to decoding and basic comprehension and did not use other measures of reading. Even so, it is telling that the many of the students included were unable to manage basic reading tasks, which most likely means that they were not capable of the more advanced reading tasks demanded by college reading.

This large-scale study is consistent with the findings from other studies which indicate that students in high school are not reading at the level necessary for college preparedness (ACT, 2015; ACT, 2016; ACT, 2017; Moore et al., 2010; NEA, 2004; NEA, 2007). The idea of using Lexile ratings to measure readiness is an interesting way of measuring reading readiness, especially in states here a large number of students attend universities in the public system or where common texts are in use. This study focused on using the common texts in the Texas college system, and these may not match other colleges and universities in the US. Taken in

conjunction with the results of other studies, this study adds more evidence that students in high school are not ready for the reading demands of a college environment.

ACT career and college readiness from 2015-17. While the previous studies take place over a range of years, there is more recent data on reading and college students in the annual reports from the ACT. Each year, the ACT reports on test data from graduating seniors and one of the areas of college readiness that is measured is reading. A look at the data from 2015 to 2017 shows that reading remains an issue for many prospective college students. The overall percentage of students who meet the ACT definition of college ready in reading is 46% in 2015, 44% in 2016, and 47% in 2017. This leaves the majority of students each year not ready for the reading demands of college. NJ-specific data is much higher, with 59% of students considered college-ready in 2015, 59% in 2016, and 65% in 2017. While the data shows that NJ students are scoring higher than the average, on the national level racial differences are a considerable concern. Though the ACT data on race/ethnicity is not broken out by state, African American students tend to be the least ready for college reading, with a 19% ready in 2015, 19% ready in 2016, and 20% reading in 2017. Hispanic students also tend to be less ready for college, with 31% scoring as college-ready in reading in 2015, 30% in 2016, and 33% in 2017. For comparison, 56% of white students were considered college ready in 2015, 55% in 2016, and 58% in 2017. The ACT annual reports provide a good glimpse into the college and career readiness of graduating seniors. The measures used by the ACT look at vocabulary, comprehension, close reading, and critical reading skills. The ACT shared information about the test and student scores and aligns its work with educational programs throughout the US however they decline to share detail on the tests, for security reasons. It is possible that, as a timed test which looks at many readiness skills, the test format and questions do not accurately

reflect what a student may do in college and that students could perform differently in classroom environments. That said, the size of the population and the consistency of the data over time makes the results compelling- it seems that at least as measured by testing, many students are not college ready when it comes to reading. Even though NJ tends to test better than the average, with more students meeting the readiness measure, it does not mean that the students are ready or even that those who are considered ready can translate their readiness into college learning. Too, the low percentage of African American and Hispanic students meeting the readiness mark overall is of great concern, especially for institutions that serve diverse populations.

While the studies presented here vary in method, the findings that students are reading less, and are unprepared for college reading are consistent. Given the current climate of concern about college success, which is driven by issues of cost, graduation rate, and career preparation, investing in ways of increasing reading skills and habits makes sense. If the measures used in these studies are aligned with what higher education institutions expect from students upon entry, it is not surprising that so many students struggle and even fail in their first year. Colleges simply are not set up for supporting reading in the general student body and yet there is a clear need here for college faculty to become college teachers who integrate explicit reading support and instruction in their classroom. Student success may well depend on it.

Descriptive Studies of College Reading

In addition to the large-scale studies on reading literacy, there are also smaller, descriptive studies that have looked at students and reading in specific disciplines, courses, and classrooms. Like the large-scale studies of skills and habits, these studies tend to focus on deficits. While smaller, these studies are valuable additions to the literature because they provide

more detail and depth about students and their reading lives. The following section examines research, which looked at how students felt and experienced reading, and the skills and habits that they leave high school with and bring to college. Overall, the results of the studies of high school students support the large-scale studies, in that students are not reading, and have poor attitudes and habits towards reading (Burgess & Jones, 2010; Hooley, Tysseling & Ray, 2013). While the nature of these studies makes it difficult to generalize the results to other environments, it provides a way of understanding what might be happening with students in the larger studies. The descriptive studies also can guide instruction, providing areas where faculty can be aware and intervene if needed.

Studies on reading habits of college students match up with the large studies, such as the National Endowment of the Arts *Reading at Risk* (2004) and *To Read or Not to Read* (2007) reports in that college students tend to not to read at length or depth. There are a number of studies that indicate that students are not reading assigned materials (Berry, Cook, & Hill, 2011; Mokhtar, Reichard, & Gardner, 2010) and one study found that students are reading an average of 7.72 hours of academic reading per week, which is less than the time spent in the classroom for full-time students (Huang & Capps, 2013). This study, which included 1265 college students, that students spent an average of 7.72 hours of academic readings per week, more than traditional recreational reading, and less than Internet browsing. Of note, this research identified internet use and socializing as two activities that affected the time spent on traditional recreational or academic reading completed by the students.

College students are likely to state that they believe that reading is important for learning and college success and yet are still not likely to comply with simply assigned reading especially if those assignments come without explicit guidance or immediate use. Studies by Mokhtar,

Reichard, and Gardner (2010) and Berry, Cook, and Hill (2011) found that students know they should read but are likely to shut down when overwhelmed by reading demands. Hilton, Wilcox, Morrison, and Wiley (2010) studied 504 students in an introductory philosophy and religion course to understand reading motivation, completion, and study habits. They found that students understood and believed that reading was a necessary component of learning and knowledge and that the use of assigned times, versus chapters or pages, increased reading completion. Students tended to be less overwhelmed when given a specific reading time and more able to manage their reading. Also, the use of reflective strategies such as self-assessment and reflection journals, especially when used with accountability measures and grades, were likely to increase reading completion and motivation. The positive view of reading held by these students contrasts with the reality of college reading. It appears that being overwhelmed was a major factor in reading compliance, and that measures adopted by college faculty to manage the overwhelm led to better reading outcomes.

Another community college based study with relevance for understanding students in a higher education context is one by Del Principe and Ihara (2016). In this study, the researchers studied reading using a qualitative study which followed students through their classes looking at the student's reading habits and how their classes assigned and used readings. This small study of ten students over a long period found that students are likely to avoid reading, reading only for quizzes and activities where is necessary for passing grades, and that faculty members tend to avoid assignments that require close or critical reading skills. Also, few classes addressed reading in any meaningful way through instruction or support. While small, this study shows what type of messages students receive and react to in their academic lives. This study was consistent with the NCEE (2013) student on reading, supporting the idea that while texts

themselves may be complex, they may not be used in a developed, nuanced way that increases learning.

Regarding reading preferences, students are likely to prefer short condensed readings, provided by instructors to longer forms. Juban and Lopez (2013) found that students preferred notes and PowerPoint presentations to textbook readings. They tend to go to electronic sources for convenience and shorter readings (Foasberg, 2014; Mokhtar, Reichard, & Gardner, 2010). When left to choose readings for pleasure, male students are more likely to look for short readings like newspaper or media articles compared to females according to Burgess and Jones (2010) study of gender and reading preferences, based on 209 undergraduate students. This is an important detail since Berry, Cook, and Hill (2011) found that students tend to feel overwhelmed and shut down when challenged by readings. These preferences for condensed materials, coupled with the issue of lack of stamina and persistence may mean that instructors need to reassess how they assign, introduce, and use readings in the classroom. If students are not reading because of feeling overwhelmed and being unfamiliar with readings, instructors may find that encouraging learning may require changing how text and text support is handled in a classroom.

Understanding factors that might affect reading ability can be helpful for college faculty in designing activities that support reading. Macaruso and Shankweiler (2010) conducted a study with 48 students, which looked at what can predict a student's reading ability, specifically regarding comprehension. Using a variety of accepted reading tests, they found that phonological awareness and verbal working memory predicted reading skills. Also, they found that reading fluency influenced reading ability and captured the variance in the reading results of the participants. These are areas that are known to affect reading abilities in children and have significant literature and methods available for improvement. Teaching college students to

recognize these issues and take steps to improve awareness and memory could be helpful as they learn disciplinary vocabulary. Another study, completed by McGeown, Duncan, Griffiths and Stodhard's (2015) looked at adolescent reading motivation in 312 students and found that motivation for reading predicts skill levels among students, as students with motivation tend to have higher skill levels. Together, these studies, while very small and local, give instructors a focus when looking at or support reading skills. Students motivation, phonological awareness, and verbal working memory, which are all things that students are or can be aware of, may be useful in predicting how well students will read and determining how to support them. While college faculty are unlikely to teach basic phonological strategies, there are many techniques available in teaching practices that can support students in improving these areas. Knowing that students who are not motivated readers are likely to have issues with their reading skills may be a useful way to reframe student performance, helping faculty to view students who appear unmotivated as those who need the most support.

We do know a bit about reading preferences for students. College students are likely to multitask while reading (Mokhtar, Reichard, and Gardner, 2010). Students prefer print reading for sustained or lengthy reading and academic reading and are more likely to engage with print text than with electronic (Foasberg, 2014). Students tend to dislike textbooks and are less likely to read them especially in the absence of a specific task (Hilton, Wilcox, Morrison, & Wiley, 2010; Juban & Lopez, 2013). Condensed text, such as notes and presentations created by faculty were preferred over textbooks (Hooley, Tysseling, & Ray, 2013; Juban and Lopez, 2013). Even extra materials, meant to clarify and extend understanding tend to be viewed negatively by students, and were unlikely to be used unless the students are prepared for them, understand them, and are not overwhelmed by reading demands (Berry, Cook, & Hill, 2011; Juban & Lopez,

2013). Strangely, students tended to believe that they are reading well even in the absence of experience and evidence they are doing so.

An example of this is Hooley, Tysseling, and Ray's (2013) study of 64 students in a mid-sized high school. In this study, the researchers found that students had a low tolerance for and low performance with sustained reading and yet, they felt confident that they would manage the reading demands of college, even as they reported not reading or completing assignments in high school. This is concerning given that sustained reading is a skill that is necessary for college success (NCEE, 2013; OECD, 1957; Springer, Wilson, & Dole, 2015).

In 2013, Perin completed a systematic review of more than 140 research articles on research on literacy and underprepared students. According to this review, the research on underprepared students and literacy skills is very thin and what exists was often from developmental instruction, or was not rigorous or linked to effective instructional strategies. Perin noted that we do not know much about the literacy practices of underprepared students including how they read and that given the number of underprepared students who are enrolled in college, much more research is necessary. She did note some effective practices in the research that provide a starting point but cautioned that we need much more research on literacy skills and habits as well as teaching methods to provide these students with the support they need. Even though a number of years have passed since this review, the lack of research on reading and college students, especially studies on how students read and how to increase reading capacity, continues to be an issue.

The literature tends to present a dismal picture of reading literacy at the college level. Both large and small studies tend to focus on the deficits that students have when it comes to college reading and paint a picture of young adults who cannot read well, and who do not read.

Looking at these studies through a different lens though gives us some context and concrete suggestions for how to approach college reading with the ideas of increasing learning. With the right mix of strategies and the encouragement to students and faculty alike to understand, value, and support college reading, we may be able to increase reading performance. Given the highly connected, collaborative, interactive nature of our world, it is possible too these students have skills developed through their immersion in multimodal, digital technology that could be used to increase motivation and reading ability overall.

The Digital World, Multimodality and Literacy

Though the academic world is unimodal and book-based (Clark, 2010; Hull & Nelson, 2005), the world that surrounds it is multimodal with information stored and shared through text, video, images, and sound. Reading literacy is necessary for accessing these multimodal resources though, as text provides access to the resources itself. Most digital technology requires traditional-reading literacy. It is impossible to separate traditional text literacy from digital technology and multimodality in our everyday world and digital technology and multimodal communications enrich and expand traditional reading literacy, instead of relegating reading to the history books. Even in 2005, as digital technology increased and multimodality became a possibility, Hull and Nelson (2005) found that the combination of text with multimedia is more powerful than either mode on its own.

It is impossible to separate the idea of traditional reading literacy, with its associated writing forms and tasks, and digital and multimodal literacies that take advantage of technology and connection. There is significant overlap in all three areas, and with that overlap, comes tension. The tension between these areas comes in part from the ambiguity in the digital literacies as they intersect with both multimodal literacy and traditional literacy (Gourlay, 2013).

In spite of the arguments of past years where reading literacy was predicted to be a dying skill, traditional reading literacy forms a foundation for the use and interpretation of digital tools and multimodal works and continues to change just as the idea of literate adults changes and terminology such as digital literacy becomes ambiguous and even unusable (Belshaw, 2014).

Understanding literacy in the digital age requires recognizing literacy as an ever-changing process, driven by what society accepts as “literate.” While many people still conceive of literacy as a skill that people either have or do not have, we have known for many years that literacy is a characteristic that changes over time. In 1957, a report released by UNESCO defined literacy as a skill that has a range starting at minimal and moving upwards and that all people have literacy, so the idea of illiterate versus literate is not accurate. While the UNESCO report was written in a very different time, it is important to think of literacy in this way- as an ever-evolving set of characteristics that people build throughout experience, education, and exposure. The idea of literacy is strongly bound to the tools that are used by those considered to be literate, as explained by Belshaw (2014) who discusses at length the link between tools, including technology, and literacy after studying literacy in a digital age. This is especially true in the world of academia, where those that are considered to have extensive literacy develop it in concert with the ability to use the tools within their discipline. In the same way, students may well be highly literate in the way that they live their life using their tools and yet be at the lower end of literacy when starting in a college environment, with academic discourse. While this may be inevitable, it is also concerning if college faculty are not prepared to address the gap.

If students are not bringing with them the reading skills they need for college work, a natural question is “what are they bringing with them?”. The ECAR study from Educause (2017) found that the vast number of undergraduate students own smartphones (97%) and

laptops (95%) and on campus, all students have access to technology and the internet. These traditionally aged college students were born into a heavily technological world. As such, technology is part of the language they use, think, organize, and even create. They expect to have access to technology, and the ubiquitous nature of technology is a part of how these students relate to every part of their world. This does not mean that they are experts in these areas, or even aware of their competency (or lack of it). What it means is that these students tend to think in terms of the digital world and tend to have a constant connection to technology. This is an important distinction- high school and college students may not be aware of what they know or do not know. Assumptions made that all students are masters at technology are often false as found in a study of younger students where their technological competence and self- assessment of competence of 280 students were compared (Porat, Blau & Barak, 2018).

While it would be convenient to have a model of digital literacy or literacies that would allow easy understanding of the level an individual student, there is no consensus on what digital literacy is or what the digital literacies are. Analysis of thirteen different digital literacy models (Iordache, Marien, & Baelden, 2017) found that there were significant differences between models and what was considered digital literacy, with some focusing solely on operational and technical skills, while others focused on mindset and knowledge to the exclusion of operational skills and yet others incorporated some of each. Nevertheless, all of the frameworks rest on the idea that a constant connection to digital technology and the resulting multimodal communication is part of all aspects of life, including the personal, social, and professional or academic. Interestingly, the lack of consensus on what digital literacy is or digital literacies are points to the need to better understand students; though different, all frameworks support the idea

that students bring with them strengths, skills, and habits of mind that can be used to encourage learning.

One area of literature that we do have information on, though usually from younger children and elementary and secondary classrooms, is the multimodal skills that students can develop and how teachers can influence them. More and more, our students are being educated in an environment that is interactive both technologically and socially (Lolherington & Jenson, 2011). Multimodal experiences allow for interaction and collaboration on a scale not possible before the integration of technology into society. They have afforded students a chance to work in new ways, with all forms of information including text (O'Brien & Voss, 2011). What is also known is that integrating technology without explicit teaching typically is not enough to enable learning (Porat, Blau, & Barak, 2017). The advances in technology and in the ability to use multiple modes of information sharing have, and were known to have, the ability to change not only in how we learn but in the social practices of literacy (Walsh, 2010). As a result, students need to be able to combine traditional literacy practices with the design and manipulation of different modes of communication and to enable this teachers need to model, scaffold and collaborate in designing and teaching (Walsh, 2009).

The ECAR study by Brooks and Pomerantz (2017) also provided knowledge of how students learn. This study of 43,559 students in 10 countries found that undergraduate students are unlikely to ask for help and instead are likely to turn to technology for assistance. Not only do the majority, more than 95% own a laptop, they wanted technology integrated into learning, not as an afterthought or a novelty, but at the core of how they learn since it is part of how they live. Instructors often do not ask students to use technology for engagement in creative and critical thinking work, which is an opportunity that is wasted. This study was large, and broad,

and looked at areas that are useful for college learning. If a college environment has similar demographics, this study can be useful in guiding instructional practices.

Understanding the literacies that students bring with them to college offers an opportunity to build on strengths, within the context and methods that students are familiar with. While prospective and first-year students are not experts in the digital world, they do have a unique view of our shared world, and much of this relies on reading. Using the literacies that students are developing provides a way of addressing a new version of college-level reading built on the ever-changing foundation of society's literacies especially within the realm of higher education. In other words, how can we use the strengths that come with the digital literacies to not only meet the current reading needs of college courses but to encourage college teaching that evolves along with the literacies themselves? The answer to these questions lies not within the literature, but within our students. Answering this question requires that we understand our students and they understand themselves.

Theoretical Framework

The idea that literacy is a simple trait that a person possesses or does not possess has been disputed by groups such as UNESCO (1957) and by literacy theorists such as Freire and Macedo (1987). Working from the deictic lens, they define literacy as a continuum, where each person possesses at least a minimal level of literacy, and literacy levels range from minimal to expert. At the high end of the continuum, individuals can use their literacy skills flexibly, automatically, and in a manner that meets their goals and objectives. At the low end of the continuum, individuals may struggle with portions or skills associated with literacy and find daily life and reaching goals to be difficult and limited. While reading literacy is now only one of many literacies considered to be necessary for successful life in the 21st century, it remains the

foundation for learning in the United States and is necessary for other forms of literacy, such as information literacy, multimodal literacy, and digital literacy.

Freire and Macedo (1987) state that the idea of what it means to be literate changes based on the context of a person's work and life, and that learning to read is a political and cultural act. As such, being able to read is inseparable from having power, and those that learn to read are active participants who learn methods of discourse to fully participate in society. Freire and Macedo's (1987) theory views reading as an active process of making meaning, and not a passive process where an individual has things happen to them. Each individual becomes literate in the discourse, or language, of their early life based on their experiences. In this context, literacy means that the individual can control the language to meet their needs and goals. Mastery of literacy means that the individual can do so fully without effort. Gee (1991) discusses the fact that we can acquire additional discourses, beyond our primary discourse, throughout our lives and positions the classroom as a place to acquire and practice secondary discourses. For college students, primary discourses typically include familiarity with technology and the technologically driven world as well as language and vocabulary from their home and early environments. Those same students enter a very different world in higher education, one that has its own form of discourse. As a secondary discourse, students need the opportunity to acquire language and context and move towards mastering that language to use the language for their goals and to share their thoughts. In this sense, reading allows full participation in education.

For reading literacy, this means that individual's have a primary discourse, or method of managing and controlling language, acquired by their early experiences. It affects their beliefs about reading, their identity as a reader, their motivations towards reading, and their general understanding about reading itself (Freire and Macedo, 1987). As children grown, they acquire

additional discourses, or literacies, in the context of their lives. Our students' primary discourse is likely to include technology, and while this may not mean that they are experts on technology, it means that their understanding of language includes technology in a way that previous generations primary discourses did not (Belshaw, 2014).

We live in a digital society with multiple modes for communication, literacy and what it means to be literate have changed. Belshaw (2014) discusses the issues inherent in the old ideas of literacy, arguing that literacy has always been social in nature and the use of technology has made it obvious and even more important that we acknowledge this. For this reason, his conceptualization of literacy in a digital world includes the use of technology tools, defines literacy as ambiguous, and sets the idea of being competent or even literate in a digital world as a way of thinking and interaction instead of a set of prescriptive skills that a person either possesses or does not possess. Belshaw's (2014) work informed this study and provided a way of identifying reading skills and habits that students may use in one context, for instance their personal reading lives, and yet not in another.

Leu et al (2017) proposed a new theory of literacy, that encompasses the role of reading and traditional literacy in a digital world. This theory is based on the idea that communication in the world is no longer hierarchical and allows for communication between individuals without regard to position. This type of communication requires literacy skills that are much more critical and analytical than needed by previous generations. Specifically these literacy skills must be fluid, adapt to change, and require ongoing learning as a core component of adult life and not merely an adjunct or hobby. This theory of literacy has profound implications for students- when coupled with the ideas of discourse from Gee (1991), it shows that our students need to be able to transfer skills gained in one form of discourse to another, be flexible in their literacy skills,

and constantly respond to the changes in society. The current study uses this theory as a way of identifying what skills students have, where they are used, and what support they would like to see.

This study is based on the idea that literacy changes over time and that college students have acquired a primary discourse which includes both traditional reading literacy and technology. Since this process is personal and invisible to others this study uses the ideas of a primary discourse based on reading and technology, a secondary discourse learned through education, and the reading literacy requirements of academic discourse to examine the personal space of college reading. As such, the questions involved in this study use the theoretical framework outlined here to move beyond measuring skills as specific abilities or inabilities, to look at how students think and feel about their own reading lives.

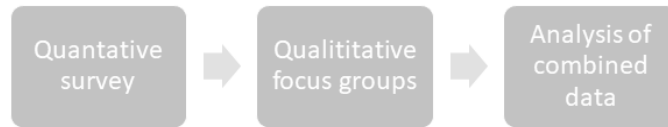
Chapter 3: Methodology

A student's private reading life consists of four areas, their beliefs about reading, reading skills they possess and use, habits they have developed and motivation for reading. While skills can be measured in standardized and diagnostic tests, these types of tests do not elicit information about what students do in their personal, social, and academic lives. We are often able to see the outcomes of their reading but are unable to view the processes they use and the beliefs that affect reading. To examine our student's reading lives, this study used a mixed method approach, consistent with Creswell (2014). This mixed method study used a survey questionnaire to give us a broad understanding of what beliefs, habits, motivations, and skills students bring with them to college, followed by three focus groups which provided a deep, detailed look at reading and how it shapes and is shaped by a student's life and experiences. These two parts were done sequentially using first-year students at the university as participants, recruited through first-year courses. The survey was administered from November to December 2018 during the fall semester and focus group discussions were held in the last week of February and first week of March 2018.

Research Design

This study was completed during the 2018-2019 academic year using a two-stage mixed method sequential design. I chose a mixed method design as I wanted to have a broad view of the reading lives of first-year students and still have the opportunity to speak in depth with students about reading. Part 1 of the study was a survey questionnaire using analyzed using descriptive statistics, with data collected midway through the fall 2018 semester. Part 2 of the study consisted of 3 focus groups which took place in the first half of the spring 2019 semester. Part 1 data was analyzed using descriptive statistics before stage 2 began in order to ensure that

the focus group data would be relevant. Once completed, data was analyzed together by comparing overall descriptive statistics with the themes that emerged from the focus groups.



Research Question	Data Source(s)
1. What beliefs do students have about reading and themselves as readers?	Survey- beliefs section Focus group question # 2, 7
2. How do students view their reading habits, skills, and motivation?	Survey- habits, skills, motivation sections Focus group question #1, 2, 3
3. What are student’s views on college teaching and reading support?	Survey- final questions section Focus group question # 4, 5, 6, 7
4. What critical reading strengths do students believe they use for social technology-based reading and how does this compare against those skills they say they believe they use for academic reading	Survey sections: -confidence in skills in social, internet reading section -reading academic sources section, -Likely to use these actions section

Part 1: Quantitative Survey

Consistent with recommendations from Creswell (2014) and Gall, Gall, & Borg (2015), the first part of the study was conducted as a single cross-sectional survey. The objective of this part was to find out student’s prior reading experience, habits, and beliefs and a survey questionnaire provided a structured, efficient way of gathering data from a large number of participants. Given the diversity, number of participants, and the nature of the university environment using a survey made it possible to gather data from the first-year population efficiently, while ensuring anonymity.

Participants. The participants for this study were first-year students enrolled in the standard general education program who were enrolled in the 1 credit new student orientation course. An email was sent introducing the study to all instructors of the orientation course. The email contained a script to read about the study and the link to the survey questionnaire. Approximately 1700 students were admitted to the university for the fall 2018 semester. Not all students admitted qualified for the study as the study requirements included the following criteria: participants must be at least 18 years old, must be matriculated students, and enrolled in the standard orientation course (as opposed to special sections outside of the standard general education program). Approximately 1550 students met the study criteria and of these, 315 completed the survey for this study. After reviewing the surveys for consent and completion, 268 completed surveys were used for analysis.

The participants in the study had an average age of 18.5 and 90% of respondents were in the traditional college age of 18 to 19 years old. Of the 268 included participants, 61% identified as female, 37% identified as male, and 2% identified themselves differently or declined to answer. In terms of race/ethnicity, 30% identified as Hispanic, 28% identified as white, 27% identified as black, and 14% fell into other categories or did not answer. In terms of work experience, 50% of the participants worked part time, 45% did not work, 5% worked full time, while 1% declined to answer. In terms of reading status, 63% stated that they did not test into remedial courses, while 36% required remediation and 1% declined to answer. Of note, remedial students were overrepresented in the survey (36% versus the university report of approximately 20%).

Recruiting. Recruiting for the first part of this study took place through the first-year orientation course run by the university. This course meets once per week, and all first-year

students in the standard general education program are expected to enroll in this course in their first semester. Faculty teaching this orientation course were sent an invitation and explanation of the study via email and asked to share it with their students. This email included a script that introduced the study along with the link to the survey on Qualtrics. This email explained the purpose of the study and emphasized the fact that the study was voluntary, anonymous and would not count towards academic credit. Many of the faculty who teach this orientation course also teach other core courses and reminded students about the study during the course of their classes. Faculty teaching the orientation course were sent reminder emails twice during the November and December.

Data collection instrument. Questionnaires provide a good way of collecting data in a structured way, from a large population. This questionnaire used a variety of questions including short fill in the blank, multiple choice, and scaled questions answered on a scale of 1-5 (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). The questionnaire opened with a consent form. Once consent was granted, the questionnaire gathered information on demographics, reading habits, reading experiences, and reading beliefs and expectations. The survey was designed based on research on college and adult reading which discusses the types of issues common among high school seniors and college students. These include issues with comprehension, fluency, behaviors that influence reading including attention and information literacy, and analytical and synthesis skills.

Because of the use of Qualtrics, it is possible to break the questionnaire into smaller screens focused on specific questions with explicit instructions. The questionnaire began with demographics and educational experience including age, race/ethnicity, gender, high school zip

code, high school GPA. The survey was then broken into sections focused on specific areas related to reading.

The first section of the survey focused on demographics. This section asked about age, gender, race/ethnicity as well as academic background including zip code for the high school they graduated from, their score range for the verbal part of the SAT, and placement in remedial courses.

The next section of the survey looked at beliefs about reading and student's reading identity. The survey includes twelve statements which ask the participant to rate their agreement on a 4 point Likert scale which ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with no neutral point. Examples of questions in this section include ones that ask about the student's views of themselves including "I read well", "I enjoy reading", and statements that look at how they feel about reading and text such as "Reading is an important part of learning".

The third section of the survey asked participants about their motivation for reading. This section included twelve statements and asked the participant to rate their agreement on a 4 point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree with no neutral point. Examples of statements in this section include "I read because it is important", "I read for pleasure", "I read because I am curious", and "reading makes me smarter".

The next section addressed habits and preferences. This section had a variety of question types, with multiple choice, short answer, and agreement statements. Examples of questions in this section are "I usually can read for classes for _____ minutes before becoming bored, frustrated, or uncomfortable", questions about preferences including modality and format. Questions on habits address reading alone and reading combined with audio/video/image and audio/video/image alone.

The skills section included twelve agreement statements about reading comprehension, ten confidence statements on college literacy skills, comprehension, and vocabulary, and ten statements which address the participants confidence with specific critical skills used for reading, multimodal literacy, and audio/video/images alone. The agreement statements for reading fluency are based on areas that affect reading comprehension and ability, such as reading speed, memory, fluency, and vocabulary. The confidence statements addressed common literacy activities in college, such as understanding words, trusting information sources, and finding main ideas in a source. The section on different modes of information looked at ten specific reading skills, including synthesis, prediction, previewing, and analysis, to find out if students are likely to use that skill in text reading alone, multimodal reading, or audio/video/images alone.

The last section of the survey asked the participants to rate their agreement with brief questions that address reading and faculty interaction. These include “I want my college instructors to provide help with college reading”, “it would help me if my instructors talked more about how to read college materials”, and “it would help me if my instructors reviewed the readings periodically to make sure I understand why it is important/significant”. This section gathered feedback from the students about what they have seen, want, and need for college reading support.

Once the survey was completed, the participants viewed debriefing information, followed by a thank you screen and an invitation to participate in a focus group. Students had the opportunity to sign up for a reading focus group by clicking a link which opens a different survey with a screening and sign up page. This second survey is not associated with the initial survey, for anonymity. There was no way to determine any focus group participant's survey answers.

Data collection process. The electronic questionnaire was shared with participants through a link given in the first-year class and used Qualtrics for data collection. Qualtrics is a secure, proprietary system used for both administrative and research activities in many universities and colleges. The Qualtrics survey was housed on the university system and participants completed the survey online, submitting results directly to the Qualtrics site. Instructors teaching the first-year orientation class were sent an email that explained the study and contained both the link to the survey and language about the study itself to be shared with the class. Follow-up emails were sent to the instructors a week and two weeks later as a reminder.

Validity. To ensure the questionnaire is relevant and valid, two levels of review were used. This process, which was consistent with Creswell (2014), helped to ensure that the questionnaire measured what it was expected to and provided reliable results. The first level was a review by an individual with experience in reading and education. This reviewer was asked to provide feedback on the content and relevance of the survey. The second level was a pilot test with two student employees who have experience supporting first-year students. These student employees did not participate in the study and provided feedback on the questions and process to ensure that the survey was clear, concise, and acceptable to participants.

Analysis. As this study seeks to investigate the reading lives of students, data collected in the survey was used to describe the student population. The data collected with this survey questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine how students view themselves as readers in multiple contexts, as well as how they perceive themselves and reading.

Part 2: Qualitative Focus Groups

Focus groups, which are facilitated conversations with a carefully chosen set of participants, are a useful way to gather information on what people think and feel (Kreuger & Kasey, 2015). For this study, focus groups provide an opportunity to have students talk about their beliefs, habits, and feelings towards reading. Three focus groups were held in the second half of the spring 2019 semester using a semi-structured script, or list of questions. Each focus group was recorded and transcribed by the Rev service for analysis.

Research design. Focus groups are a qualitative research method that allows the researcher to step into the role of conversational facilitator, which in turn supports the participants in sharing their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs on a specific topic. Unlike interviews, where the researcher steers the individual conversation, focus groups place the researcher in the role of enabling the group to discuss the topic. Focus groups are well suited for studies of motivation, opinion, perception, and emotions (Krueger & Kasey, 2015). For this study, conducting focus groups of first-year college students were used to expand my understanding of student beliefs about reading and themselves as readers, habits, and motivation, and how they perceive their reading skills in different parts of their life. Two areas of exploration in the focus group were what students expect and want for reading instruction and support in their college classes, and how they use reading skills in their everyday life and academic life.

Participants and recruiting. Krueger and Casey (2015) recommend that three groups be used as a starting point for a study and that each group consist of approximately five participants. For this study, I used three groups of between four and five participants, in order to allow each participant to speak at length.

The participants in the focus groups were first- year students who are attending college for the first time. All were between the ages of 18 and 19 years old and started the university in Fall 2018. Each completed a prescreening survey that asked how they rated their reading skills, and habits. All participants were willing to talk about personal and educational experiences and gave their consent in writing to participate in the study. The following tables describe each participant within their focus group, in terms of how they rated their reading skills (choices were poor, needs improvement, adequate, good, excellent) and how they described their reading habits.

Focus group 1 had five members. Two of the members considered themselves friends prior to the focus group. Overall, the group was interactive and all participants were respectful though animated in discussion. This group was interested in discussing college reading and what appropriate reading was and was not as well as prior learning experiences.

Focus group 1

<u>Name</u>	<u>Major</u>	<u>Reading skills self-rating</u>	<u>Reading habits self-rating</u>
Grace	English	Excellent	Reads frequently and is important to her
Aaron	Business	Excellent	Reads if necessary and sometimes by choice, is somewhat important to him
Timothy	Education	Excellent	Reads frequently and is important to him
Jenisse	Leaving college	Adequate	Reads if necessary, is not important to her
Elijah	Communications	Adequate	Reads if necessary, is not important to him

Focus group 2 consisted of five members as well. Members of this group did not know each other prior to the focus group. They had strong opinions and were willing to discuss reading openly and had numerous suggestions for college faculty and instruction. Table# describes this group's members. follows.

Focus group 2

<u>Name</u>	<u>Major</u>	<u>Reading skills self-rating</u>	<u>Reading habits self-rating</u>
Amari	Science	Good	Reads if necessary and sometimes by choice, is somewhat important to him
Angel	Unknown	Adequate	Reads if necessary and sometimes by choice, is somewhat important to him
Jada	Did not share	Good	Reads if necessary, is somewhat important to her
Mia	Undecided	Good	Reads if necessary, is somewhat important to her
Geneva	Design	Good	Reads if necessary and sometimes by choice, is somewhat important to her

Focus group 3 consisted of four members. Members of this group did not know each other prior to the focus group meeting but quickly engaged in conversation about their personal and academic lives. Group 3 had a special interest in connections and spoke at length about connection, to content, faculty, and peers in the class.

Focus group 3

<u>Name</u>	<u>Major</u>	<u>Reading skills self-rating</u>	<u>Reading habits self-rating</u>
Josh	Undecided	Adequate	Reads if necessary, is somewhat important to him
Adrianna	Communications	Good	Reads if necessary and sometimes by choice, is somewhat important to her
Freya	Education	Good	Reads if necessary and sometimes by choice, is somewhat important to her
Kayla	Design	Good	Reads if necessary and sometimes by choice, is somewhat important to her

Recruiting. Participants were recruited by two primary means. The first was through the surveys completed in the first phase of the study. At the end of the survey, participants who were interested in participating in a focus group were able to complete a pre-screening questionnaire

which is not linked to their study questionnaire/survey results. Students who were interested in the opportunity to talk in a focus group clicked on link that opened a separate Qualtrics form which asked for basic information about their attitudes and habits as readers. The second means of recruitment took place through first-year courses. Faculty teaching core courses, such as writing, were asked to share information about the focus groups and were given my email and the link for the Qualtrics screening questionnaire. Food was provided during the focus group meetings and this was disclosed during recruitment.

Procedures. All individuals who showed an interest in the focus groups were offered the chance to participate by signing up for one of the three sessions. When participants arrived at the private meeting room where the groups took place, they were explained the purpose of the study, how it would work, and what consent meant. They were then explained the consent form and asked to sign if they chose to participant. Once everyone was ready, the focus group began.

Once all participants were present and consent forms were signed, I acted as moderator and started the discussion with ground rules for the group. These consisted of guidelines for interaction, encouragement for talking to each other, and stressed the idea that they were welcome to share their thoughts, and feelings freely. The two main questions that the focus group is convened to answer are: what type of experiences do students have with readings, and how do they view college instructors in regards to reading. To answer these, seven discussion questions were included in the questioning route, chosen to encourage discussion among the participants. The questioning route started with a probe question which was used to introduce participants to the topic and encourage conversation. The session continued with follow-up questions to help the group focus more deeply on reading experiences, thoughts, and feelings. At

the end, an exit question allowed the participants to talk about anything that they may have missed in the earlier discussion.

Specifically, the focus group began with the question “in the fall survey, most students felt that they were good readers. How about you?”. This goal of this question was to help the participants think of themselves as readers. The second question in the questioning route was “How do you feel about yourself and reading since the end of the high school up until now”. It was followed with a question about differences between reading for recreation or fun and reading for classes and a question that asked about confidence and types of reading. I then asked what reading strengths they had for recreational and academic reading and what they would like to do better to improve their reading lives. The focus groups ended with a question about faculty and how we could better support college reading.

My role during the discussion was to keep the conversation moving, respond to what participants wanted to talk about, and ensure that each person had an opportunity to speak. I moved to a new question when the group appeared to be done with the question we discussed. At the end, I closed the session by thanking everyone for their participation, reviewed the debriefing information and shared my contact information and reminded them that they could contact me or meet at any time with comments, questions, or to view the transcripts. Once completed, the recording was sent for transcription.

Analysis. Data from the focus groups was analyzed using an analytical framework proposed by Nill, Tate, and Johnstone (2017). This analysis framework consisted of a set of explicit steps which helped me to organize and think through each stage of analysis. It is consistent with the recommendations of Krueger and Casey (2015) but provided a more

structured way of analyzing complex qualitative data. Both Nill, Tate, and Johnstone (2017) and Krueger and Casey (2015) recommend open coding which was used for this analysis.

The steps from Nill, Tate, and Johnstone's framework are as follows. Data was first transcribed and then reviewed for completeness and accuracy. Once this is done, the data was organized by question, and content areas were identified and marked. Each content area was analyzed predominantly using open coding although some initial codes, drawn from the literature on reading were chosen ahead of time to ensure that important areas and topics are not overlooked. Examples of codes drawn from the literature included strengths, concerns, social interaction, and teaching strategies. Each content area had two rounds of analysis- the first was a manifest analysis which looked at the concrete, tangible data from the transcript (or what the words say). The second round of analysis was a latent analysis which looked at what the data meant. Once complete, the results from both analyses were combined and integrated. This set of steps was repeated for each content area. Once all content areas are analyzed, the full results were integrated and reported using the same steps, against the larger set of data.

To ensure that the coding of the focus data is reliable, codes were checked with members of the dissertation group, the dissertation chairperson, and other colleagues who have experience with first-year students. Having codes tested and agreed upon by other coders increases the intercoder reliability, and by association, increased confidence that the coding scheme and the use of it was reliable.

Validity. The quality of data is always a concern in research, and it was important to ensure that the results were an accurate representation of what the participants felt and thought about reading. To ensure the validity of the results, a number of steps were included in the process. Prior to the study, I reviewed the questions with faculty and former first-year students to

ensure that the questions were understandable and relevant and would lead to effective discussion. During the focus group sessions, I as the moderator listened carefully, and sought clarification when necessary. Throughout the discussions, I took notes on body language, and interaction that would not be visible in the audio transcription. At the conclusion of the sessions, I made the notes available to the participants if they chose to review them. Systematic analysis procedures, following the framework proposed by Nill, Tate, & Johnstone (2017) were used to ensure systematic, thorough analysis.

Limitations

There are two key limitations to this study. The first is related to the recruitment method and participants. The second is related to the types of questions asked within the study. This study recruited students using first-year courses at the university. As such, it is a non-probability sampling method and is specific to university environment. After discussion with the leadership of the program, I invited all sections of the standard first-year orientation courses and asked the instructors to share the study. This was done because first-year students may be overwhelmed by information and often ignore email and may not have had access to the system.

The second limitation was related to the purpose of the study is to understand how students think about their reading habits and skills and how they use them in their lives. As such it was limited to their perceptions and thoughts. Since I did not gather data that measured reading ability (for instance, diagnostic testing), there was no evidence to gauge how accurate their perception of their skills were or ability to compare perception against actual skills level.

A future study could focus on comparing student perspectives and their actual reading skills and habits. In order to gather data on actual reading, a phone-based app could be designed to monitor and track readings. Diagnostic testing could be used to better understand the skills

that students' possess as a comparison point. Combining a self-evaluation of reading and a measure of reading habits and skills could provide data on the accuracy of student self-evaluation as well as greater depth on reading abilities and habits. Using a randomized sample in further studies may help to ensure that the university's first-year population is more accurately represented.

Chapter 4: Findings

This findings chapter reports the results of this mixed method study and contains six sections. The first section focuses on introducing the study and is followed by information about the survey participants and provides a description of the focus groups. In the four sections that follow, I discuss the findings related to the four dimensions of students' reading lives, including students' beliefs about reading and themselves as readers, their motivation for reading, habits and preferences, and confidence and use of reading skills. For each of these dimensions, I present the results from the survey and the findings of the focus groups. The chapter ends with a section discussing the findings from the survey and focus groups regarding what students want and expect from college faculty with respect to reading support and college teaching practices.

A Student's Reading Life, Viewed Through Survey Data

The survey portion of this study asked participants to evaluate their reading life in four domains, which included preferences and interests for reading, reading motivation, beliefs about reading and themselves as readers, and their confidence and use of specific reading skills. This section of the results summarizes each of the domains as a group, and notes trends and differences among how the participants answered. A total of 268 surveys, of the initial 315, were used for this analysis.

Demographics. The majority, 90%, of the sample were between 18 and 19 years of age. In terms of gender, the respondents were 61% female, 37% male with the rest identifying differently or choosing not to disclose. Participants were asked to identify their race/ethnicity and identified themselves as black (27%), Hispanic (30%), Asian/AI/AN/PI (7%), and white (28%), with 7% declining to answer. Of the participants, 50% worked part time, 45% did not work, 5% were employed full time and 1% did not answer.

Academic history was also a part of the survey. In terms of high school GPA, the majority, 60%, claimed a GPA of 3.0 or higher, while, 26% reported a GPA between 2.5 and 3.0. A small number, 3%, either gave a GPA lower than 2.5 or chose not to respond. When asked about the SAT verbal test, 38% either did not know, did not take the test, or declined to answer. Of those that that did answer, 25% stated that their score was between 400-499 and 60% were between 500-599, with the rest either under 400 or above 600. Of the sample, 63% stated that they did not test as needing reading remediation upon entry to the university, while 36% tested into remedial reading classes. It is important to note that students requiring remediation were overrepresented in the study sample, as the university reports that about 20% of students test into reading remediation.

Understanding Reading Through Focus Groups

To provide a deeper look at the reading life of first-year students, focus groups were held during the Spring 2019 semester. These focus groups examined the beliefs and experiences of the students and allowed them to provide detail on the areas investigated in the survey. Participants were recruited through the survey and courses designed for students in their first-year of college typically scheduled in the second half of the 2018-19 academic year. In total, 14 students took part in the focus groups. When participants filled out the pre-screening survey, they were able to choose which days and times worked best for them. Most participants in the groups were assigned to a group based on their schedule; however, there were participants who were available for all groups. For these participants, I placed them in groups with others with different answers on the screening questionnaire to facilitate discussion.

Focus groups meetings were held on February 28, 2019, March 5, 2019, and March 7, 2019. Meetings were held in a small private space in the college and food and drinks were

provided. Prior to the start of the group, the participants had a chance to meet and eat together, after which I reviewed the consent forms, answered questions, and introduced the study and the focus group process. Each group was asked the same questions, however, participants were able to direct the conversation into areas that they felt were important.

All participants in the focus groups identified as first-year students and were between 18 and 19 years old. They were in their second semester of their first-year of college and were enrolled in a variety of majors. Focus groups met during college activity hours when classes were not in session, in a quiet private meeting room. Participants gave consent before the focus groups began. Group discussions were recorded and transcribed. Participants were aware of the recording devices which were placed in the center of the table.

The Dimensions of a Reading Life

For the purpose of this study, a person's individual reading life was viewed in four dimensions. These dimensions were personal and largely invisible to instructors and those around the reader. They dealt with the internal processes that affect how an individual approaches reading and reads in their personal and academic lives. This section presents each dimension of an individual's reading life, explaining what the dimension is, followed by the results of the survey and then the focus group, as applicable.

Skills

The purpose of the study was to understand the dimensions of a college student's reading life- areas that contribute to reading but are not visible to those around them. These dimensions are only available to instructors if students choose to share them. The first dimension discussed is the student's perception of the skills they use and the confidence they have when working with different sources of information. This was accomplished via the survey, where questions focused

on comprehension, evaluation, metacognition and reflection, and focus and memory. This research asked the participants to consider each skill area and rate their confidence in performing actions from the skills areas when reading academic and social texts, in different formats such as print or electronic, or information gathering through text or audio/video in a variety of scenarios including format (print, electronic, or audio/visual). This section is divided into sections based on the type of skill and presents findings from the survey, first presenting skills for academic readings, then non-academic/recreational readings, and finally comparing them.

Comprehension. The term comprehension refers to an individual's ability to understand the information in front of them. Comprehension can be at the word level, where the individual knows and understands the words, or at the text or source level, where the individual understands what it is saying, and what it means. As part of the survey, participants were asked two questions about their confidence in their comprehension skills when reading academic material and material they chose for recreation. When asked if they were confident in their ability to understand an academic text or reading, 68% were confident. When asked if they were confident in their ability to recognize words within academic readings, 72% were confident. These results indicate that most participants feel confident in their ability to read and understand at the word level, and at the text or reading level when working with materials for classroom purposes. When asked the same two questions about recreational readings, participants tended to feel confident in their ability to understand both the words (77%) and overall meaning (76%) in materials that they chose for recreational purposes.

The survey data indicated participants were more confident with comprehension for words and readings when they chose the source or were reading for pleasure. For word level and text level, the number of individuals that felt confident increased when comparing reading types.

Table 1

Comparison of confidence by reading type, at source and word level

<u>Reading type</u>	<u>Text/source level</u>		<u>Word level</u>	
	<u>Confident</u>	<u>Not confident</u>	<u>Confident</u>	<u>Not confident</u>
Academic	68%	32%	72%	28%
Non-Academic	76%	24%	77%	23%

Academic. More than half (68%) of participants felt confident in reading academic text in general, at the source level and 72% were confident recognizing and understanding words in academic text. Still, 32% of participants did not feel confident in their ability to understand what they read for classes at the whole text or source level, and 28% lacked confidence in their ability to recognize and work with individual words in their class readings.

Non-academic. Participants tended to be confident in their ability to work with social and recreational readings. The majority, 76%, were confident in their ability to read and understand non-academic readings as a whole and 77% of participants felt confident that they could understand the words used in their social and recreational readings. There were some participants however that felt less confident, with 28% lacking confidence in their ability to understand readings as a whole, and 23% reporting low confidence in their ability to read and understand the words in their readings.

Comparison. While most participants were confident in their ability to understand the readings at the whole text level and at the word level for academic readings, even more participants had confidence in their ability to read social and recreational readings. Participants also tended to be more confident in their ability to work with the individual words versus

understand the whole text, with a greater difference in academic readings, than in non-academic readings.

Focus group. The focus groups provided a different picture of comprehension compared to the surveys. While the surveys were fairly straight-forward with most participants feeling confident in comprehending at the word and source/text level, the focus groups demonstrated that it was not a simple question. As discussions about reading progressed, the idea that comprehension is reliant on more than word recognition developed. Context and engagement emerged as two important and formative ideas that affected if a person is able to understand what they read beyond the level of decoding. Participants also brought up the need to find other sources to explain, reinforce, and extend their understanding of any topic with which they were working.

Evaluation. Evaluation is a process where an individual thinks about the source of information, making judgements about its purpose, format, and validity/reliability. Evaluative skills are key in determining the trustworthiness of a source of information and require an individual to think carefully, about the source itself and who created it. The survey asked three questions about confidence in evaluative skills including the ability to identify if a source can be trusted, if they can identify the purpose of a reading, and identify issues that compromise validity or reliability of the text.

Academic. As part of the survey, participants were asked three questions that assessed confidence in three specific areas of evaluation. When asked about their ability to determine the trustworthiness of a source, 73% were confident in their ability to know if a source should be used and 67% were confident that they could identify issues or problems with a source that could

compromise validity or reliability. Many (67%) felt that they were able to identify the purpose of a reading.

Non-academic. When asked the same three questions about recreational reading as they were about academic reading, students tended to answer with less confidence, at least for knowing if they could trust the reading or determine the purpose. When asked about determining if a source could be trusted, 56% felt confident while 44% did not feel confident that they could do so with recreational readings. Participants were confident in their ability to determine the purpose of a recreational text, with 76% reporting confidence, while 24% were not confident. Participants were confident (73%) in their ability to identify issues that could compromise the validity or reliability of a source when it came to recreational reading.

Comparison. Overall, students tended to have more confidence in their ability to evaluate sources to determine whether an academic reading was trustworthy (73% vs 26%) and to identify the main idea in academic readings (67% vs 33%). Students felt more confident in identifying issues or problems that compromised a source's trustworthiness for recreational readings (73%)

Overall, students were more confident in their ability to determine if academic sources were more trustworthy than those that they chose for recreation (73% vs 56%). It is possible that the highly structured nature of academic texts made it easier for students to determine trustworthiness and purpose, as academic texts often follow a specific format, whereas recreational reading can use many formats or no format at all. Too, participants may have had formal instruction in determining credibility of source as part of prior education and may also find it easier to trust readings assigned by faculty as part of their studies or assume faculty will only assign trustworthy texts.

When it came to determining the purpose of a source, students were confident in their ability to analyze sources they chose for recreation, versus those for classes. Most participants have confidence that they could determine purpose for recreational sources (76%) compared to academic sources (67%). Participants were also more confident in their ability to identify problems or issues in sources they chose for recreation (73%) compared to academic sources (67%). It is possible that students are more confident in sources they choose due to the fact that many students build an internal knowledge base about the things they read for recreation, making it easier to identify if the information itself is valid.

Table 2

Comparison of confidence between academic and non-academic readings, based on skills

	Trust		Purpose		Identify problems/issues	
	<u>Confident</u>	<u>Not confident</u>	<u>Confident</u>	<u>Not confident</u>	<u>Confident</u>	<u>Not confident</u>
Academic	73%	26%	67%	33%	67%	33%
Non-academic	56%	44%	76%	24%	73%	27%

Note: may not add to 100% due to rounding

Metacognition and reflection. Strong readers have a set of skills that allow them to continually monitor their process and progress when taking in information in. Metacognitive and reflective skills allow readers to pay attention to their understanding or comprehension of the source, adjust the use of skills based on the type of source and their own progress, and determine how and what else they may need to do to ensure understanding. Individuals who are reading metacognitively are aware of their reading and learning and able to adapt and change their approach to increase success.

Academic. Two questions in the survey looked at what participants believe about their ability to manage reading. The majority, 69% of participants felt confident that they were aware of how they were reading and took steps to ensure understanding. The majority of participants, 76%, also were confident that they connected what they read with what they already learned.

Non-academic. When asked about recreational reading, participants were confident in their ability to monitor and manage reading. When asked about being aware of how well they are reading, and if they can take steps to adjust reading, 76% were confident that they are able to do so. In terms of connecting what they read to prior knowledge and learning, 76%, were confident in their ability to do so.

Comparison. Participants in the survey tended to have confidence in their ability to manage their reading. Overall, the percentage of those who believed that they were aware of their reading and able to take steps to adjust and manage their learning from sources was similar between academic and non-academic readings (69% for academic, 67% for non-academic). When asking about making intentional connections between readings and what they already knew, 76% felt confident in their ability to integrate what they were reading with what they already knew.

Table 3

Comparison of confidence based on reading type, actions taken

	Awareness of reading		Connection to prior knowledge	
	<u>Confident</u>	<u>Not confident</u>	<u>Confident</u>	<u>Not confident</u>
Academic	69%	31%	76%	24%
Non-Academic	67%	32%	76%	24%

Focus and memory. The ability to focus on a source for information and remember what was learned, both specific details and overall message and meaning, is critical for college

success. These behaviors affect the other areas of reading, including comprehension, evaluation, and metacognition and reflection.

Academic readings. In the survey, participants were asked about their confidence in being able to focus on and remember what they have read in academic texts. One question asked specifically about being able to read quickly enough to manage time. While overall, 62% felt confident, only 25% answered that they were very confident, compared to 37% who felt moderately confident. Another survey question asked about the participants' ability to focus on what they read without mind wandering. In general, 45% felt confident that they could read without mind wandering being a major issue, however only 14% felt very confident that they could focus without mind reading. The rest, 31% had answered moderately confident, indicating that this is still an area of concern. When asked about remembering what they read, the majority of participants (60%) had confidence, though only 21% were very confident in their ability to recall and remember. In general, most participants in the survey felt confident in their ability to read quickly enough to manage their time and remember what they read, although the number of participants who felt very confident in each area was low.

While the majority did feel some level of confidence, there were still many participants who did not feel confident in their abilities. Specifically, 37% of participants did not feel confident in their ability to read quickly enough to manage their time, 40% did not feel confident in their ability to remember what they read, and 54% did not feel confident in their ability to read without mind wandering. These numbers indicate that students have an awareness of areas that impact their ability to be successful in academic readings and may provide guidance in building skills for academic texts.

Non-academic readings. Participants in the survey were asked about their confidence in time management, focus and memory for recreational reading. When asked about their confidence in reading quickly enough to manage their time well, the majority (70%) felt confident that they did. Of these, 25% felt very confident and 45% felt confident but not strongly so. The majority of participants also felt confidence in their ability to remember what they read, with 61% reporting confidence though only 24% felt strongly confident in this ability. Participants had less confidence in their ability to focus on readings, with 49% reporting confidence and only 16% considered themselves very confident in their ability to focus without mind wandering.

Overall, the majority of participants felt confident in their ability to manage their time and remember what they read. Even so, several participants were less than confident, with 30% reporting concerns about managing their reading time, while 39% have concerns about remembering what they read. The lower level of confidence in being able to read without mind wandering, 51%, may indicate that students are aware and even concerned about their ability to focus on reading in general.

Comparison. The survey asked about confidence in reading skills when working with assigned readings and recreational reading was chosen by the participants. When asked about confidence in reading quickly and managing time, students were more confident in recreational readings than they were with academic readings (70% vs 62%). In terms of confidence in remembering what they read, the numbers were very close, with 60% of students reporting confidence in retaining academic texts versus 61% in recreational reading. Numbers were also similar when it came to focus. When asked about academic reading, 45% of participants were confident, with 54% having concerns about their ability to focus without mind wandering when

working with academic texts. Participants were slightly more confident in focusing on recreational reading, with 49% having confidence in their ability to focus without mind wandering, and 51% having concerns about focus.

Table 4

Comparison of confidence between reading types, for ability

	Reading quickly enough to manage time		Remember what was read		Focus without mind wandering	
	<u>Confident</u>	<u>Not confident</u>	<u>Confident</u>	<u>Not confident</u>	<u>Confident</u>	<u>Not confident</u>
Academic	62%	37%	60%	40%	45%	54%
Non-academic	70%	30%	61%	39%	49%	51%

Beliefs about Reading

The previous section examined participants’ confidence in using skills with certain types of readings. To further understand what participated believed about reading and themselves as readers and learners, questions were included in both the survey and in the focus group interviews. The survey included a set of questions that asked participants to rate their beliefs about themselves, reading, and learning in general. The focus group allowed participants to share their beliefs reading and about themselves as readers and learners. This section will present what participants believed is good reading, how they feel about reading and themselves as readers and learners, and their thoughts and opinions of what poor reading is at the college level. It ends with a discussion of vocabulary and the idea of stigma and readiness for reading at the college level.

What is good reading? The first block of questions in the survey asked students about their beliefs about themselves as readers and reading itself. Overall, students tended to report positive beliefs. The vast majority of students, 94%, answered the statement “I am a good

student” positively. A large majority of students, 86%, felt that that they were good readers and few of the participants in the study, regardless of remedial status, answered that they believed they were not good students (6%) or good readers (14%).

In the focus groups, I asked participants to elaborate on the idea of what a good reader is (and is not) in order to have a better sense of why students may have answered so positively in the survey portion of the study. Participants were consistent in their answers when it came to skills. Specifically, students in the focus group described good readers as having literacy skills which include but extend beyond comprehension. They expect good readers to have a working vocabulary and be able to decode words in text. Beyond that though, they expect good readers to understand what the author means in the text, obtain knowledge from the readings, think about what they are reading and question the text and themselves. The idea of reading critically and critically thinking during reading can be seen in this response from the second focus group.

Timothy explained this, saying:

I think it would have to be, like, kind of like what we were saying, like obtaining the knowledge because I think you can ... anyone can read a bunch of words, but if you don't like interpret it or you don't get a message from it or you don't understand it, then it's not really reading, you are just looking at words

In this comment, Timothy is stating that decoding, the ability to recognize words, is not enough for successful reading at the college level. His comment about looking at words is telling- seeing the words and even recognizing them is not enough for successful reading. During the focus group, Kayla explained that a good reader is:

An active thinker. Like, not just reading and saying words, like actually kind of like questioning or like understanding what you're reading and like critically ... like not just

agreeing, but also thinking, Oh, I wonder why it's like that or ... [and] responding to what you are reading as well.

This comment, and the discussion itself, demonstrated that she was aware that good reading requires a reader to question as they read, identifying issues or areas that may need further consideration. Josh discussed the same ideas, when he said

I think a trait of a good reader is someone who [will] speak up and ask a question because it's all about how...you take in the information, so ... if you don't understand it, to be a good reader, you should ask and get more information on it.

This comment continues the idea of questioning but extends it beyond the individual and their internal thoughts. For this participant, a good reader is going to question others about the areas that they need clarification on instead of ignoring text they do not understand.

There was disagreement on the topic of mindset and good readers. Some students in the groups spoke about skills and what students were able to do, while others brought up ideas that were more in line with how students felt about reading and the behaviors they were willing and unwilling to do. For instance, Grace remarked, in a conversation about skills, that making an active choice to care about the reading is a part of being a good reader saying:

I think a good reader is just someone who can make themselves care about what they're about to read. You don't need to be interested in it. If you're going to read an article for class about plastic pollution in the ocean, and you can't be like, "Oh, wow!" But you just need to go into it prepared to learn something from it. To prepare to analyze the information in it, even if you're not interested. You just have to make yourself ... not get interested, but just make yourself, like, "Okay. Need to read this, and get into it" in a way.

Grace was not speaking about care towards an individual but rather the idea that good readers are those that can make themselves care about, or give value, to what they are reading. For her, a good reader needed to be able to find a way to make the reading important enough to sustain reading even if they do not feel interested about the topic. The idea of caring, or not caring, was present in a comment made by another participant in a different focus group. During a conversation about what good reading is and is not in an educational environment, a participant said:

I probably was a bad reader in high school, honestly. I was the person, like, who reads the questions and I'm going through the text like, okay, where did she say this? Okay, let's write that down. Just to get it over with.

In this example, the participant was sharing that she looked for answers for assigned work, instead reading the text itself. This approach, of looking for the answers to questions to, as she commented “get it over with”, can satisfy an assignment, but does not lend itself to the kind of reading that builds understanding. In her own words, she indicated that in her push to get the work done, she is not seeking meaning from text as her focus is on completion rather than mastery. The idea of care, of choosing to assign reading importance regardless of motivation or interest, was one attribute of a good reader.

Based on these types of comments made during the focus groups, it appears that students' judgment of reading ability is based on a combination of beliefs about their skills and themselves as learners, as well as how they feel about reading more so than on the results of formal assessment of their reading ability. Given that most participants in the survey felt they were good readers, or at least “good enough” readers, it makes sense that they are judging their reading ability based on their feelings about themselves and intention as readers readings and less from

their performance on tests or academic measurements. In fact, when asked, students were likely to dismiss the results of formal testing.

Formal testing. While not addressed on the survey, the topic of formal testing and assessment was brought up in some of the focus group discussions. In group 1, when asked about testing, participants quickly turned the conversation away from their own results and resumed talking about their reading habits and thoughts about good and bad readers in general. The second group was more willing to discuss test scores and an excerpt from the discussion showed that participants did not place much weight on formal tests like the SAT now that they were in college.

Josh: Well, I feel like I'm a better reader than what the SAT had given me because like, the SAT is like, most of the time, it's a bunch of trick questions and stuff where as like, I know what I'm capable of, so I know if I read a book right now, I know I'm going to be able to process that information, so I feel like sometimes, like, stuff like the SAT, like, sometimes it can accurately describe you, but sometimes it really can't.

Kayla: I agree. I don't think the SAT's can determine if someone is a good reader or not because people have different ways of tackling text and I feel like the SAT questions are meant to trick you and you shouldn't let it define you, definitely.

In these comments, participants spoke about their distrust of tests and what tests measure. They specifically question if the SAT is able to measure reading and are concerned that the questions on the SAT are meant to trick test-takers. The conversation continued.

Freya: I would have to agree with that because sometimes if I'll read something like off the SAT and like they ask me certain questions, I don't think those questions can kind of capture what kind of a thinker someone is because everyone thinks differently and

everyone has a different way of processing information, so I feel like the SAT is kind of like generalized when it could be like a very specifically different people's like thought patterns.

Adrianna: Right. I think it's very generalized. And it's like how well you do under pressure too. Like, how well can ... how fast, more likely, can you do something. Which is ... doesn't equal how smart you are.

As the conversation continued, they discussed the idea that the SAT did not capture what they believe is good reading. In particular they were concerned that the test does not capture how people read or process information and does not allow for differences among readers or intelligence. It seems important to note that the question was not specific to any test and yet the students chose to discuss the SAT.

The third focus group did not engage with the topic of testing, at least not about formal tests. Instead, they discussed the use of testing in the college environment and how the format and content of the test affected their success. Like the other groups, they wanted to move away from assessing themselves and towards their opinions and experiences. An example from the discussion was:

I don't know. It's something about them. I feel like you put me in the classroom at that table and I can get an A. Like in my bio, I take quizzes and I'm like, "Oh I think I did good", and then I go and I take a test on my math lab online, and it's like, "Yo, I thought I did good, then I got a 44". That's not for me, and I don't know, but I feel like it's something about being in that classroom, in that environment that it really helps me.

Mia described how she does well in the social environment of the classroom and yet on a test completed independently (and online), she often has issues with demonstrating what she knows.

She feels confident in using her knowledge with others and is aware that the classroom is a better learning environment for her, but she also disregards the information from the online test as it does not match her sense of her own learning. While it is possible that she does not want to accept testing, it is clear that she is aware of – and values- learning as a social activity. The conversation continued with Jada saying:

For me I think it depends on the subject too. Like in college when I had regular Psych, all my tests were online and that worked for me. But in my Child Psych class, they're in paper and sometimes it benefits me and sometimes it doesn't. It really just all depends.

Jada had a different take on testing and online learning, and felt that for her first level psychology class, which focused on acquiring basic knowledge, online testing was fine. In the subsequent class though, which required higher levels of application, she found that the paper format had benefits.

Beliefs about reading. Participants were asked a variety of questions concerning their beliefs about reading during the survey. One area of investigation was how participants felt about their reading ability and activities. In terms of beliefs about reading, 77% of participants felt that reading well and accurately was important. The majority of participants, 74%, felt that reading tended to make them smarter, with 64% agreeing that reading makes them more interesting to others. Like earlier results on beliefs about being a good student and reader, students reported positive beliefs about reading itself.

Similarly, most students felt prepared for college reading and reported positive beliefs about reading behavior. When asked if they were prepared for college reading, 76% felt that they were with 55% feeling strongly that they are ready and the other 21% feeling positively though less strongly. Most students reported enjoying talking about what they read (67%) and

interestingly, 50% enjoyed writing about what they read. Of note, 80% of participants believed that they were willing to work hard at reading. This leads me to believe that students are putting in the effort and work to read well, even if they are less than successful in the classroom. They appear to be using the skills they think they need. It is possible that students struggle in college reading due to something other than behavior and mindset. It is also possible that students either misunderstand college reading demands and are unaware of the differences between elementary and secondary school and college, but it is just as likely that they do understand the differences but are not reading the way that their college faculty expect.

The focus groups had similar answers. Most of the participants felt that they were at least “good enough” readers, able to manage the reading necessary in a college environment. The question “are you a good reader?” was explicitly asked during the focus groups. Of the three groups, only one engaged in discussion beyond the minimum on this topic and even that group tended to shy away from discussing their feelings towards themselves in detail. Each group was quick to move on to other areas in reading. It is unclear why the participants did not want to talk about their own reading, but it is possible that they did not want to show weakness with peers. It is also possible that being a poor reader is something that adults feel shame about; in American culture, reading is a foundational activity and children spend significant time building skills. As an adult in a college environment, most students are aware that reading is important and that they are expected to be competent. With this in mind, it seems unlikely that students would be open to discussing their worries about their reading in a direct manner especially with people they do not know in a research in setting.

In the first focus group, participants were reluctant to discuss their thoughts about their own reading. Most nodded along with each other and answered the questions with nods and

smiles and shrugs but with very little discussion. There was only one point where there was even a minimal discussion between two participants where they discussed issues in their own reading.

Elijah: Mm-mm. Being a good reader is such a broad term. Me, personally, I'm a slow reader. I take my time to really understand what's on the text. And then, I have to reread it because I miss a lot of things. And then, my brain will ... I'll zone out a couple sentences, and I'm just looking at the words, not really reading it. So ...No, it's not that I don't feel confident. I just ... I know I'm going to take my time trying to understand it. And other people are just like ... Read it once, two-second style, finished the whole book. Me, I'll have to read the book. Then, I'll have to read it again, if I want to understand everything in it. The little details, all that.

Elijah was aware of what type of reader he was and had identified not only what he considered possible problems, but had developed strategies to help him through the work. He was aware of his reading speed and also that he needed to re-read to ensure that he understood what he was reading. The conversation continued with other participants discussing reading.

Jenisse: Because me, personally, I can't skim and understand what I'm skimming. I'll skim, and skip a whole, big sentence. Go on, and then, I'm like, "What did I just do?" I have to go word-for-word. I feel like it takes much more to do that.

Jenisse was also aware of her reading and how it affected her comprehension and ability to use what she had read. She knew that skimming did not work for her and that she needed to read more closely, but was also aware that it would take time for this type of reading.

The second group was more elaborate in their responses and was more interactive in the discussion, making eye contact with one another and jumping in as each person finished speaking. Even so, they tended to move quickly to detail and move away from how they felt

about themselves. This discussion started with the question posed “do you think you are a good reader?” Two of the participants answered briefly with Andriana saying “I think so. I think I am” and Josh commenting “I think I am, but I could be better.” The conversation continued with participants answering with more detail. Kayla was clear in her about her own skills and how they relate to her mindset, and said that

I think the same way, but I think it depends on, like, the reading material. If it's something I'm really into, then yeah, I'll pick it up and I'll get the knowledge for it. But, if it's something that I'm not really passionate about, then I'm kind of like ... something, it could be something I could be better at.

This comment acknowledged that interest and grit play a part in reading. She thought she was a good reader who could be better, but believes that her ability to read depends on her engagement with the text or the content. As the conversation continued, the idea of engagement was discussed.

Freya: I think I'm a good reader, only because I ... I do ask a lot of questions, like, especially if I'm unsure because I always like to know whatever I can.

Kayla: So, I do a lot of reading and some of it is just for my major or it's just like by personal choice and some of the readings I pick by choice, I'm really into, so I'll think more about it or I'll think more outside the box. But, if it's something for my major, there are sometimes where I feel like, Oh, it's really engaging because maybe how it's written or how ... or what the material was about. But, sometimes, it doesn't, like, captivate me, so I don't think about it too much or I'll start to fade away, like, my interest.

In these two comments, two participants were explaining that questions and the desire to know- either for personal choice or because of major- made their reading better. Kayla also

acknowledged that lack of interest or engagement was likely to decrease thinking and eventually reading skills.

As the conversation continued, participants stated that they believed they were good readers, or at least “good enough” readers, when they chose to be, even as they acknowledged areas where they think their reading skills could be enhanced. These participants were responding to the question “If I asked you as an academic reader are you a good reader, what would you say?”. The same idea of engagement driving good reading was apparent. Kayla spoke briefly, saying “I would say I'm good, but I could definitely be better in areas.” Another member of the group, Adrianna, elaborated stating:

I would probably say the same thing, ... like history. You have to read so much in history and I actually like history, but there are just like some things, I'm like, okay, I'm just going to keep going onto the next thing.

Josh agreed, talking about the difference between material for his major and other courses that are required but not natively interesting to him.

With my major ... athletic training ... it's engaging to me. So ... I want to be into it. But, if it's something out of the blue, like, history, like, like I struggle with history, so it's like ... it's like, if I'm not into it, then it's like, I'm not really going to get it, so I should ask more questions.

While this participant was clear that the content made a difference in engagement and understanding, Freya spoke about frustration with the vocabulary of the text and the content itself.

I know sometimes, like, I get really frustrated when I have to read for a course and there's like a lot of words I don't understand, like, it's almost in a different language. So, instead

of reading, sometimes I'll watch videos, so I can understand the material better and then when I go back and read, I have like background information. So like, for example, we're reading *The Odyssey* in world literature and sometimes I'm just reading it and I don't absorb anything. So, I'll watch someone summarize it and like, for a chapter or something, and like, I'll understand what's going on in the chapter and then when I look back and read, I'm like, Oh, okay, so that's what the guy was saying. And then like, I become a better reader like that.

In this comment, Freya was clear about her frustration when reading unfamiliar words and content. She briefly mentioned reading without understanding and then shared that she will try to find video to help her understand content before returning to the text itself. By doing so, she builds contextual knowledge that enables her to manage the unfamiliar vocabulary.

When questioned about academic readers, the participants were likely to identify areas they struggled in. For them, it appears that content, form, and context of the material makes a difference in how well they will read it, so even though they continue to believe they are good at reading, they are aware that they may not read at the depth or as efficiently as they think is necessary. An interesting part of this discussion came from the fact that they are willing to use strategies, like viewing a video or reviewing materials, when they are not reading as well as they feel they need to.

The third focus group was willing to state their opinions but did not show an interest in discussing the topic further. They responded briefly to the initial question of "Are you a good reader?" with very brief comments which included:

Geneva: I think I am.

Mia: Yeah I'd like to think I am.

Amari: Yeah I think I am too. I think my fluency is really up to my level, so I mean there's always need for improvement, but at my pace, I think I'm a good reader.

Angel: I think I'm not. In English no, in Spanish yes.

Jada: I think I'm okay. Like I could be better, but I'm okay.

Even with further questions, participants did not want to engage and instead shrugged and looked away. While on the surface, these participants appeared to state that they were reading or college reading, a closer look though indicates that these initially confident words are contradicted by hesitation in claiming expertise. For instance, words like “think”, “could be better” indicate that while these participants believe that they are ready, there is still a part of them that is concerned and aware that they will need additional reading skills throughout their college career. The language they used, coupled with their hesitation to engage in the discussion, may indicate a lack of confidence.

In most of the areas discussed, these participants were active and engaged in conversation however, this line of question did not yield much. Their comments were brief and further attempts to engage them in conversation ended with them talking about other people and not themselves. Even so, these brief answers show that these participants, like the survey participants and the earlier focus groups, believe that they are good readers but are able to acknowledge that they may need to increase skills. When asked about academic reading, these participants made noncommittal noises, and moved on to other topics.

The hesitancy or lack of interest in discussing themselves as readers was striking as the groups themselves were very interactive and engaged, with participants speaking over one another excitedly, expanding on each other's statements, and even challenging one another at times. They were open about discussing their skills and interests and their beliefs about reading

and good readers, but when it came to assessing themselves, they were much more reticent. For instance, when asked about their reading skills. This same phenomenon showed up when asked about reading strengths—participants did not engage with the topic, answered it as briefly as possible, and changed to another topic. Even the second focus group, who were more engaged with the question, quickly pivoted away from their feelings and into describing their behaviors and mindset.

In both the survey and focus groups, few students saw themselves as poor students, unable to read well, and unprepared for college reading. In the focus groups, participants were less positive though, showing some doubt or concern. The group was split when it came to enjoying writing. While half of the student responded positively when asked about writing about what they read, the other half were clear that they did not enjoy this type of writing. Given the other answers in the survey and in the focus groups, this could be more an issue with writing than reading itself.

In addition to the majority of students having positive beliefs about reading and themselves as readers, most participants expressed liking reading, at least in some form. In the survey more than half the students (65%), answered that they like reading in general. Even though this is the majority, this still left 34% of participants who dislike reading at least at some level. In the focus groups all participants had specific types of reading that they enjoyed, which tended to be linked to their personal lives, goals and aspirations. It is possible that students have a narrow view of what reading is when asked on a survey in the beginning of their college career, which can change or expand as they progress or discuss reading in more detail with their peers.

Poor readers. While the survey provided the information that the majority participants saw themselves as good students and readers and the focus groups provided detail on how first-

year students measured good reading, the focus groups also provided a look at what a poor reader in college might be. Interestingly, while skills were mentioned, poor reading- at least for the focus group- was more likely to be behavioral and contextual than linked to decoding skills. Participants were asked how an instructor could identify a poor reader and what an instructor could look for.

Jada: Someone that lacks the comprehension. Like you don't understand what you're reading, it's really just words.

Amari: I also think it's someone that doesn't want to take the initiative to understand what they're reading, they're just reading words and they pretend that they know what's going on, but they really don't.

Geneva: You call on them and they have no idea what's going on.

In these comments, one participant brought up the idea that a poor reader does not understand the reading, not because they cannot decode the words but rather because they lack the ability to understand them. In other words, they can read what the words say but cannot understand them in their context. This idea continued with two other participants agreeing that poor readers do not understand what is going on in the text. In answer to the same question with another group, Aaron made the point to say "I know words. I know the words in a dictionary. I know how to put them together. I know how to make sentences. I know what they mean together. But that doesn't mean I'm a great reader."

These examples point out the fact that the participants in the study do not view the ability to decode text as good enough for the college setting. College reading requires more than knowing the words, and like their definition of good reading, means that students can gain knowledge from what they read. Too, there is a behavioral component to the idea of poor

reading, where they judge students who do not know the material and instead pretend to know the material as poor readers, and not as poor students. This may make sense in light of the survey data, where most students rated themselves positively as readers: if students view poor readers as those who do not read the material and instead pretend to have read the material or who have not read the material and taken knowledge away from it, they may well believe that they are reading at college level if they tend to avoid these specific types of behaviors.

Vocabulary. Vocabulary questions were a small part of the survey and not included in the questions on the focus groups. The answers from the survey showed that students believe that they are able to manage new vocabulary and unfamiliar words. The answers from the survey however, did not demonstrate how important students think vocabulary is, in terms of success in college and beyond. Even though vocabulary was not an explicit part of the focus groups, participants brought up the topic on their own and believed that good reading required extensive vocabulary and the ability to manage unfamiliar words independently.

In the survey, questions on vocabulary were presented to see how participants approached unfamiliar words. The survey found that 77% of participants were confident in their ability to work with unfamiliar words. When asked to choose how they would manage unfamiliar words, many participants, 44%, said that they would look the word up, with another 28% choosing that they would work from context clues. Asking for help from faculty was rated lower, with 52% of students rating that as the least likely action for them, and only 13% choosing to ask as a first choice. Students were more likely to ask other students and friends for help though 43% of students placed asking friends and classmates as their least likely behavior. Overall though, the action that students rated the least likely overall was ignoring unfamiliar words.

The focus group data reinforced the ideas from the survey of how students manage unfamiliar words. Like the survey, most participants in the focus groups preferred to look up unfamiliar words on their own. Most participants were uncomfortable with asking for help with vocabulary and were concerned about how they would be judged or viewed if they asked their peers. In addition, they were unlikely to ask faculty for assistance unless they had a strong relationship and a natural opportunity to ask in the course of a class meeting.

During the focus groups, students tended to linger in discussion about vocabulary. Vocabulary, as part of reading and literacy, was brought up in each group without prompting. In fact, participants in the focus groups felt that a good vocabulary was essential for college reading, and having the skills to work with unfamiliar words was necessary for success in both college and careers. In one focus group, the conversation returned to vocabulary a number of times, first when talking about reading to stay informed. An example of a comment was when Amari said:

I definitely want to stay informed, but I don't have a problem with reading, because I feel like, I don't know sometimes I'll pick up on words that I don't know. Because personally, I'm not weird, but I have a notebook full of vocabulary words since I was in maybe the fifth grade. And then I would write down the word and definition, just memorize them, memorize them because I would use idioms when I'm speaking just in general just to make myself look smart.

He was aware of vocabulary and in fact, from an early age had found a way to manage and learn new words. As a college student, he is comfortable with reading, and gives credit to the vocabulary he has built and continued to build as a reader. Interestingly, Angel, another member in

the group, also keeps track of unfamiliar words. He has a notebook and during the focus groups, he wrote down a number of new words that he planned on learning afterwards.

The idea of vocabulary and career readiness was brought up again later in the conversation when Amari remarked:

Because I personally work in a professional medical field, and you cannot speak without, I don't know, a certain level of words. You have to speak at a higher level of words. People just look at you. I remember I said something out of line, it was like, "What did you just say?", it was slang, so that's why I try to. I read to stay informed, yeah.

Amari was very aware and mindful of vocabulary and how individuals are judged on the words they know (or do not know). He brought up an interaction where he used slang and was met with judgement. For him, reading and vocabulary are intertwined, in that reading to stay informed requires and encourages a more extensive vocabulary. Later in the discussion when talking about changes from high school and college, vocabulary was raised again as a topic when Mia said:

In college, vocabulary is so important. Like in high school, I could write a little paragraph, it doesn't even matter if I repeat myself thousands of times, they don't really care too much. But then when you get to college, it's like you want to use higher-level words, you want to not repeat yourself as much, you want to explain a lot more. I just feel like ... in high school writing and college writing are two different ballgames. Like when you come to college, you really have to have a higher vocabulary, better sentence structure

Mia brought up the fact that the vocabulary in high school was not enough to succeed in college and that as a new college students, they needed to build new skills and new vocabulary, in both speech and reading. Yet again later, when talking about how participants felt about themselves as readers, Jada brought up as vocabulary as something that affected her, saying:

Sometimes when you're reading, my experience when I'm reading something and I have no idea what some words mean, I can't even understand what is the paragraph about. For example, in the topic, I cannot even know what the whole paragraph if I don't understand what the topic is. Something like that.

Jada brought up an important element about reading, which is that the context matters and that having a working vocabulary means understanding the words in their context. Sometimes a word is recognizable and yet does not increase understanding when it is in an unfamiliar content. For her, knowing something about the topic before the reading helps her to read more effectively.

Towards the end of the focus group, the topic of vocabulary was brought up again, this time in terms of how participants read and interpreted text. In this discussion, participants spoke about how vocabulary helps them to understand if something is accurate or to be trusted. One participant captured this thought clearly, saying:

I also feel like vocabulary keys into how exaggerated something is. Like you can really sense the feelings of a story through its vocabulary. Like if it has strong vocabulary, like little words, big words, like that.

It became clear in the focus groups that vocabulary is a concern for college students. Participants were aware of the impact of vocabulary on learning. In addition, they appear to give thought to vocabulary and unfamiliar text, and some even have taken steps to manage unfamiliar vocabulary.

Stigma and readiness. One interesting outcome of the focus groups was that students believed that there was a stigma to being considered a bad reader and that readers may not actually be bad at all but may not have been ready for what they are reading. It appears that students believe that there is a readiness aspect to reading, and not everyone is ready to read the

materials, at the same level, at the same time. Participants pointed out that wanting to read something might not mean that you are ready to do so and that a person may not be ready developmentally, or even just ready in the moment. An example was a small discussion between students about the idea of readiness, developmentally and in the moment itself.

Aaron: Some people read things differently. Say, it's a novel. They might want to read it. Be hard to comprehend it. They think that they're a bad reader because they want to read it, but it's hard for them to read it.

Grace: As far as getting off-topic one time, I don't think that could make you a bad reader. You know what I'm saying? Because there's always going to be that time you're just sitting there like, "Hmm." Looking outside, looking at the window, just totally in your own zone. But that doesn't necessarily mean you're a bad reader. That just means you weren't ready at the time. You just didn't want to read. I don't really know.

Grace was acknowledging the idea that people learn at different paces and that behavior done once, like looking out a window, should not be used to judge if a person has mastered a skill. The conversation continued with Timothy bringing up the idea of stigma:

I think there's a whole stigma of what it is to be a good reader and what it is to be a bad reader. Instead of saying if you're a good reader or a bad reader, let's just say there are many different levels of reading. First, you have to know what the word is. You have to know how to sound it out. You have to know the meaning of the word, and everything like that. I would say that no one is necessarily a bad reader. If you can't read, that doesn't mean you're a bad reader. It just means that you're not on that level of getting ready to read. I wouldn't say that my little brother who is two years old is a bad reader. Because he can't read. It's just that he's not at that level yet where he can start to process and read. I

would say that the more that you have people around you who actually encourage you to do better and people who encourage you to go forth and read and who actually sit down, take the time out, and help you get to that goal, then you will become fluent. Fluent and you will be speaking eloquently or reading eloquently.

After the word eloquently was used by a participant, one participant stopped the discussion to ask what eloquent meant. The definition was given by the speaker, then reinterpreted by another member of the group when it appeared that not everyone was familiar with the word or understood the first definition. The tone of this interaction was positive, with the person who asked the definition looking comfortable and interested, instead of concerned or hesitant. This side discussion demonstrated a positive way of bringing in vocabulary instruction in an authentic, dialogic way and also showed the need for both faculty and students in the classroom communities to create an environment where authentic interaction can occur safely without fear or stigma of not knowing the vocabulary.

Final words about beliefs. Based on both the survey and focus groups, students have a positive mindset towards reading, and positive beliefs about themselves on entering college. They view reading as an activity that they are able to enjoy, at least in the right circumstances. They appear to be aware of the importance of reading and their feelings towards reading and themselves. Still, the generally positive nature of their beliefs is confusing given the evidence from research on college and career reading and the disconnect between testing and beliefs coupled with some of the focus group responses about disregarding test scores may provide a starting place for new college students who are not used to reflecting on their academic work.

Motivations for Reading

Both confidence in skills and beliefs affect reading, but the argument can be made that motivation is a key part of reading. Motivation is a dimension of the participants' reading lives and both the survey and focus group questions looked at what participants believed influenced their reading. In the survey, participants were asked questions with specific reading motivations. In the focus groups, participants had the opportunity to talk about what they read and why they chose to or declined to read. This section discusses factors that motivate students to read including the mindset that reading is important, the importance of reading as a social activity, the link between reading and personal reasons, pleasure, links to childhood and finally, reading for academic reward.

Reading is important. Throughout the study, participants universally felt that reading was important, even if they did not like it or feel particularly engaged or skillful. In fact, 78% of participants felt that reading well was important to them personally. When asked specifically if this belief motivated them to read, 63% of participants answered affirmatively. This does leave, however, 37% of the participants who do not find this motivational.

This general belief, that reading is important, was also present in the focus groups and was -for most- motivational. Much of the sense that reading was important came in discussions of college reading. The general feeling in each of the focus groups was that students believe that reading is important and will at least attempt to read because of this belief, even when they are less than interested or engaged with the material. The way that they discussed reading seemed to take for granted the idea that everyone realizes reading is important and that it is unavoidable in both personal and academic life. It was interesting to note that the focus groups tended to meet any probes about why reading was important by returning to talk about academics.

Participants were aware that they read continuously however, there were disagreements amongst the group members about social and internet browsing as reading. While most acknowledged reading as a skill, many returned to the idea that reading was a serious, intentional action. This idea was present in a comment in group 2, where a Kayla answered the question what do you like to read with what they like but try not to read, saying:

I mean, I try not to read about celebrities. I try to block as many celebrities as I can, just because I know, like if I see it, I will want to read it, but so ... I try to like just stay away from that and I'll read more, like news articles or like controversial topics"

It was clear that this participant felt that what she wanted to read was not a valid form of reading and that she believed she needed to read more serious things. A member of group 1, Aaron, was more direct when this question was asked. He told the group that he chose not to read. When challenged by other members of the group about social media and internet browsing, he acknowledged that he reads those materials but that he did not consider them reading, saying "I'll read stuff like that, but that's not reading". Comments like these from participants indicate that young adults may not define the reading they do as part of their daily lives as legitimate reading. In further conversation, members of the group discussed the term reading as both a skill they use in everyday life and specific to reading books or serious materials which were often academic. There was a general sense among the participants that the term reading belongs to books and serious materials and that social media and internet browsing was not what they considered reading, even as they acknowledged that those texts use reading skills.

In addition to questioning social media and internet browsing as reading, the content of social media and internet browsing was a concern to many students, across all three groups. In group 1, participants discussed the types of things they would choose to read online. Even

though they said they wanted to read these things, they were clearly concerned about the value- or lack of value- of what they considered entertaining. Interestingly, the critical judgment of worth did not stop them from reading those items, but may have left them feeling bad about their reading habits. A brief discussion among group 2 discussed this issue.

Adrianna: Well, I'll say when I read for fun, it's got to be really interesting, but mostly I read articles from Instagram, like the Kardashians and what's going on and I'll sit there and click on it and actually read the whole article, but now I think back, like 20 minutes later, like dang, I really wasted 10 minutes when I was looking at the Kardashians. I didn't really mean to do that. I didn't need that.

Kayla: I mean, I try not to read about celebrities. I try to block as many celebrities as I can, just because I know, like if I see it, I will want to read it, but so ... I try to like just stay away from that and I'll read more, like news articles or like controversial topics.

I stepped out of the role of moderator temporarily in this discussion because of how judgmental the group were towards themselves about reading popular online websites, like BuzzFeed which is a website that has a number of different types of information on it. Even with a faculty member telling them that it was ok to read about these topics, they disagreed. At one point, I stated that they can read that type of material and was answered with participants arguing saying “no” and “No, it’s not okay”. Throughout this exchange, the group nodded affirmatively when each other spoke. My standing as a faculty member was not enough to convince them that it was acceptable to read everything. Still, the critical view they took of the types of readings they wanted to do did not always prevent them from reading it. There was evidence that students did read socially and on the internet for fun, even as they judged themselves for it.

Freya: I think when I read, article wise, it's some ... I don't know how to describe it, but you know how when you're like up at night and you start pondering questions about the world, like, how deep actually is the ocean or something like that. I'll read articles like that kind of have like those deeper ... yeah. There's so many nights I was on buzzfeed and there are so many useless articles I read and I'm like ... useless facts I know now because of late night readings.

Kayla: I stay away from buzzfeed. I feel like sometimes they have like propaganda on there, like they are trying to push an agenda or they're trying too hard to appeal to millennials or something like that.

Freya: That's true, yeah.

Adrianna: That's true. Like, take this test and see what type of avocado you are.

Freya: Yeah.

Adrianna: But, I'll take the test.

Freya: You take the test.

No one really needed to know what type of avocado they are and in fact, this may have been something that the participant made up as a joke, and yet in some ways, this example of a possible online quiz may provide a window into what happens with online reading, for the participants in this group. The discussion continued with participants talking about what they enjoyed reading online. Interestingly, reading sports and news was popular and not judged in the same way as reading other types of social media and internet sources. In talking about readings about celebrities and online quizzes, there was a clear sense that this type of reading was not real reading, nor should they enjoy it. If anything, there was an aspect of shame and guilty pleasure in

that type of reading which might be part of why they continue to read these things and do not consider them legitimate reading.

It is possible, and maybe even likely, that students in college consider reading to be attached to content in the classroom more so than a skill that they use consistently in their every day lives. If so, this could explain research on reading that was done over the years which indicated young adults were not reading. If college students only think of reading in terms of working with difficult or assigned materials, read with intention for grading purposes, it is likely that they disregard the amount of reading that they do for pleasure and for day to day life.

The conversation continued with the group discussing the fact that being college educated means reading extensively. The final comment in the group ended with Amari stating that reading is “everywhere, yeah. Signs, food, like everything” which was affirmed by other members of the group. This very general language though points to the fact that while the importance of reading may be a strong belief, participants may not be considering how it influences their lives and actions. They are aware that reading is important, but as literate adults, it is likely that they have internalized the idea and do not spend time reflecting on what life is like without reading skills, except in the one context where their reading skills can be an issue—the college classroom.

The focus groups tended to meet any probes about why reading was important by returning to talk about academics. Even so, one of the final exchanges in group 1 stated their views of reading clearly, saying:

Jada: Read everything.

Geneva: It's fundamental.

Amari: It's essential, yeah.

In many ways, these words echoed the messages these participants most likely received as children. That said, looking at the rest of the discussion and the fact that independent reading is critical for college success, these words are true and may be the core message that all students need to hear- that reading is not just a skill learned as children but remains important throughout life.

Reading is social. Social reading, which is done to interact with others and because of interaction with others, was motivational for many participants.

As part of the survey, four questions addressed the idea of social reading. Many participants, 71%, were motivated to read by a desire to stay informed about the world and events around them. Reading was also motivated by a desire to participate socially in discussions with other people for 71% of the participants. Social media use motivated reading, with 60% of participants feeling that read because they saw links on social media, from friends, advertisers, or others. Interestingly, only 51% of participants were motivated by direct personal recommendations, which seems to suggest that seeing items on social media was viewed as more motivational than the recommendations of others that they know.

The idea of reading being social and motivated by social reasons was also clear in the focus groups. In a discussion of reading versus writing, the first focus group veered into talking about group discussions.

Elijah: Yeah. I'm a big fan of discussions. I like knowing what other people see and what other people interpret.

Moderator: Do you like talking about reading or writing about reading more?

Grace: Talking!

Elijah: Talking! Talking.

Grace: Talking.

Aaron: Doesn't matter.

Timothy: Talking.

The group, in general, found that discussion with others was a way of thinking. For most, discussion was easier for them to generate ideas, think more deeply about the content, and focus their thoughts. The conversation continued.

Grace: I usually like talking about it more, not that I don't like writing, but when it's ... I like writing, but I don't like writing that much when it's about analyzing something. I'd rather talk about it than write a paper about ... And you get more in depth.

Jenisse: Yeah, and you get really passionate about it.

Elijah: Exactly.

Grace: You lose some of it. You lose some of it while typing.

Elijah: You're restricted to it. It's like you'll have this one train of thought on paper, when you're typing on paper. Then, all of a sudden, you're trying to. You're like, "Wait, hold on a second. This doesn't fit grammatically. The whole structure doesn't go together."

Aaron: Yeah.

Grace: Yeah, it's not flowing.

Elijah: Exactly.

Grace: When you're talking, people-

Elijah: Can understand.

Grace: decipher, you know? I used to take philosophy, and we had those conversations, and we'll get so into it. And then, I'm like-

Timothy: "How do I write this?"

Grace: "Oh, wait. What did we just say? What am I writing?" We knew what we said, but to put it down on paper was like, "How? What?" It's just annoying.

Aaron: Because like, what she said. You can say stuff and get passionate about it, and then lose yourself in your passion. And where is it coming out? Especially if you're talking with somebody, and you guys just going, bouncing off each other. It's really good, but then, when you try to recap it, and ... "Uh, what did I say? Let me try and put that down on paper." It's not the same, you know? You got that energy in that room with whoever you're talking to, whomever.

The participants in this discussion were talking about the emotion and energy that an authentic, active conversation can generate. They found that talking with others tended to help them think, as they built on each other's ideas.

During this exchange, all participants were engaged and involved. The body language was active, with participants looking at each other, gesturing, and even speaking over each other and picking up from each other's words. It seemed clear that for this group, discussions about reading were a key part of thinking and understanding texts. The enthusiasm during the exchange made it clear that this was not a new thought for any of the participants and in fact, discussion about discussing readings was something they were interested in and had spent time considering. That said, it was also clear that the participants struggled in writing down the ideas they generated in discussions, and that finding a way to capture the in-the-moment energy could be an opportunity for literacy instruction at the college level. Based on this small discussion, it seems like students would be receptive to changes in group discussion that could support independent writing.

The second group brought the idea of group discussion in multiple parts of the focus group meeting. For instance, in talking about reading in general and what they prefer, Freya said:

I think class discussion is really nice. Most of my professors already talk a lot. It is usually very interactive, it's not like a lecture, but I think ... I've heard other students complaining about being bored in class and because they are not participating, they are not able to absorb anything in that class, so I think it's really important for professors to find a way to get the students talking.

During the conversation, Adrianna brought up prior experiences with class readings, and said:

I remembered high school and a little bit of college, we would read a passage, like for homework or something or we would read it in class in ... whenever we came in the next day, it was more engaging for me when we were like in a discussion, like, reviewing a chapter because someone will say something like, oh, didn't think about that when I was reading, so it's kind of helpful when there's other people discussing the reading, kind of refreshing it.

Both of these statements show that reading and discussing readings with other students, in the classroom environment is important and valuable to students, in helping students to feel comfortable and engaged and to increase their understanding. The second participant brought up the idea that reading alone is not as powerful as reading and then working through material in a group where you are exposed to other people's analysis and point of view.

A brief discussion between the participants in the second focus group touched on reading as a social activity as well. When asked if students wanted instructors to tell them what readings meant, participants responded with a preference for problem-solving on their own, with backup from the instructor.

Adrianna: If I'm really stuck, I'll ask the professor, but I kind of like problem solving myself.

Kayla: Yeah.

Josh: I find that it's a little bit of both because I mean, sometimes you would want the professor to say it, but I also think that it sticks more when your peers say things sometimes when you're like in a group discussions and they're like, the teacher could build off of things and explain it a little bit more.

Freya: I ... I think it's both for me too. Like, sometimes, like, it just ... I just, it doesn't come to me at all and I appreciate when professors tell me about it because I still learn when they tell me, like, straight up like what it means. But, like other times, I understand why it would be better if I figure out on my own, but I don't think it makes a huge difference.

Kayla: Definitely because if I'm just sitting in a classroom ... listening to somebody tell me something versus having a discussion with a group and like get the thoughts flowing, I would have...[a] better time in that than the other one because it's getting me engaged in what I'm reading and making me think more about it and how it relates to my life.

In this conversation, the participants shared some of their experiences and also what they feel good about in a learning situation. While they want the instructor to be there to support them and ensure that they are correct in what they take away, these participants wanted to do the analytical and critical work themselves, as a group with other students. They felt that working with peers increased engagement and interest, exposed them to new ideas and views, and helped them to learn the material deeply, instead of walking away with a series of facts unrelated to their lives and experiences.

Participants in the focus group also spoke about motivation related to links from social media and internet browsing and recommendation from others. Participants were particularly clear about talking about being told to read, equating it in some ways to chores. For instance, group 1 had a small discussion about reading that covered both coming across links versus being asked/suggested/told to read. One comment from this discussion, from Grace, was:

If I go online and I see this article. I saw one the other day about birth control for men, and I was waiting. And I literally read the whole article. And I'm sitting here like, "If school said, "Read this article on what they're trying to do. How they're trying to ... medicine and stuff." I would've been like, "No."

Grace was speaking about the idea that agency is important in reading and that finding readings and becoming curious were a powerful motivator to sustain reading. At this point, I asked the group what happened when a professor assigns articles. The group then discussed how motivation changes when readings are assigned, especially with strict requirements. In these comments, I had asked if students would read texts that I assigned. While students agreed they would likely attempt to read an assigned text, motivation would change.

Grace: Not even not read it, but you don't want. You know? When there's pressure, you're like

Aaron: It is. It's different.

Grace: Yeah.

Elijah: It is.

Grace: You can't fully enjoy it.

Elijah: I don't know how it's for anybody else. When your parents tell you to wash the dishes-

Grace: And you're like, "I was planning on doing that!"

Elijah: Exactly. Now, it's not fun anymore!

Grace: Or when they say, "Go clean your room." I'm cleaning my room and now you stop. And then you stop.

Elijah: I'm folding my clothes!

Grace: I don't need you to tell me when to clean my room. If you gave us the book and said, "Okay." I feel like if you say, "It has to be finished by this time," I think it would be easier to pick it up. You could read it all at once, and then we could go back and fully discuss and then catch onto details. I feel like that would be more comfortable because we have our own time to do it. We know when it's the end of it. It's just better when you just read it, and then go back and find those little ... You're like, "Oh, I didn't know that happened!" And it's just ... cute.

Group 1 was especially engaged in the focus group process and tended to gesture, make eye contact, and pick up on each other's sentences and thoughts. The discussion began with Grace introducing a time when she read more than she expected because the link showed up while internet browsing. Quickly though, the group picked up the conversation and moved from finding a reading through browsing to being assigned readings. They equated assigned readings to chores, describing how being told to do something limits their motivation and may even stop them from doing something they were enjoying.

One of the important aspects of this small discussion was that students are aware that they become passive or even resistant when they feel that their reading and work is being micromanaged. There seems to be a desire for agency, for the ability to have control over some

of the reading content, time, or schedule. Too, in discussing time, participants expressed an idea that not only do they want to be in control of their time, they want more time to read.

For the participants in the study, there is clearly a social component to their motivation for reading. They are motivated by and want social engagement with reading. The results of the survey were consistent with the discussions in the focus groups which lent depth to understanding what students find motivating. If, as indicated by both the survey and focus group results, students want to discuss readings, and find the critical and analytical work engaging when done in a group, this has implications for teaching at the college level in all disciplines. In fact, to some extent it supports other literature which talks about the need for college instruction to change from passive to active, placing more responsibility and control in the hands of the students themselves.

Reading is personal and personally beneficial. For many participants, reading was a personal activity, that affected how they viewed themselves and interacted with the world around them. Too, participants were most likely to read when they were interested in the topic and had agency with what they read.

Many of the participants were motivated by the belief that reading was good for them. The belief that reading made them smarter was motivational for 76% of the participants. The majority, 65%, of participants were motivated to read by the belief that reading makes them more interesting, to themselves and other people. For some, 67%, reading was motivated by the desire to better understand themselves and others, and 70% read because they are curious about themselves, others, and the world they live in.

In the focus groups, similar themes were observed. As mentioned in the beliefs section, participants in the focus group brought up vocabulary several times. For many of the

participants, gaining vocabulary in college was linked to personal esteem reasons and for future and career goals. For instance, Freya stated:

It's very important for communication, like you should know, like the words that you're typing and what it means, like if it has any negative connotations or anything like and you should know, like, you should be able to read other people's opinions even if they are not able to explain it correctly, so like, if ... even if they are having a hard time, like trying to gather the right words to use it, you can kind of infer what they mean.

In this comment, Freya was discussing the idea that having an extensive vocabulary helps individuals to understand what others are saying and ensuring that communication is effective even if the speaker or writer uses words that are unfamiliar or incorrect. This idea, that vocabulary is necessary for social interaction is an important motivator. Another Amari, in group 3, discussed how using incorrect words or words that are out of place could be an issue when working with others, stating:

I personally work in a professional medical field, and you cannot speak without, I don't know, a certain level of words. You have to speak at a higher level of words. People just look at you.

His last words in the discussion were “Words definitely matter”. In both of these quotes, it is clear that vocabulary is linked to motivation. These students wanted to possess an extensive vocabulary to enable others and feel more capable and intelligent. There is also an element of wanting others to respect them, and students link the ability to understand and use words correctly to this respect.

This was not consistent for all participants though, as unfamiliar words can also work to demotivate students, as evidenced by a comment from Freya who, when asked about unfamiliar vocabulary, said:

I think sometimes... for me, personally, I feel like I can because sometimes, depending on what I'm reading, like whether it's an article or a blog or whatever it is, sometimes they'll have a certain word choice and some of the words are like more sophisticated and I think that sort of sometimes stops me from reading because if I, like, every five seconds have to go on dictionary.com and figure out what's this word mean, what's that word mean? I am not more engaged in it.

Freya explained that encountering unfamiliar words could act as a demotivator, because either she did not understand the material or had to stop reading in order to check the meaning of the words. Either way, she was not immersed in the reading and unable to think deeply or critically about what she had read as her focus was on the words, not on the meaning of the text.

Vocabulary was a recurring theme during the focus groups, with a number of participants returning to the topic in various ways. For some, the desire to gain vocabulary was a motivator and linked to their personal and career goals. For others though, unfamiliar words became a challenge and managing the unfamiliar vocabulary distracted them from reading, leading to lower motivation. Given that vocabulary is important and participants are interested in new words instructors should pay attention to how vocabulary is presented and used in order to manage the motivation and avoid demotivation by helping them to focus on the meaning instead of the individual words.

Reading for pleasure. Reading for pleasure was another motivation that was explored during the study. In the survey, one question addressed this idea, with 64% of participants saying

that they were motivated to read by the sense of pleasure and interest felt when reading. Participants were more likely to be motivated to read when they were interested in the topic. Interest though could come from many places- including prior interest and enthusiasm from others in their classes, especially from the instructor. Participants were also motivated to read when they had agency and choice in the readings. As they discussed reading for pleasure, participants in all groups brought up memories of reading from childhood and elementary or middle school, reminiscing about the reader they were when they were young.

Participants tended to be motivated to read when they were already interested in the topic. Each participant, regardless of their overall stance on reading, had topics that they were interested in. For instance, one student, Aaron, who said that they did not like to read, did – when pushed by the group- acknowledge that he enjoyed reading social media and sports. Jada, a participant who avoided reading, said, “I just prefer not to read, but if I do read, it's articles or how to get my skin better or something like that.” The role of interest in the reading was clear in an exchange in group 3 where one participant who liked reading in general, brought up an academic reading:

Mia: It's kind of like in World Lit right now, we're supposed to be reading 'The Odyssey' and I don't like it and I don't understand any of it. So it drags, it makes me not even like the class. But if I go home and I want to find out the best face mask, I will read articles, and articles, and articles, and articles with no problem.

Jada: And before you even look, you're just like, "Dang I just read ten articles! Wow that was fast!"

Mia: But I can't get through a page of 'The Odyssey'.

Amari: It's like when you like something, you have more like ...

Jada: Yep.

Mia: Yeah.

Jada: You're just passionate about it, you're like, "I wouldn't mind reading this book because it's something that I'm interested in. I'm curious. Like I want to know".

Geneva: It's curiosity for me definitely.

Mia: Yep.

Jada: Yeah.

Geneva: Like I was saying, I want to get to the end of ... like if I enjoy the book, I want to get to the end. I want to know what happens at the end, I'm at the edge of my seat, so.

This discussion provided insight into how having a connection to material, for instance face masks or books that they are curious about, increase motivation to read. When these participants read about topics that interested in them, they were likely to lose track of time and continue to read. Conversely, when they did not have an interest or connection to the readings, they were less likely to read them and more likely to avoid them.

When instructors are enthusiastic about classes in general, students in the focus group were more likely to be motivated to complete coursework including reading. Group 2 mentioned how an instructor's interest affected them as learners in a discussion about class readings. At this point in the discussion, they were discussing why they would shut down or disconnect from the class and content.

Adrianna: Yeah, I'll shut down. Like, I've done that in class, so if I didn't like the way the professor was teaching or the way they were like, yeah, mostly the way the professor was teaching. I will shut down and I don't want to do this and I know it's bad and I know I shouldn't do that, but in the back of my head, it's like, I really don't want to do this. I

really don't like this class. Why am I here? Is this really important? And I'll be like, I'll just leave, mentally, like as a student, I'll just leave.

Kayla: The professors attitude is definitely a big part of the class. Like, if I think the professor's not interested, then like, that just makes me think, why should I be interested?

Moderator: Will you read if a professor seems enthusiastic about what they are reading?

Kayla: Yes.

Josh: Definitely.

Adrianna: Yeah because I will want to talk to the professor about it as well.

The discussion continued after this, with participants talking about how discussion and social interaction about the content of the course motivated them to read and then engage in the class itself. In this discussion, participants explained how important a professor is in the classroom and that a professor has the ability to make class content important or unimportant. They were clear about the role of the professor and their attitude towards motivation, including the ability that college faculty have in lowering motivation.

The focus group discussions demonstrated that the instructor of a course has significant influence on a student's motivation for reading and learning in general. Instructors of a course influences motivation and has the ability- for many students- to motivate or demotivate them. Having an instructor who is interested in what they are teaching (and who they are teaching) was a motivating factor but when students did not have an engaged instructor, they were likely to completely disengage from learning and even question the value of the class, as mentioned by Adrianna when she said that she would mentally leave or Amari who acknowledged that he might leave class early.

Participants were also likely to be motivated to read when they had agency in terms of the content or type of material they were working with. Freya was a participant who was open about this, and said:

Being told how to do something, like, they like having options because as I said, we all read differently and obtain information differently, so I really hate it when a professor tries to teach me something in only one certain way. Like, I like it when they give me options.

By making this comment, the participant was sharing the fact that she was aware that each person has their own way of learning information and that respecting and preparing for this can be helpful and motivational. Good teaching is more than presenting information in a single way and instead focused on the learner's ability to process it. Underlying the words in this comment is the idea that she, as a young adult in a college classroom, is aware of how she learns and wants to have a say in how the course is presented and what materials she reads. Throughout all three discussion groups, participants were consistent and in sharing that they were most motivated to learn when they had a choice or say in the materials used and when the instructor gave them choices and control of how they would learn information.

Memories from childhood. One idea that emerged in the focus group was that that participants were very aware of their reading lives as children. During the focus groups, participants tended to bring up childhood memories. Many of these memories focused on readings from when they were younger, along with reminiscing about enjoying reading as young readers. Group 2 had an extended conversation about this in the context of what they enjoy reading now. Instead of answering directly, participants brought up memories from childhood. One participant, Adrianna, answered a question about what she enjoys reading by saying:

I think I go through like weird reading binges, like, I remember reading until all night when I was like in 5th grade and then stopped reading for a while and then picked up the dork diaries, stopped reading for a while. Picked up a whole series of Maximum Ride and I just binged and I just stop for a bit.

In addition to mentioning fifth grade, Adrianna also brought up two different series of books popular in elementary and middle school. Shortly after, while discussing what they read now, Freya mentioned elementary school and then moved quickly to what she reads now stating

I stopped reading books, like, I think in elementary school, I was like a very active reader because our teacher would have their own like book shelf and I would just pick out books from there, but as I grew older, I just like being on my phone and reading articles, so I'll go on Reddit or something and go on different subreddits to find out anything that is political because I'm very interested in politics or anything that is controversial or something that will just challenge me or challenge the way I think.

In this statement that she was motivated by reading as a child, by the teacher's books but as she progressed through school, that she began reading online instead. Another participant, Josh, when answering a question about reading now, redirected the conversation to a time he associates with reading for enjoyment- for him, elementary school. At one point, he said

I feel like, back in elementary school, I used to binge read, but like that was more like diary of a wimpy kid and captain underpants, I don't know why I loved that, but that was one of my favorite books and then like, now, it's like, I don't really read as much

These participants clearly remember enjoying reading, recalling their ages, environments, and specific books or series that they link to these memories. The language they used when talking about reading as children was affectionate and nostalgic, and works like active, love, binge, and

favorites. There was a motivational aspect to reading for pleasure as children, at least for these participants, which for some disappeared over time. In listening to the conversation and watching the body language, there was a sense of sadness with the nostalgia, where they remembered a time where reading was enjoyable, and they were likely unaware of the work and learning inherent in language instruction for children.

These are examples of redirection by participants who were asked about reading for pleasure today. There are two things worth noting in these redirections. First, that reading for many students was associated with enjoyment as children and that they were able to quickly recall favorite books and the environment they read in. The second is that participants are aware of their reading past and can, with reflection, reconnect to the younger reader they were, which can be used to develop a better understanding of their current reading lives.

Binge reading, which was brought by a number of participants, is also an interesting phenomenon. Young adults are often familiar with the term binge-watching as it related to television and video. For most, binge-watching is an activity where a person consumes a significant amount of television at one time, often working through an entire season of a television show in a condensed amount of time. Inherent in the idea of binge-watching is immersion and engagement, where other concerns and responsibilities are ignored or at least pushed aside during the process. The idea of binge reading, or consuming large amounts of text for pleasure over a condensed amount of time, is an interesting one. Given that students in the groups brought up the idea of binge reading, using that term is intriguing. Even the fact that they would bring up this idea of binge reading demonstrates a desire to read- and not just short reading, but sustained reading done to disconnect from the world around them and immerse themselves in the world within their books.

Of course, not all students shared this desire. As discussed earlier, there were participants who viewed reading formally, for instance books and serious readings, and did not read for pleasure. Even so, these participants did have types of readings they enjoyed which were often accessed through social media, news, and through internet browsing and many of these participants followed similar patterns in terms of immersing themselves in reading to the extent of losing track of time. It may be worth noting that no one in the discussion groups discussed binge reading course or academic materials, and that the idea of binge reading was limited to items they chose freely and were highly personal to them.

Reading for grades. For college students, independent reading makes up a large amount of the work for classes. A great majority, 84%, of participants in the study were motivated to read in order to do well in classes.

This idea was present in the focus groups as well. Participants in the focus groups tended to bring each conversation back to the classroom- including prior experience, for instance high school and middle school, as well as their college classes. From the discussion it appears that students spend a significant amount of time thinking about classes and the work assigned. Reading is no different, and in fact, the focus group participants were clear about how the classroom expectations affected reading. For instance, Timothy who viewed himself as a strong reader, immediately diverted from the topic of what good reading looks like to the idea of the classroom and grades. He brought up the fact that he could do well without meeting his own definition of good reading, and that he could read well enough to get the grade he wanted, stating

In that class, she asks us to read the text, and she asks us to analyze it. And the thing is, when it comes down for us to respond to the question that she has, I can easily just skim the text and answer all the questions before anybody else can.

Even though the discussion was about reading in general, it was clear that participants were thinking about grades when asked about reading. Participants in group 2 and 3 did the same, moving the conversation about what good reading looked like to the topic of educational experience and grades. It was clear from these moves that while they are aware of reading as separate from grades and classes, the idea of class expectations and grades were important to them, and constantly in their awareness. Given that the focus groups took place on a college campus, it is not surprising that they would think about college during the focus group, but it was surprising how often these participants returned to early education experiences, citing examples from elementary, middle, and high school throughout the focus group meetings.

In addition to the idea of reading being linked to classroom success, participants in the focus group 3 brought up the idea that in order to be successful, they needed to change their reading strategies to complete work. It is important to note that the strategies students discussed may work for earning a grade, without actually meeting the student's definitions of what good readers and reading is. Instead, these strategies and actions focus on the outcomes only, possibly without the experience and development that instructors may have expected. The motivation of reading for grades could lead to a "gaming" of the process, looking for specific details while ignoring the context and larger issues that the text discusses.

In fact, the idea of focusing on small content items was something that students in the focus groups felt caused them to lose motivation. In a discussion in group 2, participants talked about their frustration with what they considered unnecessary details. One participant, Freya, stated "sometimes I read it and I read it so many times and I have no idea what detail they're searching for. I'm just like ... it's like what color was she wearing? I'm just like, why would I retain that information?". Adrianna chimed in quickly saying "Why was that part important? I

don't understand". Later in the conversation, Kayla spoke about tests, saying "I think it should be more open-ended questions. More than like what color was their shoelace? More open ended."

The focus on small details seemed frustrating to students who were not sure if they missed specific details and did not understand why those specific details were important. This type of focus- on details instead of learning- seemed to demotivate participants, leading them to feel less engaged and confident, and as time went on, to care less about reading and more about satisfying a requirement for a grade.

Students in group 3 were not only concerned about grades but exquisitely aware of the importance of doing well in college. In some ways, this knowledge made them both motivated to do well and unmotivated in the sense that the anxiety resulting from their awareness often left them feeling helpless and overwhelmed.

Participants throughout the focus spoke about anxiety both explicitly, and as part of other discussions. They disclosed how anxious they are about the future and how serious they take it. They also explained that the constant reminder that grades and college are important served, not as a motivator, but as a stressor that increased anxiety.

In a discussion about prior experience, group 3 discussed the changes between expectations in high school and college. It became clear that motivation for reading and learning was heavily driven in college by grades, not just in the moment, but linked to their goals for the future. One group member, Mia, brought up the idea that high school teachers may need to demand more from students, saying

Maybe I would be where I'm supposed to be if he wasn't like, "Meh, it's okay. Maybe she'll get it next time". Like no, I need to get it right now. I need to get it right now. Tell

me I'm wrong, don't worry about my feelings and all of that, because at the end of the day, it's my future that's at stake.

In this statement, you can hear the worry and frustration of a first-year student who is learning that the skills and habits from high school do not match the expectations and structure of a college environment. You can also hear the stress and fear that this she- and other students- felt about the future. Mia was extremely aware that education was critical for their future, and while she felt she was prepared for college, the more it was discussed, the more stress and anxiety were revealed. The conversation continued and the topic of worry about the future was raised. When asked about worrying about the future, the group responded strongly.

Mia: I do.

Amari: Absolutely. Every day.

Moderator: Every day?

Amari: All day.

Moderator: All day?

Amari: Yeah.

Geneva: All day.

Throughout this brief exchange, the group was nodding and making affirmative noises. The group acknowledged feeling stressed and anxious every day. The conversation continued with participants talking about their inner dialogue.

Jada: I think about it, but it kind of scares me, so I go with the flow I think.

Amari: I get headaches. That's how much I think about it. Because I want to live my best life, I want to achieve it, but I'm thinking about obstacles that can get in the way of it and I'm just thinking, "What if I can't?". Like you have doubts, and you doubt yourself

sometimes. Like my doubt was "Oh my God maybe I can't do it, maybe I'll go for a lesser field". And then at times I'm like, "You know what? Let me do it, let me do it".

Jada: Yeah.

Amari: It's a constant fight with me, it's so crazy. And you're competing with other people for different programs. When I apply to programs, I'm thinking "Oh my God, maybe I don't fit into this program, maybe I won't get in" and it's just doubt, and doubt, and doubt.

Participants in this group admitted to worrying frequently. Some of them have an inner dialogue which makes them feel less capable and confident. Fears for these students focused on failing at school and career, and not meeting the expectations they have for themselves and others have for them. There was also a feeling that college instructors, parents, and other adults in their lives either were unaware or did not take this seriously.

Amari: I just feel like that, I don't know elders just in general, grown-ups, elder people, they shouldn't kind of stereotype us and say, "Oh you guys have it easy", or "You guys are coasting by", no I'm working my butt off.

Geneva: "When I was young ..."

Amari: Exactly, "When I was young", it's a different time. It's a different generation.

Geneva: Very different.

Amari: They just stereotype everyone like, "Okay you guys are the wild kids. You guys have no goals set for yourself", I'm like, I don't know about everyone else, but I for sure do have goals set for myself. So just a stereotype thing.

These participants felt that their instructors and other adults in their lives were unaware of the pressure they live under. They were also very clear that they do have goals for themselves and

that their futures weight heavily on them in the present. Jada mentioned that she had not yet declared a major and was not sure of what she should study.

I think it scares me. Like, I'm undecided, and it's like when you tell someone you're undecided, the first question is like, "Well what are your hobbies? What do you like to do?", and it's "I don't know yet", at least. And that is so scary. Especially when people around me know exactly what they want. They know what they have to get to. Like their future, they have it set and they're even worried about the obstacles, they get in the way of it. And then it's like, you have no idea what your future looks like right now or how you want it to go, or the direction you want it to go. But I know I want a future.

Not having a clear sense of how to move through college is stressful for students, and Jada was able to articulate this. It was not only a fear of her own, but also the judgement of other, and comparison to others that caused her stress and anxiety. During the same discssuion, Geneva followed up on, bringing money into the discussion, saying

College is like ... okay so you're growing up, you're figuring out yourself, you're figuring out what you want to do. But it's like you're limited because this is money we're talking about. College is not free, so if you want to change your major, that's more money, you'll be in school longer. Things like that, so it's quite difficult.

There is a high cost of failing a class, of being undecided or even changing your mind, both monetarily and personally. These students were aware of these costs, which lowered their motivation even as it increased their worry and anxiety. The concerns and worries about money, time, and decision-making affected the ability to learn for these participants and to read effectively. The pressure they felt, from themselves and others, added to demotivation. When asked if they feel pressure, the result was universally yes, that they did. In addition to every

member of the group stating yes and nodding, Amari added “Self-pressure, family pressure, societal pressure. Everything.”

For group 3, this pressure affected reading, in terms of quality, engagement, and experience. One member volunteered the statement:

Geneva: Well with outside pressure I guess, in terms of reading, it's like ... more specifically in classes. So you have this pressure like you need to get an A in this class, you need to do well in this class. So it's like your pressure to focus on this reading, and even if you don't like it, you have to focus on this reading so you can get this good grade. So yeah. But if you don't like it, you're not going to enjoy it at all and you're going to have a really hard time. It's going to be in the back of your mind all day, every day.

This was followed up by another member who explained how the pressure makes reading less effective, by limiting their ability to engage with the text.

Amari: Yeah, pressure definitely gets to me, because when you have that in the back of your head ... if I'm reading something and I have something like that in my head, I'm reading it, but I'm not picking up any context clues, no, nothing. I'm not comprehending anything because that is still in the back of my head.

In this comment, the participant is aware that when he reads under pressure, he is not reading critically and using his skills. He can go through the motions of looking at text on the page but that he is not connecting to the text and is not able to gain skills or knowledge from reading this way. Throughout this discussion, participants in the group reacted by nodding and murmuring “uh huh” and making other sounds that affirmed what they were hearing. These two excerpts show the extent to which participants recognize that pressure and the resulting anxiety affects their ability to read efficiently and effectively. They are aware that they are not reading

the way that they expect from what they consider good readers, and instead are doing what they can in the hopes of earning a passing grade with the goal of learning what they need as a secondary, or tertiary goal.

Habits and Preferences

The final dimension of a personal reading life, as defined in this study, was students' reading habits and preferences. Understanding what participants wanted and valued, and how they approached reading tasks was an important part of extending our knowledge of college student reading. As part of the study, participants were asked about their habits and preferences, in both format and content. A series of questions on the survey addressed these questions directly, and there was room in the focus group discussions for participants to talk about what they prefer and how they work with informational sources.

What they prefer. In the survey, participants were asked questions that looked at what they preferred in terms of the format. When given a choice of books and articles in both print or electronic format, audio only, or audio/visual (video), participants rated video as their preferred source of information. This was followed, though not closely, by electronic articles, and then print books. When the question was asked only about reading, and participants were given a choice of learning from a single book, multiple short articles, or a combination, the majority, 58%, preferred to learn from the combination of short articles and a book. More participants, 26% preferred short articles alone, and only 16% preferred a single book alone.

Participants in the survey were split on the type of content they prefer. When given the choice of informative text (how things work), practical text (how to do things), and stories (how things happened), participants were least likely to choose practical texts (19%). Participants rated stories (41%) and informational text (40%) as their preference.

How they acquire information. A section of the survey asked about what participants were thinking about and focusing on while acquiring information. Participants in the survey were slightly more likely to focus on facts and details (55% of participants) when acquiring information versus focusing on thoughts and feelings in the source (45%). A slight majority of participants were more likely to focus on the usefulness of what they were learning (55%) while reading or watching and listening to audio or video, though many (45%) were more likely to think about what they already knew about the topic. Many (50%) of participants were most likely to remember information and details from sources, and less likely to how they felt (31%) or thoughts and feelings in the source (19%).

What they do while acquiring information. Participants in the survey were asked about a series of actions that they could take when working with information sources including print materials, electronic materials (those read on a device like a laptop, tablet, or phone), and audio/video materials. These eight specific skills are linked to college-level reading.

Table 5, below, compares the percentage of participants reporting the use of each skills by type of information source. Overall, the numbers are quite close or the same.

<u>Skill</u>	<u>Reading print</u>	<u>Reading electronic</u>	<u>Audio/video</u>
Previewing	37%	40%	23%
Thinking of questions	38%	40%	22%
Predicting	37%	40%	23%
Reviewing	38%	40%	23%
Pause and reflect	37%	40%	23%
Context	37%	40%	23%
Analysis of the text and wording	37%	40%	23%
Synthesis with existing knowledge and other sources	37%	40%	23%

As mentioned earlier, participants preferred to read long texts in print, and shorter readings, like articles, electronically. Participants reported using critical skills at the same, or similar, rates for both print and electronic materials. While participants tended to choose audio/visual materials as their preferred format for information, they also reported using the least amount of critical skills when watching these formats. Only 23% of participants reported using critical skills such as previewing, questioning, prediction while watching video. In addition, they tended not to re-listen, pause to check their understanding or use context and analysis to ensure that they understand the information.

About Instruction

As part of the survey, participants were asked a short set of questions about instruction and reading as part of their college courses. When asked if they wanted instructors to provide help or assistance with readings, 76% of participants answered positively. The majority, 89%, of students believed that instructors should provide guidance about how to read the readings and

take the time to explain how to approach and work with the types of texts in the course as part of the course instruction. Similarly, 89% of the participants felt it would be helpful if instructors would review class readings with the focus on why those readings were important.

The survey results indicate that students are open to reading support and tend to see value in it. Interestingly, these results support the idea that students want reading intervention in their learning- not as a separate service that they must seek assistance with but instead an embedded, authentic and natural part of classroom work. Embedding reading support in learning may be better received than remedial classes or tutoring services which remove the student from the learning environment.

Similarly, students in the focus groups were also open to and requested instructional methods that were authentic, embedded, and naturally emerged as part of the classroom. The central theme, which relates back to motivation, is that most participants want to spend time in discussion on what they have read, constructing their understanding of course content in a supportive, connected environment. Not only do they want this, they expect that college faculty will provide this type of environment for them. The focus groups had three central ideas of what could be done to improve reading and learning in college classrooms. All three of these ideas share the common element of connection, as participants in the focus groups stressed the importance of connecting to faculty and classmates, and to the content itself.

Faculty impact. The first message that participants had for college faculty was the faculty should be aware and mindful of the impact they have on their students and learning. While it is widely accepted that faculty are content experts, the role that faculty play as teachers is very important to students. In fact, participants in the focus groups consistently returned to the topic of teaching and faculty when discussing reading. Almost all participants in the focus

groups felt that it was important that faculty take the time to connect to their students and invest effort in engaging students in the work of the course.

In order to do this, the attitude of the instructor is important to students. At one point during the focus group 2 meeting, Kayla remarked that “The professors attitude is definitely a big part of the class. Like, if I think the professor's not interested, then like, that just makes me think, why should I be interested?”. This participant, and the group she was speaking with, discussed how an instructor’s attitude influences students. In this discussion, the participants spoke about how an instructor who demonstrates care about the material and helping the student learn it was more likely to retain their interest and help them learn.

During one exchange during the discussion, participants spoke about the need for enthusiastic, interested instructors- those that want to share the content with the group.

Jada: I feel like if, kind of going back to what he said, if the professor themselves are interested, and they make it a point to make the student interested, it makes a difference. Like no I didn't care what that it was before, but you're making it so interesting that it's "Oh, okay. I don't like it, but I get it".

Mia: The professors matter too, yeah. They do.

Geneva: And enthusiasm is key.

Amari: Yes.

Geneva: If the professor is having a good time teaching, then I'm going to have a good time.

Amari: I'm all in, I'm engaged. But if you're just like walking around, boring, just sitting, reading, I'm not going to be into it. I'm going to go on my phone, I'm going to leave for the bathroom or leave early.

This exchange, which involved all members of the focus group, demonstrated that students are aware of their professors and how they present the class material. In it, they were voicing their belief that the instructor in front of them had a significant impact on their ability to engage with the material. It is not enough for faculty to be interested in the content; faculty need to be interested in presenting the content actively to students. Engaged professors are likely to pay attention to the cues of the group and involve them actively in work. These participants valued their professors when they were interested in ensuring that students learned and teaching from this place of interest and concern was able, at least sometimes, to transcend disinterest in the material. Interestingly, the discussion about passion and interest of instructors focused on how the instructors felt about the material and not about how the instructors attempted to engage them. In fact, there was little discussion in any of the groups about what the instructors did to engage them in the material even as they spoke about the classroom experience itself.

The use of questioning as a way of deepening understanding and encouraging reading also emerged as a way that faculty can lead classroom discussions. Strategic and careful questions can be part of planning or can emerge during a class lesson or discussion, when used by skilled teachers. A small excerpt of a conversation among group 2 spoke about the value of questioning.

Freya: They don't really have to spoon feed the information to you, I feel like if they can just guide you with, like, a good set of questions then, even that would be more useful.

Josh: I feel if they like ask you a good set of questions, like, it gets your mind going. And then it's like you get actually intrigued more, I start thinking about it more and like you think of the ways of how like this could actually relate to you and your life right now and how it could better you for future, in a way.

Freya: Yeah. It makes you a better thinker too because you are asked a good question. These three participants spoke of good questions, the kind that can encourage critical thinking and evaluation. These comments demonstrate that students want to relate readings to their lives and their future, and that questions that are carefully written to support this interest can help students to sustain interest in reading and take away valuable insights. It is interesting that they differentiate good questions as those that require thought and connection from questions that they feel are about faculty focusing on small details that do not connect the reading to the readers lives. The conversation continued with more discussion on thinking and questions.

Adrianna: And while you're reading it, you are also thinking and that's important.

Moderator: So, you would like that kind of a guide?

Adrianna: Yeah.

Josh: Yeah.

Freya: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Moderator: Do you want tests and quizzes? [Silence and then laughter in the room]

Participants wanted as a guide to reading, to help them to identify important ideas and details, and to provide direction on what to focus on as they read. Participants however had mixed feelings about quizzes and tests, initially staring at each other then laughing as they began to answer.

Freya: I hate tests where they ask you about the stupidest details and it's just actually the professor wanting to know if you actual read it. Which is so dumb, because sometimes I read it and I read it so many times and I have no idea what detail they're searching for. I'm just like ... it's like what color was she wearing? I'm just like, why would I retain that information?

Adrianna: Why was that part important? I don't understand.

These two participants focused on tests or quizzes that look for specific small details instead of challenging them to understand and connect readings. They believed that this type of testing was a compliance measure, to see if students are reading, rather than a measure of learning. As such, they did not like it, did not value it, and were firmly against this type of testing. They were not against all type of tests or quizzes though and saw value in those that helped with retention and learning and challenged them.

Josh: You know, I feel like tests and quizzes, at the same time, it's a good thing, but it's also a bad thing because some people aren't good test takers, so that's not an accurate why to like grade them. But, then sometimes, like, testing is good because it also helps you retain the information.

Moderator: How come?

Josh: Well, I feel like it helps you retain the information because it's like, I mean like, if you do a test, it's like, sometimes you just reading it, like it helps you. You remember it, but if it's like an out loud, like a verbal quiz, it's like just the teachers saying it out loud, you might not retain it right away, but it's like, if you read it, I feel like you could put bits and pieces together in your mind while you are reading it.

Kayla: I think it should be more open-ended questions though. More than like what color was their shoelace? More open ended.

Freya: Yeah.

These participants felt that tests and quizzes could be valuable to students if they were designed to encourage learning and retention of material, instead of specific, small details. They believed that students would be more likely to read and work at understanding and remembering the

material if there would be a test or quiz. Even so, they had concerns about the type of test and about individuals who do not do well on tests and cautioned that faculty need to use tests for learning and not to ensure compliance if they want their students to read. Memorization was not something that participants valued, beyond gaining vocabulary, which was important to them.

Participants in the focus groups felt that it was important to work with the material, beyond memorization and repetition. A participant talked about how reading was necessary, not for class but rather for her future.

Adrianna: I think it's just kind of what we've been saying, thinking and having that because I'm, I think for me personally, like, if we are out in the real world, we have to start thinking and problem solving. So, when we are reading, we have to be able ... or even if any problem we face, whether it is in reading or outside of it, we have to be able to think, okay, this is the situation, how am I going to solve it? What steps am I going to take so I think if professors can kind of help thinking, even like with the questions with the reading to help us like have that better understanding I think that would be much better.

This participant was sharing that she knows that a goal of her college years are to be able to think critically and deeply, to develop skills that she can use, with the ultimate goal of being able to use all that she has learned through education and experience to solve problems and manage situations in her life. Working on these skills with an instructor who has the content knowledge, experience, and disposition to teach and support students is a large part of what all three focus groups believed was the role of college faculty. These participants were aware that while reading was a classroom skill, it would inform all areas of their lives well beyond their college career.

Soliciting feedback from students in the class and giving choice was another area where participants in the focus group felt that strong teaching could improve reading and learning. Participants felt that skilled faculty, who were comfortable with content, should be able to incorporate choice into their teaching, allowing students to have a say in what and how they read.

One suggestion of how to read was to use jigsaw style reading assignments, where different groups choose different material. A participant from group 2, Josh, spoke of how this worked in one of his classes, saying

What I like definitely about what my history teacher does now, is he puts us into groups and we read like our own different, like, chapters or whatever. And then like, we all present out loud in front of the class, so it's like, you get to view like everyone's different perspective's going and then it's like when you're in a group, everybody's own personal ideas are thrown out there and then you start to relate and you start to build off that topic. This type of activity puts the student groups in the instructor's seat and tasks them with becoming the expert on the reading for the class. As the experts on the reading, the groups not only have to read the material but decide on what the reading means, what is most important for the group to know, and how to present in a way that is coherent and meaningful. Given the social nature of this type of work, it is likely that the groups make choices that are relevant and important to them and engage with reading in a deeper and more critical way than they may if they are reading it alone.

Participants also suggested that faculty consider how students may respond to reading, and change readings based on what they know of the students in their classes. Participants believed that experienced teachers should be able to make changes to the readings based on the participants in front of them, and what they know of them. For example, Jada, suggested:

Be mindful of what you choose for your students to read. Some things you just know, you're going to bring that in there and they're not going to like that. You know that already though. I know it comes with a lot of knowledge. Maybe something that interests them will help them better master that.

This participant and her group were aware that while some readings are canonical, there are many times where a faculty member can choose a text. They believed that experienced faculty should have an extensive knowledge of reading and content for these courses and that they could make choices, with and without input from their students, that would increase the relevance of the material and the likelihood that students would engage deeply with the readings. For faculty who do not feel comfortable making changes so quickly, participants suggested that faculty find a more formal way to give choices and allow the group to make decisions. An example of what could be done was a suggestion where Amari said:

Take a survey. I mean before you begin the class, don't even pick the books. Print out a survey and let the students take it and kind of get like a unanimous vote or something. So for example, 'The Odyssey', I was like oh no. I understand it, but it's just boring. Or verses like 'Persephola', something like that. I'd rather choose 'Persephola' other than 'The Odyssey'. Just like a survey, a questionnaire, something like that.

The idea of a formal survey or questionnaire was a recommendation of how faculty could give students a voice in choosing readings. Some participants felt that students could help choose all readings, while others felt that a few strategic choices would work fine.

In addition to asking students to make choices about readings, participants felt that it was important for faculty to understand the group in order to design activities and choose readings

that would be engaging and useful. They felt that class discussions would give faculty a chance to get to know the students. One comment about this, from Mia, said

Class discussions are important. Not 'get to know your students', it's not high school, I understand that. We only meet two times a week, sometimes only one. But get to know your students as individual people. I just feel like that matters, just talking out loud and seeing what some people blurt out, that matters.

This participant was saying that faculty need to see each person in the classroom as an individual, not a homogenous group waiting to be told information without an opinion or experience. She felt that discussions could be a useful way for faculty to see each student as an individual and get a sense of their thoughts and experiences. As the conversation continued, three students picked up this idea and spoke about it saying

Mia: No seriously, actually engage in conversation with them [students].

Jada: And it's just like you make it a point to say what you have to say and let them figure everything else out, or it's like, "Oh I'm going to tell you this, and you're going to go home and teach yourself". It's pointless kind of.

Mia: They'll treat it like that. "Alright I'm just going to go home, past this test and keep pushing", that's it.

Jada: "You're going to go read this chapter".

Amari: And I get that this is college, but still, it doesn't matter.

Mia: Don't talk at me. Talk to me.

When Mia mentioned “no seriously, actually engage in conversation”, there was a sense that she felt that other participants would find this juvenile or simplistic. Instead, the group quickly jumped in to agree and explain more. Mia’s interest in having faculty talk to her stemmed from

her hope that her instructors would pay attention to her learning the material and not just grade her work. As Jada entered the conversation, she gave an example of what she and other students tended to believe about instructors- that instructors want to tell students something and then walk away, leaving the students to learn on their own. Both she and Mia pointed out that this leads to basic action, for example passing a test without concern about learning and reading a chapter to be compliant. Amari added his reminder that yes this is college and learners are adults, but gave the reminder that it does not matter, and that students expect and want teaching, not just to be talked to. The final comment from Mia was especially clear. When she said “Don’t talk at me, talk to me” all heads nodded at the table and it was clear that they needed to be seen as valuable, capable learners by their faculty.

The idea of talking at students, instead of to or with students was a frustration and a demotivator. Angel, in group 3, discussed how one of his professors talked at the group without taking time to gauge reaction or adjust instruction.

Two weeks ago I started reading 'Say It Ain't So or something like that, it was a book. And it was for my English class. And I didn't like it because he was explaining [everything] ... it was like he read a paragraph and every single sentence, he explained the sentence. He did like three pages [of notes] from a paragraph, and I didn't like it because he was going on, or he wrote something that I personally don't like. And I'm not into that, I like reading the whole thing and just really sum or compress the whole knowledge in just a paragraph or a sentence.

This participant did not like the instructional method, and later in the discussion said that the instructor should have noticed that he and others were not engaged and were becoming frustrated. The participant felt that the instructor was talking without taking into account his

audience and felt that the instructor spent too much time speaking without checking for comprehension or asking the students to be part of the work. Participants, like this one, felt that teaching should focus on what the students were doing with the content, not on explaining every detail of the content without interaction or student input.

Relevance. The second message that students shared was that faculty need to put conscious effort into making content relevant and accessible. It is not enough to assume that students believe that material is valuable because it is part of the course. It is also not enough to say that something is needed for the future. Instead, content needs to be something that students can use actively and immediately. Increasing the depth of coverage of topics in readings made a difference for a number of participants in the study, ensuring they understood the material well enough to sustain interest, and work through the difficult parts of the reading and content.

Not understanding the material in depth was difficult and demotivating for students, but integration of other materials to help them understand the source was helpful and made the content of the reading more relevant. Participants felt that using video was especially helpful in building context which increased understanding. An example of one conversation, from Amari, focused on reading Shakespeare, focuses on the idea of extending and deepening understanding through the use of video.

Like, in high school you had to read, like old things, like Macbeth and The Odyssey and stuff like that and the way it was written, I was sitting there, like what is he talking about? Until we watched the movie and we were like, Oh, okay that makes sense now. Like a lot of like old literature is very confusing to me. To the point where I'm like, okay, I don't want to read this anymore.

Amari was talking about how she did not understand the reading until another source, in this case a performance of the same text, was shared. Seeing and hearing the material helped her to make sense of the text and extended her understanding. Without the support of the performance, she was not comfortable and tended to disengage from the reading. Kayla also picked up on this idea and spoke of the same thing.

That's the same thing with me and Shakespeare because I love Shakespeare and I love Hamlet, but I'll read a passage and I'm like, this isn't English. This isn't English I know, so I'm like so confused. But then, in class, we'll end up, like, watching a clip from like a movie that they made or people acting it out and I'm like, oh, I get it now because there's more context. It's not just me kind of visualizing it in my head or I have to look at a video or look at summary like she did and be like, oh, it makes more sense now.

These comments speak to the fact that this participant, Kayla, struggles with the language in texts and especially in primary or authentic texts like Shakespeare. Vocabulary was a concern discussed earlier in the focus group process and was certainly present in understanding literature like Shakespeare. For her, seeing an excerpt from a movie based on the text was helpful in building context for the reading. Not all supporting materials had to be direct performances of the text under analysis. Josh also discussed the use of video, saying:

That's the same thing we would do at my old high school, but when we read Macbeth and all the other Shakespearean plays, like, we had watched all these, like, different videos, like we watched videos from The Office, stuff that like ... stuff that correlates with it, so it gives us like a better understanding of what it is.

Building contextual knowledge helps students to build schema. It appears that first-year students, who already are comfortable with video sources, are likely to use these as a part of building

understanding. Constant video watching can not only build vocabulary, but the contextual knowledge to use it.

Many texts, especially those used in the humanities like literature classes, have supporting materials. This is also true of texts in the sciences, social sciences, and business. This participant found that other videos that covered similar ideas and themes were enough to build context that would support understanding the unfamiliar text.

The use of additional information, in the form of readings, audio, and video can be helpful for students who are working with difficult texts with unfamiliar language, context, or information. From the discussion among the focus groups, using additional materials can help learners to make sense of unfamiliar materials and may increase their reading resilience. A concern that faculty may have is that using video could limit reading but most participants in the focus group did not believe that would be the case. While Amari commented “I think a video, kind of takes away the point of reading”, the majority felt that videos could extend understanding of readings and act as a companion. Jada recommended that video be used after reading “to help me wrap everything up. And it's not like, "Oh skip the reading go watch the video", but it's like "Make me sure that you understand what you just read".” Another recommendation was that video be used during longer texts to help students because “you can connect two pieces faster”. Josh felt that using video both during and after initial readings could be helpful for learning, saying:

I would say during, but also a little bit after because, like, if you play the video afterwards, it's like you get ... already get the kids listening to about like, they're like, you read the passage and know it's like, they're thinking about it. And then, you play the video, they're like, oh, so that's what they meant. So, it kind of sticks like a little bit more.

Participants in the focus groups felt that using video would help students more than it would limit reading. These two comments, from different groups, discussed the idea that using video during the time that students are reading could be helpful in lowering frustrating, increasing understanding, and increasing motivation to read. They believed that students who are exposed in more than one way would be better prepared for critical thinking work and more likely to see the reading as relevant to themselves. One reason why the participants believed that video would work was that it would push them to be immersed in the reading. Kayla, a participant in group 2 explained this idea, saying

I think it would be really helpful if professors can give resources, like, if they found a good video because I know some students, they don't even think about like, they'll just be like, oh yeah, I can't read this and they'll just leave it alone and go onto the next assignment. But, I think if professors introduced them, like the idea of watching a video, not like telling them, oh, you don't have to read, you can just watch the video. But, say like, this video can help you better understand it. I think a lot of students would actually try that out.

Kayla was explaining her thoughts that for many students, who may lack persistence or feel intimidated by readings, incorporating other resources may make the reading more approachable and accessible. She, and her group, felt that resources that the instructor chooses for the specific content and students would be well received and could help students to connect to the material and build context and vocabulary so that they could manage the challenge of reading the assigned texts.

Connection. The third, and based on the focus group feedback, most critical thing for college faculty is that part of learning is social and that connection to faculty and peers in the learning environment is not only wanted, but necessary for success.

Participants wanted connection in the learning environment because it helped them to build their own ideas and expand how they thought. For example, Timothy commented:

I like to know how people interpret different things when they read. I want to know the teacher's interpretation. I want to know what my classmates' interpretation. I might use their interpretation, and I might apply that to my reading, and I might be able to refocus my thinking a little bit whenever I read a text. Like, "Hmm. I remember so-and-so said this. What if that applies to this? Or how would that apply to this or these situations?"

This group, and Timothy specifically, spoke about how sharing different viewpoints and experiences can help with understanding readings. This participant wanted to hear what his classmates and faculty thought to build and challenge his own ideas. For him, listening to others helped him to connect ideas, challenge and confirm his beliefs and hone his focus on what is important. While he was speaking about the classroom, Grace responded in the conversation considering time constraints, saying:

What if they don't have that type of time for you guys to discuss everything? Maybe it's up to you. Find a couple members of your class, and then discuss it there. Because I understand that professors have a lot to do. Even though they're here to help us, they can't sit and talk about everything.

Grace was concerned about how faculty might manage limited classroom time and the need for students to connect with each other over the materials outside of the class. She understood that time is a valuable resource and that the many goals for classtime could be an issue.

In the focus group discussions, participants were aware of the constraints on class time and that discussion with faculty and classmates may not fit within the time that is available. This idea, that learning needs to be social and also transcend the timeline of the class could be valuable in ensuring that students have the chance to work with each other, faculty, and the materials on their own, without a formal classroom structure.

The idea of wanting to connect with faculty was echoed by participants in each group, with one example being the comment by Mia when she stated:

I hate to put pressure on all the professors, because it's like ... we are in college, we are of age, we shouldn't be requiring that much, they do not need to hold our hands, but if I'm sitting with you in a class, I'm paying all this money, I'd like for you to talk to me a little bit.

This participant was talking about her desire to connect to faculty, to feel like she was seen and heard. She stated clearly that she is aware of her investment in college and wanted to learn with an instructor who will be actively involved in her learning. She acknowledged that as an adult she should direct her own learning, but this did not negate her expectation that faculty would spend time supporting connection with and between students. Too, it is important to note that the cost of college was brought up by this participant, just as others had in different parts of the discussion. This specific participant expressed the idea that she was paying for college and that in exchange for her investment, she expected an instructor who was willing to invest time in social connection. This idea of being a consumer was present in other groups as well, where participants make remarks including "college isn't free" and "if you don't understand it (class content), there's a problem. You are ain't paying all of this money for nothing, you know?". As discussed earlier, the high cost of a college education contributed to stress and anxiety for

participants and it is likely that it created a consumer mindset which can serve as both a motivator and demotivator. Regardless, the financial cost sets expectations for faculty and instruction that needs to be taken into account when designing and managing learning.

At another point in the focus group discussions, participants talked about wanting to know other students in their classes. One participant spoke about a classmate and a class that he attended, saying

Because this girl I talk to, and in my phone, it's just 'Girl next to me in Health', like I don't know her name. The professor doesn't engage with any of us. Just PowerPoints, we have a quiz, a test, that's it. So I don't know anyone's name, I'm just like "Girl next to me on the right, girl next to me on the left, girl on the bottom". Or in the front row. That's it. So it's just like engaging is so key, it's really key. And I don't think a lot of professors get that. They think, college is, students are just here to get a degree and that's it.

Amari, like others, voiced his frustration with the idea that he spent hours of his week sitting with stranger, including those he might want to reach out to, listening to an instructor who he had no connection with. He believed his instructor and other instructors, did not care about him or other students as individuals and that instructors believed that students did not care about their classes. He also verbalized his concern that faculty do not recognize his, or other students' desire to learn and that they reduce his presence in college to “getting a piece of paper” when in fact, he believes that college is important because of how it changes a person.

The idea of connection was echoed in other focus groups meetings. Mia commented at one point about how important it is to know classmates and the missed opportunity when you do not. She explained how her classes feel, and said:

You're grown, so figure it out kind of. But it's like introducing yourself to another classmate is so important. It's like, "Oh I don't get it, but maybe he does", and sometimes you don't even have the chance for that because there's no engagement in that class. It's like I go to class, he talks, I leave.

The idea that a student goes to class, listens, and leaves was frequently mentioned during the focus groups, almost always with frustration and sometimes with sadness and resignation. The participants in the groups wanted to connect with their classmates and instructors and felt intellectually it was their responsibility to do so and yet wanted it to be part of the class structure. Activities that build connection between students and students and faculty can be integrated into class work without requiring extensive time or preparation, however it is possible that lack of teaching preparation and a focus on content could be a barrier. In any event, a goal for college faculty could be- at minimum- to break the pattern of going to class, listening, and leaving. Changing that mindset of faculty talking and students listening is a difficult task, especially given the low level of teaching preparation and professional learning focused on teaching available to college faculty.

There are faculty who integrate simple activities that build connection. One example was given by Jada in group 3 who said

My math teacher, she put on the last page of the syllabus, she put three lines to get someone's name, their number, and their E-mail and stuff. She was saying, "This is just in case you miss a day and you want to get the notes", but I feel like that's helpful too because it's like, maybe I can call them up like, "Hey I didn't understand this, do you think you can explain it to me?". And it's like, "Yeah, yeah of course, let's meet in the library".

This is an example of a quick and simple activity that can be done on the first day of a class. By encouraging connection between students, it reinforces the idea that students can extend learning beyond the classroom, on their own. Simple strategies like this can be used in class to build connection among students and to normalize social contact within the class and beyond. It also serves a practical function of ensuring that each student builds an academic support system in case they are absent, need clarification, or have questions.

For the participants in the focus groups, connection to their classmates and faculty was important for motivation and understanding. Participants wanted faculty to address this aspect of learning as part of the class environment, encouraging and possibly even requiring social engagement as part of the course. They felt that engaging with other students and the instructor not only made them feel more comfortable but gave them a diversity of ideas and opinions that enabled their work to be more effective. There was also an aspect of consumerism, the idea that students pay to attend classes, which may play a part in the expectations that students have of faculty. While participants stopped short of making demands, they did make it clear that as paying students, they expect at least a minimum of attention and engagement from their faculty members. It would make sense for faculty to, at minimum, take specific steps and incorporate activities that would encourage students to engage with each other in the class, so that they build a support network, and have the opportunity to extend learning and discussion beyond the constraints of the classroom session.

Connection is the key to learning. The information from the survey and the three messages from the focus groups are consistent with other areas of the study and align very closely with what students find motivational and demotivational regarding reading and instruction in general. In addition, the focus groups made it clear that students spend a great deal

of time thinking about their faculty, classes, and instruction. This makes sense given the fact that first-year college students have typically spent twelve years in formal education and have experienced learning in a variety of classroom and content styles. For the students in the focus groups, who were raised in an elementary and secondary school environment which likely focused on their socio-emotional development and integrated ideas of social learning into the classroom, the abrupt change in college most likely feels uncomfortable and alien. Too, the switch from smaller environments with high contact hours with both peers and teachers to the larger, less personal environment of college may be jarring. The drive to know and form attachments to peers and faculty seems to remain constant even though the students are adults and in a college environment. The feedback from the focus groups is consistent with theories on adult learning, and in fact matches well with the ideas of experiential learning and transformational learning.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The literature on high school reading is clear; students graduating high school in the US are likely to be underprepared for the reading necessary for college and career (ACT, 2014; ACT, 2015; ACT, 2016; ACT, 2017; Jackson & Kurlaender, 2014; Moore et al, 2010; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2008; Wilkins, Hartman, Howland, Sharma, & Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest, 2010). Based on the results of these reports, the United States work force is at risk for being unable to do close and critical reading successfully- and the issue may worsen as individuals have more access to texts written for experts, that require significant understanding of context, or that promote falsehoods and misconceptions. To succeed in college and career, adult learners will need to have reading skills that allow them to read complex text strategically and independently, with persistence to be able to synthesize and read both closely and critically (NCEE, 2013; Springer et al., 2015).

Unfortunately ensuring that college students develop these skills will require much more than skills testing. Changing the college learning environment to encourage deep and critical reading requires an understanding of the reading lives that students live. Successful interventions and activities will depend more on the habits of mind that students develop than on any specific score a student receives. In addition, success will require that faculty across all disciplines develop skills that relate to specific reading outcomes. There are a number of questions that can provide useable information for college instructors who want to close the gap and support their students in becoming conscientious, competent college readers who can monitor their comprehension and academic progress and adjust their strategies as needed. Among these are questions of what drives students to read (or not read), how students view their own skills, and what they believe about reading. The first step in improving reading issues has been identified as

understanding the readers themselves, and helping them to understand how they read. The second is allowing the information from students reading lives to guide instructional design and changes in teaching and learning that encourage the critical thinking. This study was a first step in understanding the reading lives of students just entering college.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how students in their first year of college perceive their reading lives, including their skills, habits and preferences, beliefs, and motivation. Using a mixed-method approach with surveys given in the first half of the academic year and followed by focus groups in the second half, this study was set in a public university in the northeastern United States. This university is known to be non-selective and have low retention and graduation rates and a high level of diversity, and students considered economically disadvantaged. For the purpose of this study, an individual's reading life consists of the skills they believe they have, the beliefs towards reading and themselves as readers and learners, factors that motivate them to read, and habits and preferences that can affect materials choice and help us to understand how students approach information gathering. Given the focus on the internal lives of students, it seemed important to ask these students what they expected from their college faculty. The results demonstrated that students spend time thinking about what works for them with respect to reading and instruction, what they prefer in the educational environment, and the role that college faculty play in their reading lives, and academic success and achievement.

While many studies look at reading skills, little of the research addresses the way that college students perceive reading. Instead, the focus remains on measured skills or faculty perception, ignoring the impact of students' reading lives on their learning performance. In

addition, reading support is not typically included in the college classroom, outside of developmental/remedial coursework and literature courses, and while faculty may recognize that students are not reading well, they tend not to believe that it is within their scope of work or expertise to address it. Instead, the research indicates that most faculty believe it is a student's personal failing if one does not read effectively (Bosley, 2008; Quick, 2013).

The findings of the study suggest that first-year students, in general, have a positive set of beliefs about reading, learning, and themselves but are aware that their reading skills and habits need to change as they advance beyond their first year. The participants in the study indicated that they want assistance with ensuring that their reading of materials is correct and that they work best when there is a social component to their learning. Too, the participants indicated that they expect their faculty to act as active teachers, aware of them as students and willing to engage with them beyond lecture, encouraging discussion as a main learning activity in their courses. Far from being unaware or uninvested, the participants in this study demonstrated that they care very much about their college education, their reading success, and that their faculty play a much larger role in their motivation than I suspected.

Discussion

The findings from this study can help us to understand first-year students' reading lives and can provide guidance to college faculty, instructional designers, and other higher education professionals who are interested increasing students' reading capacity and academic success. The following section presents major themes from the research along with suggestions and areas of focus for college teaching and learning design.

“Reading is important”: A core belief. Participants in the study tended to believe that reading was important. In the survey 63% of participants held this belief. In the focus groups, the

idea that reading was important was voiced multiple times with statements such as “[students] should read everything “and that reading is “fundamental” and “essential”. When asked if you can truly be college-educated without reading, the answer was a unanimous no. There was a general sense that reading itself was important for life, with one participant saying that reading was the heart of connecting with each other, saying “Isn't that why we read? To better communicate and understand each other?” The response from the group was nods of assent. There may be a lesson here in that one sentence; if students connect reading with communicating and understanding of self and others, then that could be used as an explicit goal with readings and assignments focusing on those two powerful ideas.

The belief that reading was important was motivational, especially for academic reading. Knowing that reading was important was enough to encourage participants to at least attempt to read assignments. When it came to social and browsing style reading, though, there was some disagreement among the focus group participants. While some participants believed that students should “read everything” others felt that the recreational nature of this type of reading does not deserve to be called reading and should be discouraged. This disconnect where participants considered social and browsing style reading as less desirable and useful could be an indication that participants view these types of readings as two very separate and unrelated activities instead of two types of the same activity. It is possible that students conceive of reading as a serious and intentional action related to educational work or books. If this is true, it may make it more difficult for students to transfer reading and evaluation skills from one context to another and in fact, the results of the survey indicated that students are less likely to use critical skills with sources like video which are found through social and browsing style sources. This is an important finding, as many college students spend a significant amount of time watching video.

While they are familiar with this media, the idea that they are passively accepting information is concerning; given the proliferation of inaccurate and deliberately misleading information available on the internet, accessing information with the intent of consuming it without critical evaluation may be a risk.

While the participants in this study believed reading was important, and this belief motivated them, older studies had different results. For example, studies by Hilton, Wilcox, Morrison, and Wiley (2010), Mokhtar, Reichard, and Gardner (2010) and Berry, Cook, and Hill (2011) looked at how students viewed reading as part of their work. All three found students believed that reading was important. In contrast to the current study, though, these studies found that in spite of this awareness and belief, participants were unlikely to read. One major difference though between these studies and the current study is that participants in the current study were asked about the importance of reading overall, and not only for academic reasons. Too, the participants in this study were first-year students who were new to higher education, heavily connected to technology, social in nature, and have educational experiences that emphasized student learning. It is quite possible that the difference in experiences, technology, and socialization have led to a difference in motivation. It is also likely that there is a difference between students entering their first year of college and those with experience, in that first-year students may have a different disposition towards learning, reading, and themselves overall.

“I think I am a good reader, but I could be better”: **Reader’s self-image.** The students in this study have a generally positive view of reading and themselves as readers and learners. They are experienced students with a lifetime of classroom experience who are highly aware of the effectiveness of the instructors that work with them. They tend to be clear on what works for them, as well as what motivates and demotivates them. That said, a sense of

confidence in their reading skills and the belief that they are good readers does not mean that they are; it is possible that these students have a sense of themselves that does not match outside evaluations of reading. Given the literature that demonstrates that many high school students graduate without the reading skills they need for college and career, it is likely that many of these students have an inflated view of their abilities. One reason for this could be that individuals are expected to be competent readers and those that struggle with reading are subject to stigma, judgment, and poor performance with daily life activities. Another possibility is that high school is generally a positive environment which makes relatively low reading demands on students (NCEE, 2013). This can lead to an inaccurate sense of ability, and in fact, in this study one of the focus group members commented “in high school, you can just fly by, you can glide by.” Other students echoed this idea saying “in high school they'll let you slide, like "Yeah, sure”, but an A paper in high school is definitely not equivalent to an A paper in college” and “maybe they should've not let us slide as much as they did back in high school”. The fact that students are aware of this is telling; the literature itself notes that high school reading tends to be surface level, with minimal requirements for close and critical reading set by teachers (NCEE, 2013).

The discussion with students in the second semester of their first year provided evidence that while they believed that they were capable readers and learners, they were aware that the skills and habits they possess might not be enough. Participants in the focus groups voiced their concerns saying that their reading could be better. This was especially clear when talking about vocabulary. Vocabulary was an area of importance to the members of the focus groups, and participants felt that it was important for college faculty to find a way to introduce new words in class. They emphasized the role of vocabulary in college reading, linking it to overall college success and how they viewed themselves.

These students were not only aware but capable of voicing their opinion that the high school environment made few demands and rewarded work that was not college appropriate. In spite of the generally positive belief that students had in their first semester, the focus groups in the second semester exposed the idea that these participants were aware that their high school experiences might not have provided an accurate understanding of themselves and their reading abilities.

The current study did not look at reading data and student grades and focused instead on how students perceive and experience reading. That said, the research literature is quite clear that students are unlikely to be prepared for college reading. It is important to remember that students are likely to have an inflated or unrealistic idea of their skills as evidenced in a study by Hooley, Tysseling, and Ray (2013) and to build in opportunities to strengthen reading skills and reconnect students to skills they learned in elementary school.

While the study did not test the accuracy of the participants' perceptions, it provides two foundational ideas that instructors can build on. The generally positive beliefs that students have about reading and themselves as readers and learners offers an opportunity for working from a basis of strength. Strengths-based education principles encourage instruction that identifies student's strengths, personalizes learning and work based on this knowledge, enables learners to network, apply strengths, and utilizes new experiences where students can practice learning (Lopez & Louis, 2009). The second idea that can be used is that students are aware that college reading is different than high school and that the skills and feedback from high school are not enough for success in a more rigorous environment. This idea aligns nicely with incorporating reading instruction into the classroom in an authentic and mindful way- which the participants in the study supported in both the survey and the focus groups.

There appears to be a mismatch between what students know works for them and how college faculty treat reading. Participants in the study were aware of what motivates and demotivates them regarding reading and what type of activities help them to learn best. The practices that students found most rewarding were social in nature, supported critical thinking, and offered support and time to build understanding with the guidance of faculty and the support of peers. Given that the college environment rewards independent fast reading and skimming, it could be frustrating for students who know how they read best to learn to be in an environment that does not support or reward what they know works for them. This is an area where instructors could assist students in transitioning to college reading by explicitly teaching them how to move between skimming, close, and critical reading, depending on the type of work and text in use.

“You need to address the vocabulary”: **New ideas need new language.** College courses typically require students to learn a number of new words and often asks them to interpret words they are familiar with in a new way. Survey participants tended to have positive feelings towards managing vocabulary, but discussion in the focus groups showed that underlying these positive feelings were concerns about mastering new vocabulary and an awareness that they needed to acquire new vocabulary and vocabulary skills. The focus group participants felt that they needed more support and wanted faculty to address new vocabulary. They were clear that vocabulary is not only vital for their learning but an area they wanted to improve.

While vocabulary was mentioned in the literature, it is was often discussed in terms of hard reading skills such as comprehension and fluency. There are many resources available in elementary education literature and adult basic education research which can be useful for increasing these skills. The findings of this study do not indicate that students are aware of or

concerned about these types of skills and instead, are more concerned about understanding the words in context. Still, the results from Macaruso and Shankweiler (2010) and McGewon, Duncan, Griffiths and Stodhard (2015) indicate that faculty should be aware of skills such as phonological awareness, verbal working memory, and more broadly, decoding, comprehension, and fluency as they affect motivation and ability in the college classroom and beyond.

For participants in the focus groups, reading and vocabulary were intertwined. To read well, participants recognized that they needed to possess an extensive vocabulary and skills to interpret new words or familiar words in novel contexts. Too, there was evidence that participants believed that reading was an effective way to build vocabulary. The positive mindset towards learning new words coupled with the awareness that vocabulary is important is a useful tool for instruction. One note of caution, from the survey, is that participants were unlikely to ask faculty for help with unfamiliar words. For this reason, it is important to build vocabulary work into the course in a natural way and to provide strategies and resources for students to learn new words in the context of the course material. This requires creating a space, in the classroom and outside of it, where students can be comfortable exposing what they do not know.

“What color is her shoelace?”: The problem with testing. Two different themes emerged in the focus groups about testing, both in the classroom and standardized tests. Participants in the focus groups had a strong opinion about tests and how they can be used in an educational environment. Given that the students in the study attended and graduated from high school during a period of educational history focused on testing, this makes sense. Too, as this university is non-selective and predominately accepts students from low performing school districts, these students likely had more experience completing tests standardized tests in addition to tests in the classroom (Hart et al., 2015)

When the idea of tests and testing was brought up in the focus groups, two interesting things happened. One was that students immediately discussed testing in relation to the SAT. Participants brought up their concerns and feelings about the SAT and how they and their friends tend to disregard SAT scores as a method that does not showcase what they can do. Instead of talking about their experience with the test, they quickly pivoted towards criticism of the tests themselves, coming up with explanations about why standardized testing may be an inaccurate measure of performance or skill.

The second idea that emerged was that participants were open to testing that they felt gave them a chance to demonstrate what they learned and gave them feedback they could work with. Unlike their feelings towards standardized testing, they were willing to consider tests that would give them an assessment of their performance in course readings or provided a guide to readings. They discussed testing as a possible class activity that would help improve reading. They described testing that would evaluate their reading comprehension and cautioned that tests that focused on small details, such as the color of a shoelace, would not be helpful and in fact, would be likely to lower their motivation to read. Participants felt that questions provided prior could lead them to read more carefully, think more deeply, and challenge them to connect to the readings would be appropriate to gauging and increasing understanding. Participants were very specific that they did not want tests that were set up for their failure, were intended to measure compliance, focused on small details that were not integral parts of the story, and did not ask them to connect to the reading.

The idea that students are able to disregard tests that they do not believe are designed to help them learn and are willing to be tested when there is a clear benefit to their learning provides an important insight for higher education faculty. It seems that students are willing to

engage in measurement of learning as long as they see an educational benefit and have an opportunity to learn from it. This indicates that designing tests that offer feedback and opportunities to improve one's score could be well received for class readings where the goal is understanding the text or source, as opposed to satisfying a test requirement. It also indicates that the test questions given before the reading, as a guide, could be well received as long as they do not measure compliance and instead provide a chance for students to think deeply about the text itself.

“Enthusiasm is key”: Faculty energy matters. One interesting outcome in the study was that participants in the focus groups were motivated by faculty enthusiasm for the material. The participants in the focus groups shared that if the instructor was excited to talk about the material and share it with them, that they were likely to respond in kind. This held true even when it was not a subject that the participants were interested in. As one participant said “the professors matter, they do”, which was followed by another participant saying that faculty member's “enthusiasm is key”. This idea was brought up again when a student said, “If the professor is having a good time teaching, then I'm going to have a good time [learning].” These ideas continued throughout the focus groups with other comments including “If the professor themselves are interested and they make it a point to make the ... student interested, it makes it different. I didn't care what that [was], but you're making it so interesting that [I think] “Okay, I don't like it, but I get it”, which demonstrates that these students find their faculty to be important to them personally and to their motivation and understanding of the course content.

These participants made a very important point about reading, teaching, and learning. Far from wanting to learn from technology, these participants shared that having a professor who cares passionately about the content and wants to share it is key to their interest, motivation and

success. While I might have expected the participants to value an instructor's attempts to interest them, it seemed that the participants responded strongly to the faculty member's connection to the material and to them as learners and that this connection can transcend a lack of interest in the content. One implication for teaching is that instead of focusing solely on factual content, faculty members should be encouraged to share their own engagement with the material and allow students to see their interest and encouraged them to view teaching as a way of extending an invitation to becoming engaged in the content.

“I go to class, he talks, I leave”: Interaction is powerful. Not only did the participants in the focus groups value an instructor's passion about content and interest in sharing it with them, but they also felt very strongly that they wanted a personal connection with their faculty and peers. Participants had clear and specific social expectations about their faculty and the social climate of the classroom. They expected that faculty would pay attention to them as individuals and give feedback about how they were learning and progressing with the course. They hoped that faculty would know their names and talk to them, and not at them. One participant verbalized her frustration by saying that she went to class, she sat and listened and then left, often without speaking to anyone. This type of classroom setup was not what students in the study wanted; the students who participated in the focus groups wanted and expected college faculty who would take on traditional teaching roles of guiding interaction, knowing each student, understanding where they are in learning, and providing encouragement and guidance about both the content and learning itself.

“People who encourage you to go forth and read”: Support is critical. Participants in the study had a strong desire for reading to be socially connected. This idea is consistent with Belshaw (2014), as these participants grew up surrounded by robust, mature communications

technology and are known to expect that they can connect to others instantly for information and discussion. The survey results emphasize the fact that for participants, reading is motivated by discussion and interactive work with their peers.

Participants in the focus groups also expected that faculty would make it a priority to connect them to their peers. They believed that social connection in the classroom was linked to a better understanding of the material, higher motivation in reading, and resilience when working with difficult topics. Most students, in both the survey and focus groups, believed that discussions were helpful in working with reading material. They felt that having a social component, like discussion, was motivational, and they were more likely to read when they knew that they would be able to work with others. Participants believed that faculty members should build a social learning component into classes and spending class time on these types of activities was beneficial to reading and learning and to student connections which may contribute to retention.

The clear preference for social components to learning makes sense when we consider this specific group of students. These technology-savvy students, born into a world that allowed them a near-instantaneous connection and raised in an educational time that fostered connection between members of the classroom community would naturally expect to continue these patterns in the college classroom. For students entering a traditional college setting though the lack of personal attention often present in higher education may be disorienting and uncomfortable and leave them looking to faculty to build connections that foster learning and development. Addressing social needs in the classroom does not need to be time-consuming or complicated and can be built into classroom time. This is one area where instructional activities can be

planned for readings that take advantage of the social nature of students and deepen understanding and motivation.

Participants in the study made it clear that they want reading to be used socially. They want the opportunity to talk about what they read with their instructors and peers. More than this, they identify using readings socially as a benefit to learning and as a motivation for reading. Learning activities that incorporate social components may be well received and serve to make the classroom a more active, engaging place.

“Give choices”: Encouraging agency and voice. One recommendation from the participants in the study is that faculty consider allowing students to have a voice and choice in the reading materials and activities in the class. Faculty who would like to encourage student agency and choice by allowing students to pick what they want to read should consider multiple aspects of the text beyond content. Beyond a list of choices, attention should be paid to integrating text and video, long and short texts as well as providing a mix of styles, such as narrative informal. Participants in the study preferred a mix of one long text with shorter texts.

Contrary to the prevailing practice of providing a single, long text designed for the classroom (textbook), students may more readily accept a set of authentic, targeted material which incorporates a variety of formats. In addition, providing a description and goal for the readings was considered helpful by the participants. While this may take require more preparation, the participants in the study felt it would be helpful and increase connection to the course and materials.

Interestingly, this study's findings agree with older research on what students prefer. Four studies on reading found that students prefer short readings (Burgess & Jones, 2010; Foasberg, 2014; Juban & Lopez, 2013; Mokhtar, Reichard, & Gardner, 2010). Given the time period, these

studies did not offer video as an option. However, two of the studies did find- similarly to the current study- that students preferred short readings through an electronic format (Foasberg, 2014; Mokhtar, Reichard, & Gardner, 2010).

While the study itself yielded several concrete suggestions for teaching and learning, there was a deeper level to the discussions and findings. Just as students in the study wanted to interact socially around the texts they read and information they gather, they also showed that they were aware that literacy requires a knowledge of context that comes from history and society and personal experience. The students wanted a greater voice in their education, but also in the wider world as they spoke about the future. These participants were aware that literacy was a way of improving their learning and future careers and also as a way of taking control of their own lives. Because of this, Freire and Macedo's (1987) ideas on emancipatory pedagogy and the role of reading in assuming the tools and voice to overcome barriers and oppression and to work towards social equity may be relevant to understanding and explaining the importance of literacy for college students. In this sense, reading as a way of learning to use agency and voice may begin in the college classroom but should extend beyond students' academic lives into everyday life.

“Maybe pair a video”: **Choose materials wisely.** The participants in the study showed a marked preference for video. This preference appeared in both the survey results and in the focus groups. While faculty may be concerned that video will lessen reading, the focus group participants were quick to discuss their opinions that video can provide context and background for reading, especially when the text is difficult and the vocabulary is unfamiliar. Based on the participant feedback, incorporating video based on student preferences may increase their engagement with the content and serve to reinforce or deepen reading. This is an area where

faculty need to think carefully about the purpose of reading materials. If the goal is content mastery, and both text and video provide similar content, faculty should consider what the outcome is- is reading a specific text critical or is the goal to master the content? When content knowledge is the outcome, then varying materials can lead to better student learning. In other instances, though, the text itself is important and time should be allotted to not only read it, but review and work through it critically.

The idea of approaching content through multimodal sources is not a new one. Even in 2005, Hull and Nelson found that combining text and video through the use of technology was a powerful and well-received learning tool. It appears that in 2019, this has only become stronger as adolescents and young adults have a constant connection to these sources. Still, as we incorporate sources like video, we need to be mindful of accuracy.

Implications

Teaching and learning. Based on the results of this study, first-year students enter college with a set of beliefs that indicate that they feel confident in their ability to succeed and believe that they will be capable of reading at the college level. Even though we do not know if this mindset persists beyond the first-year, we do know that as students progress during their first year and become aware of the need to improve their reading skills, they continue to have a positive mindset. Though the literature indicates that first-year students are likely to be unprepared for college-level reading, this mindset creates an excellent foundation for college faculty who want to help students be more effective readers. Treating students as if they are capable of success and are ready and belong in higher education can set the stage for faculty to use their positive beliefs to meet their students where they are, help them to identify their goals and needs, and support them to where they need to be for college and personal success. This

mindset supports faculty in creating opportunities to engage students actively with readings and help them to improve overall literacy skills. I recommend that faculty and learning designers view this moment in time as a valuable asset and focus course readings to build on these positive beliefs. When designing activities, especially for online experiences, faculty and learning designers should pay attention to opportunities where this mindset can be made visible, through discussions and writings, and tied to goal setting and used as a backdrop to mastering new content and skills. This mindset change requires that faculty worry less about acting as gatekeepers and content experts, and more as teachers and learning support personnel. Focusing on teaching students, instead of teaching content, is one way to do so. Ironically though, faculty do not often see their role as providing learning support. The mindset of faculty teaching first-year students needs to change to incorporate a broader role beyond content specialists.

I recommend that faculty view first-year college students through the lens of adult learning. As this study showed, first-year students are capable- and even eager- to explain their reading and learning lives and have strong views on education and how they want to learn. Far from being disinterested and disengaged consumers – often what many faculty members believe— this study indicates that students begin with a positive attitude, adult mindset, are well aware of the costs of education, feel highly stressed by the pressure of their futures, and want to read though they may not be able to because of time and responsibilities. Too, they are well aware of how they learn best and what motivates them to read as they have spent their lives in learning environments. Because of this, they are capable and should be consulted about their education beyond choosing what class they want to take. Treating students as adults requires that faculty and learning designers make sure that all work is relevant, fully explained, and clear. In addition, explanations and expectations need to be documented and feedback should be relevant to

learning and provided on a regular basis. Possibly though, the biggest change for faculty is to accept that students are full adults with prior experience and knowledge who lead complex lives. By focusing on them as adults, giving them control and agency and asking them to make choices and be active participants in class, students are more likely to read and learn.

Giving students agency comes in many forms. Beyond allowing them a choice of activities, faculty and learning designers should, when possible, give choices in what types of materials students can elect to read in terms of format and type. This study indicated that students prefer a combination of short texts and videos, and they are interested in reading narratives as well as informational texts. With this in mind, faculty should think carefully about each information source they assign. If the goal of the reading is to provide content, it is possible that other sources are available that will do the same work. When readings are necessary because of the context and content of the reading itself, whether it is seminal within its discipline, or has direct impact, students should be told this and given information about its history. Whatever sources are used faculty and learning designers should be mindful about their choices and remain focused on their course goals.

Agency and choice should be incorporated in reading assignments. Activities where individual students choose specific readings and then work with others to construct an understanding of the topic may be well received, assuming enough structure is given that students understand what they need to do. In terms of materials, faculty and learning designers should think carefully about what readings are assigned and what the goal for information transfer is. If the goal is content knowledge, it is possible and even likely- based on this study- that a carefully chosen video will be well received. Assigned readings where everyone reads the same text should be reserved for important texts, with student outcomes and activities that link to

the reading. Regardless of information source, text, or video, students should be explicitly told what they are reading or viewing, why it was chosen, and how it will be useful. Each information source should have an associated activity aligned with a specific learning outcome and feedback on student work, especially that linked to reading and critical thinking, should let students know how they are progressing, what they may want to work on, and give them a chance to deepen their learning.

One consideration for creating a reading-centered classroom is to incorporate activities which allow students to build social relationships. This study found that students' reading lives are social. Throughout the study, in both the quantitative and qualitative sections, participants were interested in reading and learning as social activities. Students demonstrated that they wanted to use their readings to better understand themselves and others, to connect to peers, and to see classroom practices to encourage this. Not only do they want to build relationships, they want to learn socially, which can allow them to experience other people's viewpoints, and challenge their own thinking. For this reason, faculty and learning designers who want to build a sense of connection and community in their courses should consider incorporating frequent, time-limited, interactive, low-stakes work such as pair and share and small group projects and discussions which follow a protocol and a designated product or outcome. These activities should start early in the course and should follow activities which allow students to become familiar with each other and learn each other's names. Each reading should have an associated activity with a set product and social activity in order to encourage students to read and think critically. While this may take more planning in online courses, it should be a foundational part of activities focused on class readings and use discussion boards and small projects just as you would in a traditional classroom. For both traditional and online classrooms, explicit

requirements for connection, for example, sharing of contact information or group work that requires coordination outside of the classroom, may make it more likely that students will work together. These activities may already be in use in many classes however, it is important that faculty use them to build connection and structure them as such. This may mean adding more time to these type of activities, while focusing on wording linked to learning and growth, instead of grades.

Faculty and learning designers should also be mindful of the importance of faculty and how they approach teaching and students. Far from being irrelevant or replaceable by technology, this study demonstrated that faculty are a key part of student learning. While faculty may spend time trying to decide what might entertain students, it seems that the energy that faculty bring to the classroom is a key component for reading and learning. This study found that students are motivated by the enthusiasm that faculty have for the content and teaching the class. Students were more likely to read and learn when faculty shared their passion and energy for the subject at hand and were eager to have their students learn.

For this reason, faculty and designers should intentionally build in opportunities where faculty share their experience and enthusiasm for the content. This can be done through sharing stories, adding activities that faculty members themselves participate in and enjoy, and letting students know why the readings and information chosen are important to the faculty and why. Faculty should consider sharing feelings about texts they have read and allow themselves the emotional room to be active and enthusiastic. Too, setting up experiences with students where the faculty member is a participant in the learning can also allow them to share their enthusiasm. Faculty may want to think about sharing their own research or work that intersects with the

course content. As one of the participants said when faculty are excited and enthusiastic, they are “all in” even if they do not have an immediate interest in the class or material.

Ensuring that courses have space for demonstrating enthusiasm takes planning, especially in online learning environments. In face to face discussions faculty can share their own process of thinking through readings and in online environments, especially in active structured discussion groups, faculty should make personal comments that not only push the discussion of the content deeper, but share what they value in the reading. Suggestions specific to online learning include brief introductory videos or commentaries by the instructor, written comments about material choice and why they were chosen and resonate with the instructor, especially couched in personal language, can allow faculty to share their own engagement with the course. Even simple changes, like knowing names and meeting individually, can help students to feel more connected to their faculty and as a result, to course content.

Viewing the findings of this study through a Freirean lens, it is possible to see where the intersection of changes in technology, literacy requirements, and students themselves brings us to a place where higher education needs to adapt to use reading as more than a way of learning content. This study demonstrates that students are looking for reading and learning in social contexts which can improve the world, not just their own prospects. They wanted to understand themselves and others, to be treated with respect, and they expected that reading would be a part of this process.

Faculty development. Most college faculty do not have a background in teaching and learning and yet, their primary responsibility- at least as viewed by students- is to teach and monitor student learning. The following section consists of suggestions for those that manage faculty learning and development.

To improve reading instruction, faculty should have a firm grounding in basic educational theory as it applies to adults. There are two areas that are highly useful for faculty who are looking to design activities and teach in a way that supports reading. The first area that faculty should be familiar with is theories on adult learning such as experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), self-directed learning (Knowles, 1975), andragogy (Knowles, 1984), and transformational learning (Mezirow, 2000). Each of these theories has elements that can be useful when working with college students and together, they form a foundation for college teaching. A second area is that of learning taxonomies. Many faculty members may have heard of Bloom's Taxonomy, however, for learning activities and course design, Fink's (2003) Taxonomy of Significant Learning may be a useful tool for college instruction. This design addresses many of the areas that students in the study discussed and encourages faculty and learning designers to think through many areas of the students' reading and learning lives to aligns course work with research-based elements that improve student learning. Specifically, for reading, this taxonomy provides a comprehensive way of ensuring significant learning from texts, versus surface level detail recall. Another useful taxonomy is Wiggin's and McTighe's (2005) Six Facets of Understanding which describes ways of making learning visible. This taxonomy provides guidance to faculty and learning designers on elements that they can use for assessment of learning which aligns nicely with working with course readings.

While theory is helpful in assisting faculty change their mindsets and be open to integrating reading into the college learning environment, moving from theory to practice can be a challenge. For this reason, colleges and universities should provide ongoing support and structure for professional learning focused on literacy. Professional learning should not focus solely on theory and should include specific strategies to enhance vocabulary development, ways

to support students in self and peer monitoring of reading comprehension, and how to connect topics and readings to student schema. Additional topics, including those relevant to specific disciplines and reading types can and should be proposed by the faculty themselves.

One idea for professional learning is to create formal or informal faculty groups focused on reading. The idea would be to immerse faculty in the same learning environments and activities that benefit students. Faculty in these groups should be presented, or choose, a variety of theoretical and practical materials related to reading, literacy, teaching, and student success. Using active learning techniques, faculty could then interact with materials in ways that align with what students have recommended in this study. Discussion, guiding questions, and connection activities should be trialed within a faculty group as preparation for the classroom.

In this way, each skill that faculty want to bring to the classroom will first be used within the faculty learning groups. Through a combination of reading, trials, and reflections, faculty will build a knowledge base for their own use, develop confidence and comfort in using these teaching techniques, and increase their connection to other faculty members who are doing the same work.

While college faculty typically have excellent reading and critical evaluation skills, they may need support in managing choosing materials and helping students to develop their skills. Librarians are usually excellent resources for both of these areas and workshops – delivered online or in person- combined with individual and course support can be extremely useful. Because of the variety and quantity of resources available, I suggest that librarians be involved in reading intensive courses in helping faculty to locate and evaluate sources for courses. Another role for college librarians is to prepare students to locate and evaluate sources and faculty to approve sources and ensure reading is accurate. Librarian support and professional learning

opportunities related to materials will be very important as universities move to open access materials instead of textbooks. These sources, which may be more approachable and engaging for students, need to be carefully vetted and since they are not written directly for college student learning, faculty will need to be carefully supported in ensuring that students are reading these materials accurately.

Teaching and supporting reading can be an overwhelming idea for faculty who are not trained for it. That said, faculty who want to understand reading and how to improve reading skills for students may want to review literature from a variety of research areas including elementary education, adult basic education, and English as a foreign language. Each of these disciplines has examples and information on how to increase capacity and understanding of close, critical, and independent reading that may be useful in a classroom environment. These are a partial, but not comprehensive, list of topics that can be useful in professional learning groups.

Potentially, the most difficult part of managing a reading-based learning environment will require faculty to work from student strengths. This means that faculty members will need to be able to understand learning data, be familiar with assessing learning and learning gaps and working from a growth mindset. These skills require faculty to be responsive and agile and allowing students to make decisions may be uncomfortable to faculty who are used to lecture. Support for active learning, learning assessment, and interpretation should be part of faculty life and communities of practice, and more formal faculty learning communities can help faculty take risks in teaching with the support of colleagues. Faculty members, like other teachers, learn best when learning is sustained over time, is social in nature, and immediately linked to their work and both communities of practice and formal faculty learning communities can provide these opportunities. One last recommendation is that faculty themselves take part in a faculty

group that uses the same methods and materials focused on teaching and learning so that they become familiar and comfortable with how their students will learn from them.

Limitations

This study was conducted at a mid-sized, non-selective public university in the northeastern United States. This university is not known for attracting resident students, and as such, the majority of students -consistent with the university population- who participated in the study lived locally. The area is a mix of urban and suburban townships and there are large fluctuations in economic status and ratings of the local education systems. Diversity is high in the institution, with a student base that shows diversity in race, economic status, language, educational preparation, and disability. The university is also known for having high numbers of first-generation students, students from underserved backgrounds, and low retention and graduation rates. The study participants were recruited through first-year courses, specifically through the first-year orientation course- and students had the ability to choose or decline participation. For this reason, the study describes the participants in this specific university and may not be generalizable to all first-year college students, especially those outside of non-selective and highly diverse environments.

The purpose of the study was to understand how participants viewed themselves as readers and experience reading in their lives. As such, no evidence was gathered about prior education and testing and it is not possible to determine if the data from the students was accurate. It is not possible to know if every participant in the survey was familiar with the terms and terminology used to discuss reading or if they understood what it takes to be a critical college reader. That said, the evidence from the focus groups indicated that students are likely to have an understanding of reading from their earlier education. All students in the study were

accepted to the university, which means that they met at least the minimum of entrance requirements.

Conclusion

At its heart, this study is a story about how students experience reading and learning. While the research literature is clear that students graduating high school are not ready for college and career reading, we still need to understand how our students read, what literacy in the 21st century is, and how technology and our vastly interconnected world has affected both. We also need to understand how students view literacy- as some see it as a utility while others view literacy as a method of gaining power over their own lives. Assessment and measurement are part of today's world, but the answers to increasing literacy remain embedded in individuals, how they view literacy, and experiences. This study shines a light on student's personal reading lives, a space that is usually invisible to college faculty and yet affects how they approach reading and construct knowledge. By understanding their reading lives, we are better equipped to design learning activities and environment that take advantage of what students bring to college.

Traditional-aged students who entered higher education in academic year 2018-19 are different in many ways than any that came before them. The students in this study were, for the most part, born in 2000 into a world that was populated by mature technology. The internet that they grew up with was robust and ubiquitous and information and communications technology (ICT) was already in heavy use throughout academic, corporate, and personal environments. These students were not alive during the development of these technologies and they have no recollection of a world without computers, tablets, smartphones, and the internet. These students live a highly connected life, with instant access to one another and information of all types which informs their primary discourse (Belshaw, 2014; O'Brien & Voss, 2011; Walsh, 2009). In

addition, they have been educated in an environment that integrates technology and is heavily social and interactive (Lolherington & Jenson, 2011). These young adults are different in many ways than any that entered college before them, and they bring with them a set of skills and experiences that differ from those of college students just a few years ago. They need a literacy environment that is complex, connected, and critical in order to learn to navigate their world.

The internet and ability to connect and communicate has changed the very meaning of literacy. Whereas in the past being literate meant the ability to decode basic words, in 2019 being literate has a far broader meaning. Even if we narrow literacy to college reading, decoding is just one part of what students need to succeed. College literacy requires contextual, critical, and information literacy skills to understand and manage text. Too, technology has changed the role of reading as other sources of information have become readily available. There is no standard, consistent definition of college reading literacy which makes the issues raised by research on college reading skills even more complex.

While students have changed and the idea of being literate has changed, college instruction and the model of college has not. Though there are pockets of innovation and faculty and institutions which devote themselves to improving teaching and learning, the vast majority of college reading remains unsupported even as the readings that students are expected to navigate have gotten more complex and specialized. College classes tend to remain unchanged as well, though many institutions have begun to incorporate student-centered approaches including active learning. In focusing on content over people, many dedicated educators miss out on opportunities to make deep and meaningful connections with and between their students and the content they teach. They miss the chance to help their students develop the critical literacy skills necessary they need for the future.

College faculty are uniquely and powerfully positioned to increase reading ability and capacity. The expertise of faculty and their deep knowledge of content, context, and format of information make the college classroom an excellent place to develop critical and close reading skills that help students master the readings and the content simultaneously, creating deep and enduring learning. For faculty to shift their identity from content-expert and gatekeeper to teacher and learning supporter, faculty members will need to have ongoing learning opportunities focused on teaching and learning, using the same methods that they will use with their students.

The results of this study challenge the conventional belief that students cannot, do not, and will not read. These first-year students, at a nonselective university known for poor retention and graduation, showed a willingness to read and interact around information, and an awareness of their reading lives as well as their need for improvement. For these students and faculty, the community within the classroom was a key factor in their reading lives. With this knowledge, we can craft a learning experience which takes advantage of their positive beliefs and welcomes them into the scholarly world. With professional learning and support, college faculty can create reading-focused courses which prepare students for their social and career lives beyond higher education. Fixing the crisis of reading that the literature discusses is not an issue of method, but rather of focus. By focusing on our students, their lives, and their learning first, we can start with where they need to be in terms of reading and design backward from there. By equipping our students with the skills to read critically and closely, we prepare them to be conscientious, competent learners with the voice, agency, and literacy skills to be leaders in their own and others' lives once their college years are complete.

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Appendix A: Reading Survey Questions

Please read each statement carefully and rate your agreement
(strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, strongly agree)

- I am a good student
- I read well
- I strongly dislike reading
- I am able to understand most things I read (in class and for recreation)
- I am not prepared for college reading
- I enjoy talking about what I read
- I enjoy writing about what I read
- I am not willing to work hard at reading

Please read each statement carefully and rate your agreement
(strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, strongly agree)

- I read because it is important to read
- I read because I am curious about the world
- I do not read for enjoyment
- I read because someone else recommended the reading
- I read because I saw the link on social media
- Reading makes me smarter
- Reading makes me more interesting
- I read because it is necessary for my classes to get good grades
- I read to stay informed about the world
- Reading well and accurately is not important to me
- I read to understand myself and others
- I read to participate in discussions with friends and in class

How many minutes can you usually read for fun, recreation, or enjoyment before becoming frustrated, tired or uncomfortable?

How many minutes can you usually read for classes before becoming frustrated, tired, or uncomfortable? (place in order from favorite to least favorite)

I prefer to learn new information from:

- Books (print)
- Books (electronic/online)
- Articles (print)
- Articles (electronic)
- Videos
- Audio only

I prefer to read

- Informational text that tells me facts and ideas
- Practical text that tells me how to do things
- Stories that enable me to experience different worlds

When learning about a topic that interests me, I prefer to learn from

One book
 Multiple shorter articles
 A combination of short text/readings/articles and video

When I read, watch videos, or listen to audio, I usually focus on
 Thoughts and feelings
 Facts and details

When I read, watch videos, or listen to audio, I usually focus on
 What I already know about the topic
 How useful the information could be to me in the future

When I think about things I've read, watched, or heard, I usually remember
 Thoughts and feelings from the source
 Information and details from the source
 How I felt about it

When I come across unfamiliar words while reading, I tend to
 (place in order from most to least likely)
 Ask my instructor or another expert (ie: librarians) for a definition or explanation
 Ask a friend or classmate
 Look the word up
 Guess based on the sentence or paragraph the words is used in
 Ignore the word and move on

When reading, out loud or silently, how likely are you to do the following
 (Not often, sometimes, often, very often)
 Guess words because you do not know them
 Add words
 Skip words
 Reverse the order of words
 Repeat a word/words
 Mispronounce the word or do not know how it should sound

How confident are you in your ability to do the following with social medial or internet sources
 you have found through browsing?
 (not at all confident, little confidence, somewhat confident, very confident)

Read and understand the information
 Know the words or figure out what they mean
 Know if I can trust what I read
 Find the main idea in one text/reading, video, or audio source
 Identify problems with what I read (things that may make it false or inaccurate)
 Read quickly enough to manage my time
 Remember what I read
 Focus on reading without my mind wandering
 Be aware of how well I am reading and take steps to re-read or clarify when necessary

Connect what I am reading with what I already have learned

How confident are you in your ability to do the following with readings for your classes
(not at all confident, little confidence, somewhat confident, very confident)

Read and understand the information

Know the words or figure out what they mean

Know if I can trust what I read

Find the main idea in one text/reading, video, or audio source

Identify problems with what I read (things that may make it false or inaccurate)

Read quickly enough to manage my time

Remember what I read

Focus on reading without my mind wandering

Be aware of how well I am reading and take steps to re-read or clarify when necessary

Connect what I am reading with what I already have learned

For the following, read the statement that describes an action that you might take when reading, viewing, or listening to information. Mark off the types of materials you are likely to use the action with (mark all that apply)

I preview the information by looking at descriptions, images, captions, or section or chapter titles

I think of questions related to what I read, see, or hear

I try to guess or predict what will happen next

I re-read, re-listen, or re-watch to make sure I understand the information presented

I pause to make sure I understand the information being presented

I use context to understand the meaning of unfamiliar terms or words

I analyze or look at how the item presents the information

I synthesize, or think about what I am reading/seeing/hearing related to what I've learned before

Please rate your agreement or disagreement with the following statement
(strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, strongly agree)

I want my instructors to provide help with assigned readings

It would help me if my instructors talked about how to read assigned readings

It would help me if my instructors reviewed class readings periodically to make sure I understand why they are significant/important

I would like to discuss readings in class

Appendix B: Focus Group Pre-screening Questions

Name

Email

Age

Overall, how do you rate your reading skills?

- 1 Poor
- 2 Could use improvement
- 3 Adequate
- 4 Good
- 5 Excellent

Overall, how do you rate your reading habits?

- 1 I rarely read for any reason, and it is not important in my life
- 2 I read when necessary but it is not import to me
- 3 I read when necessary and it is somewhat important to me
- 4 I read when necessary and by choice, and it is somewhat important to me
- 5 I read frequently and it is important in my life

Are you willing to talk about your thoughts and experiences with reading in a group setting? Yes No

Are you willing to prepare for the session by thinking about the following questions?

- 1) What do you typically read (including online, social media, news, blogs, books, sports articles, etc.)? 2) What were your reading experiences in high school and college? 3) What type of reader do you consider yourself?
- Yes No

Appendix C: Focus Group Questions

Probe (or opening) question

- In the fall survey, most students felt they were good readers. What do you think a good reader is and how do you feel about your own reading?

Follow-up questions

- Please compare how you feel about yourself
- How do you read for fun, versus reading for classes?
- Do you feel you do better with one type of reading than others?
- What strengths do you think you have when reading for fun, especially when browsing?
What strengths do you have when reading for classes?

Exit question

- What is one thing your faculty and classes could do to support you in reading?