ENGAGING STUDENTS IN LIFE AND LITERATURE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY
OF RURAL NORTH ALABAMA COMMUNITY COLLEGE AMERICAN
LITERATURE INSTRUCTORS’ COURSE DESIGN
AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES

by

STEVEN JEROME WARD

DAVID E. HARDY, COMMITTEE CHAIR
NATHANIEL J. BRAY
KATHY L. BUCKELEW
CLAIRE H. MAJOR
LISA SCHERFF

A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education in the
Department of Educational Leadership,
Policy, and Technology Studies
in the Graduate School of
The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2012
ABSTRACT

This purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the course design decisions and pedagogical practices of American literature teachers at three rural community colleges of varying size in North Alabama. Fink’s (2003) Integrated Course Design (ICD) model provided a framework for this study, and the researcher attempted to determine if and to what degree rural community college American literature instructors reflect the over-arching qualities and components of Fink’s ICD model. The participants in this study were ten full-time community college American literature instructors of varying ages, educational backgrounds, and years of teaching experience; the participant group included five male and five female instructors.

Data for the study were derived from interviews with each instructor, classroom observations, and review of course-related documents. Using basic qualitative methods, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis of the data, which enabled him to organize the qualitative data into manageable strands. Using the study’s theoretical framework as a basis for coding the data, the researcher was able to establish connections between the collected data and the research questions. Four themes emerged from data analysis: (a) Situational Factors Affect Course Design and Instructional Decisions; (b) Academically Unprepared Students Affect Course Design and Instructional Decisions; (c) Instruction Should Be Engaging and the Subject Matter Should Be Relevant to Students’ Lives; and (d) American Literature Instructors Should Be Reflective Practitioners.
The researcher found that participants did consider certain situational factors as they planned for and delivered their courses. Also, the data proved that instructors gave little consideration to the learning goals as they planned and delivered their courses. Similarly, the researcher discovered that participants did not plan teaching and learning activities in advance, nor did they work to ensure alignment with the learning goals or assessments. Finally, findings suggest that the participants spent little time planning or working to ensure the integration of Fink’s (2003) four components of course design; when it occurred, integration happened inadvertently. The participants’ course design decisions and pedagogical practices only partially reflect the tenets of Fink’s Integrated Course Design Model.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Anne Ledbetter and the late Dexter Greenhaw, two outstanding educators who became my dear friends and mentors. You touched thousands of lives throughout your teaching careers. I am honored to have been one of them.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to those who have helped me reach this educational milestone. My research concerning the art of teaching has led me to a greater understanding of the important role that educators play in their students’ lives. Certainly, I may testify that the educators who served on my dissertation committee and assisted me with this study have enriched my life: Dr. David Hardy, Dr. Nathaniel Bray, Dr. Kathy Buckelew, Dr. Claire Major, and Dr. Lisa Scherff. I would like to thank each committee member for offering guidance and support. I would like to offer a special word of appreciation to Dr. David Hardy, my committee chair and advisor. He saw within me a passion for teaching and challenged me to take my research in a new direction. His passion and enthusiasm for higher education proved contagious, and I will forever be grateful to him for his genuine concern for my academic endeavors. Likewise, I would like to express my appreciation to my dear friend and committee member Dr. Kathy (“Coach”) Buckelew. Her encouragement and advice were instrumental in my completion of this study.

I would like to acknowledge my Heavenly Father; I am grateful for His blessings and favor. Among His greatest gifts to me is my family, and I would like to thank them for their encouragement and patience during this process. My wife, Tracy, has been extremely loving and supportive of my efforts. Likewise, my three sons—Aden, Ty, and Eli—have provided me with inspiration to complete the task. I will always cherish hearing each of them offer prayers on my behalf, all in hopes that I would complete this task sooner than later. Finally, I would like to
thank my parents, Steve and Kelly Ward, for always expecting my best efforts and providing words of reassurance.

Additionally, I would like to thank Dr. Mary Barnes and Dr. Rebecca Reeves for serving as an *ad hoc* committee for my practice proposal and defense presentations. Finally, I would like to thank the Hartselle High School Advanced Placement Classes of 2011 and 2012. These students encouraged me by frequently reminding me that seemingly impossible tasks are, in fact, possible.
CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................................... ii

DEDICATION ............................................................................................................................... iv

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ............................................................................................................... v

LIST OF TABLES ....................................................................................................................... xiv

LIST OF FIGURES ....................................................................................................................... xv

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION .....................................................................................................1

   Introduction and Statement of the Problem ................................................................. 1

   Purpose of the Study ....................................................................................................... 3

   Research Questions ......................................................................................................... 4

   Background and Rationale for the Study ...................................................................... 6

   Significance of the Study ............................................................................................... 7

   Delimitations .................................................................................................................... 8

   Limitations ......................................................................................................................... 9

   Assumptions ...................................................................................................................... 9

   Chapter Summary ....................................................................................................... 10

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE ................................................................................11

   Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 11

   The Community College ............................................................................................. 11

      A Brief History of the Community College ............................................................ 12

      Community College Students ................................................................................. 16

      Community College Faculty .................................................................................... 27
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College Faculty Characteristics and Demographics</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges and Rewards of Teaching at a Community College</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship of Teaching</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolving Definition</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship of Teaching within Disciplines</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship of Teaching in a Shifting Paradigm of Learning</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating the Scholarship of Teaching</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Instruction and Management</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Shifting Paradigm: Student-centered Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome-based Approach to Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning for Instruction</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative Learning</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Based Learning</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Multiple Methods</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Management</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Literature</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College English Faculty</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Teach Literature?</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Methods in Literature</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational Factors</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Goals</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment and Feedback</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overarching Question</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Practice</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Further Research</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing Remarks</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Interview Protocols</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Observational Protocols</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Document Analysis Rubrics</td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Commonly Identified Readings in Community College American Literature Courses</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E Application Letter from Institutional Review Board</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board Application</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

1. General Demographic Information of Participants..........................................................147
LIST OF FIGURES

1. Model of Integrated Course Design.................................................................104
2. The Taxonomy of Significant Learning............................................................108
CHAPTER I:
INTRODUCTION

“Part of being a good teacher (not all) is knowing that you always have something new to learn . . . . To learn from the best teachers we must recognize that we can all learn—and that we will still have failures. We will not reach all students equally, but there is something to learn about each one of them and about human learning in general.” (Bain, 2004, p. 174)

Introduction and Statement of the Problem

In recent years, community colleges have undergone significant transformation to meet the increasing educational and economic demands brought on by demographic changes in student populations, the evolution of technological advancements, and a growing need for a skilled and educated workforce (Bryant, 2001; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Saunders & Bauer, 1998). Additionally, rapid growth in the nation’s number of community colleges has occurred, in part, because of the influx of learners taking advantage of open-admissions policies and federal and/or state financial aid (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Miller, Pope, & Steinmann, 2005). Furthermore, community colleges have been successful because they provide affordable academic preparation and career training to students who, for a number of reasons, might not have access to other higher education institutions (Bryant, 2001; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Jenkins, 2005).

Such changes in demographics and pressures to meet increasing demands for greater accountability have caused many higher education institutions to reassess their programs of study and to place greater emphasis on instructional goals and student learning outcomes (Bresciani, 2006; Bryant, 2001; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Miller et al., 2005; Voorhees & Zhou, 2000). As a
result, Barr and Tagg’s (1995) call for a shift in the learning paradigm from a teacher-centered to a student-centered approach to teaching and learning continues to be answered by higher education institutions. Today’s teachers are being challenged to move beyond traditional “chalk and talk” lectures and, instead, to incorporate more technology-driven presentations and classroom activities that encourage student engagement (Bain, 2004; Eble, 1988; Fink, 2003; McKeachie, 2002; Showalter, 2003). Furthermore, colleges are encouraging their faculty to be innovative in their course delivery methods by incorporating computer-based instructional strategies, collaborative and cooperative learning activities, self-directed learning options, service-learning opportunities, and other non-traditional learning opportunities into the curriculum (Bain, 2004; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Eble, 1988; McKeachie, 2002; Stronge, 2007). Though the purpose of instruction remains the same, innovative instructional practices and improved modes of delivery have helped to modernize today’s college classrooms.

In a fast-paced world where iPods, cellular phones, and digital media compete for students’ attention, how do college teachers design their courses and deliver content? Though community colleges take great pride in being recognized as “teaching” institutions, they, like other higher educational institutions, must continue their pursuit of innovative instructional methods in order to remain competitive in a market mindful of today’s “millennial” learners (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Huber, 1998; Kozeracki, 2002; Levin, 2003; Outcalt, 2000; Yates, 2000). In response to these changes and demands, many community colleges have revised or are in the process of revising their mission statements, revamping their programs of study, and designing their courses to change with the times and meet their students’ and communities’ needs (Bresciani, 2006; Fink, 2003). Likewise, community colleges expect their faculty to recognize and respond to these changes by reflecting on and modifying their instructional
practices in order to provide students with the best education possible. To encourage these changes, some colleges have established teaching and learning centers devoted to exposing faculty to and/or training them in the latest instructional innovations and research concerning pedagogical practice; other institutions have embraced the idea of becoming a community of learners and have encouraged their faculties to take part in the scholarship of teaching (Fink, 2003; Shulman, 1987).

How do instructors design, deliver, and evaluate student learning in today’s community college courses? Despite colleges’ placing a greater emphasis on instruction and moving toward a student-centered paradigm of teaching and learning, researchers have given little attention to the topic of community college instruction; therefore, literature on the subject is lacking (Outcalt, 2000). Further research is needed to examine community college course design and instruction at community colleges.

**Purpose of the Study**

Boyer (1990) issued a challenge for higher education institutions and faculty to reevaluate the role of the professoriate and place greater emphasis on teaching. In response, over the last few decades research concerning course design, instruction, and the scholarship of teaching has increased (Bain, 2004; Fink, 2003; McKeachie, 2002; Shulman, 1987). Research indicates that students prefer instructors who make an effort to understand their students’ educational needs, develop positive interpersonal relationships with their students, create and maintain a positive learning environment, and utilize a variety instructional methods (Bain, 2004; Boyer, 1990; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Cross, 1999; DuBois, 1993; Eble, 1988; Fink, 2003; Hativa, Barak, & Simhi, 2001; Healey, 2000; Kember, Kwan, & Ledesma, 2001; Kemp & O’Keefe, 2003; McKeachie, 2002; Lowman, 1990, 1994; Shulman, 1987; Stronge, 2007).
Additionally, when evaluating their instructors, students tend to give high marks to teachers who are energetic, appear to enjoy their jobs, and show concern for their students (Bain, 2004; Greenwald & Gillmore, 1997; Guthrie, 1949; McKeachie, 2002; Overbaugh, 1998; Zelby, 1977). Other research indicates that the quality of instruction can affect students’ attitudes, learning, and retention (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Eiszler, 2002; Greenwald & Gillmore, 1997; Marsh & Roche, 2000; Overbaugh, 1998; Tinto, 2000). Further research is needed to inform instructors about pedagogical practices and theories that may have an effect on teaching and learning.

Bain (2004) challenges today’s educators to continue exploring the principles of effective teaching: “If we are truly interested in defining a new university and a new professoriate, we must recognize that there is something to know about human learning. Both the research and the theoretical literature on learning and teaching can inform how we design a course or any other educational experience” (p. 176). In accepting Bain’s challenge, the intent of this qualitative study was to examine the course design and instructional practices of several American literature teachers at three different community colleges in North Alabama. Furthermore, because this qualitative study limited its focus to community college American literature instructors in North Alabama, it will fill an existing gap in the literature. Such a study is important because, as Showalter (2003) surmises, “Attention to pedagogy itself, and to learning new theory, could offer a new direction for English studies for the new century” (p. 24).

**Research Questions**

The research questions for this study are grounded in Fink’s (2003) model of Integrated Course Design. This study sought to answer a central research question: How do rural
community college English instructors design, deliver, and evaluate student learning in American literature courses? The sub-questions are as follows:

1. How and to what degree do rural community college English instructors take into account *situational factors* in the conceptualization and design of American literature courses?

2. How do rural community college English instructors determine the *learning goals* for American literature courses?

3. How do rural community college English instructors determine the methods to be used to *assess and provide feedback* concerning student learning in American literature courses?

4. How do rural community college English instructors determine the *teaching and learning activities* to be used in American literature courses?

5. How do rural community college English instructors determine what learning materials (i.e., literary works) to utilize in the teaching of American literature courses?

6. What are the most commonly identified *learning goals, teaching and learning activities, assessment and feedback methods*, and materials (i.e., literary works) being used in American literature courses at rural community colleges?

7. How and to what degree do rural community college English instructors work to ensure successful integration of the four primary aspects of course design (situational factors, learning goals, assessment methods, and learning activities) in American literature courses?

8. To what degree do the situational factors, course learning goals, teaching and learning activities, and assessment and feedback methods considered and/or utilized by these rural community college American literature instructors reflect the over-arching qualities and components of Fink’s Integrated Course Design Model?
Background and Rationale for the Study

As community college enrollments continue to increase and student populations become more diverse, classroom instruction has become an area of focus at many higher education institutions (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Saunders & Bauer, 1998). Prior research on instruction at community colleges has primarily looked across instructors teaching within a wide-variety of disciplines (Baker, Roueche, & Gillet-Karam, 1990; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; DuBois, 1993; Ediger, 2002). Other studies on pedagogy investigate instruction within a wide variety of disciplines at four-year universities (Bain, 2004; Hativa et al., 2001; Jahangiri & Mucciolo, 2008; Lowman, 1996; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999; Showalter, 2003; Torok, McMorris, & Lin, 2004; Wilson, Dienst, & Watson, 1973). Within the existing research are several recurring themes concerning college instruction: importance of student-teacher interaction and positive classroom environments (Bain, 2004; Chickering, 2000; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Cross, 1999; Eble, 1988; Fink, 2003; Groth, 2007; Kember, 2009; Kemp & O’Keefe, 2003; Lei, 2007; Lowman, 1994; Reinsmith, 1994; Smoot, 2010; Tinto, 2000; Weimer, 2003), instructors’ content knowledge (Bain, 2004; Ball, Thames, & Phelps, 2007; Eble, 1988; Fink, 2003; Major & Palmer, 2006; Reeves, 2007; Smoot, 2010; Shulman, 1987, 1999), personal characteristics and attitudes (Baker et al., 1990; Bain, 2004; DuBois, 1993; Eble, 1988; Hativa et al., 2001; Kemp & O’Keefe, 2003; Leblanc, 1998; Lowman, 1994; McKeachie, 2002; Torok et al., 2004), and methods of instruction (Anderson & Carta-Falsa, 2002; Angelo & Cross, 1993; Bain, 2004; Barr & Tagg, 1995; Chickering, 2000; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Cross, 1971, 1999; Fink, 2003; McKeachie, 2002; Reinsmith, 1994; Stronge, 2007; Tomlinson, 2000). However, the existing literature does not specifically address the course design decisions and pedagogical practices of rural community college American literature instructors. This study may offer both English
faculty and community colleges valuable insight into the components of American literature teaching, thereby promoting better learning experiences for students.

**Significance of the Study**

Since over half of today’s entering undergraduate students attend community colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Miller et al., 2004; Pascarella, 1997), the need for meaningful instruction in English studies at these institutions has never been greater (Hicks, 1960; Levine, 2001). According to Showalter (2003), literature studies are important “not only in education but in life” (p. 24). The study of literature provides students with opportunities to learn about and embrace their histories and cultures; additionally, students can prepare for their futures by learning from their pasts (Scholes, 2009). American literature teachers share the responsibility of providing students with a rich social, historical, and political overview of this country’s emergence from an unexplored territory to its current status as a world power. Through the study of multiple texts and genres from different time periods, American literature instructors may lead students to understand the development of the United States’ unique literature and culture. Furthermore, through shared experiences that evolve from reading, researching, discussing, and writing about a variety of American literature texts, students have opportunities to gain insight into the challenges of the past and to gain knowledge that might enable them to face similar challenges in the future (Davidson, 2000; Logan, 2006; Scholes, 2009; Showalter, 2003). Students attending college today will become the skilled laborers, inventive entrepreneurs, effective communicators, and capable leaders of the future; therefore, teachers are responsible for providing the instruction that will lead students to develop the necessary skills to fill these important future roles (Bain, 2004; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; McKeachie, 2002; O’Banion, 1997).
As Bain (2004) proclaims, for good teachers, there “is always something new to learn” (p. 174). By offering a discipline-specific examination of course design and instructional decisions of American literature instructors, this qualitative study will contribute to the existing literature concerning community college teaching. Furthermore, because many college instructors lack formal training in pedagogical methods and theories (Bain, 2004; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; DeBard, 1995; Kroll, 1994; Showalter, 2003), a study exploring course design decisions and pedagogical practices also provides information that may prove beneficial to current and/or future instructors who seek to improve their practices. Particularly because community colleges service a large and steadily-increasing number of students (Cohen & Brawer, 2008), research in the area of community college teaching is important to future instructors who may benefit from an understanding of the course design decisions and pedagogical practices that positively affect teaching and learning.

**Delimitations**

This study is delimited to American literature instructors from three different rural community colleges located in Appalachian foothills of North Alabama. The researcher chose to include these public two-year colleges from the Alabama Community College System in the study because of their size and location; therefore, attempting to generalize the findings of this study may prove futile. Furthermore, by delimiting the study to a purposeful sampling of American literature instructors at these rural community colleges, the results of this study may not be entirely applicable to instructors who teach within other disciplines, other institution types, or in other educational settings.
Limitations

The researcher acknowledges, \textit{a priori}, the following potential limitations that could negatively affect the study:

1. The study will only include information provided by a sample of rural community college American literature instructors, which should not be assumed to be indicative or representative of the pedagogical practices or beliefs of all community college instructors or all American literature instructors.

2. Though the researcher will make every effort to avoid personal bias during the course of this study, bias can occur.

Assumptions

The current study is being conducted based upon the following \textit{a priori} assumptions:

1. The researcher assumes that the community college American literature teachers who will be interviewed for the study will provide forthright and truthful information regarding their pedagogical practices and attitudes about teaching.

2. The researcher also assumes that the data collected and analyzed will provide sufficient information regarding effective teaching to answer the research questions of this study.

3. Additionally, the researcher assumes that the classroom observations will be representative of typical and/or standard teacher behavior.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the course design decisions and pedagogical practices of American literature instructors at three community colleges in North Alabama. In recent years, higher education institutions have begun to place greater emphasis on student-
centered instruction; likewise, instruction remains central to the mission of community colleges (Bain, 2004; Barr & Tagg, 1995; Boyer, 1990; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Saunders & Bauer, 1998). Therefore, a significant need to examine and evaluate instruction exists. Because higher education institutions rely on their instructors to provide first-rate instruction and optimal learning opportunities for students, an examination of community college American literature instructors’ course design and pedagogical practices will contribute to and fill a gap in the existing body of research focusing on community college instruction.

In describing this research, this dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter II provides a review of the literature relevant to the study, including: a brief history of the community college, its students, and its faculty; the scholarship of teaching; methods of instruction; and teaching community college literature courses. Additionally, Chapter II presents the theoretical framework for the study. Chapter III includes a discussion of the research design, the qualitative data collection methodology, and the data analyses used to complete the study. The data collected in the study is included in Chapter IV, as well as the analysis of those data. Chapter V provides the findings and conclusion of the study, as well as recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Lee Shulman (1987) comments, “Richly developed portrayals of expertise in teaching are rare” (p. 1). Nonetheless, the literature contains vast amounts of research related to pedagogical practice. The topic of teaching is extremely broad, and an extensive review of literature encompassing all aspects of the subject would be a tremendous undertaking. Therefore, the scope of this literature review is limited to subtopics relevant to the context of this study: (a) the community college, including an examination of its students and faculty; (b) the scholarship of teaching; (c) methods of instruction; (d) teaching community college literature courses; and (e) the theoretical framework for the study. An examination of this literature provided a framework for the remainder of the study.

The Community College

Community colleges have struggled to find an acceptable identity among the ranks of American higher education, and until recently “these colleges went their own way, unexamined and practically ignored by the broader education community” (Cohen & Brawer, 1972, p. 56). However, because of their open-access policies, increasing enrollments, geographical locations, and unique program offerings, American community colleges have since grown to serve a population of students comparable to the number served by four-year institutions (Bryant, 2001; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Miller, Pope, & Steinmann, 2005). Along with growth in number and size, community colleges have expanded their mission statements and broadened their course offerings to meet the changing needs of their respective communities, surrounding businesses,
and diverse student populations (Bryant, 2001; Cohen & Brawer, 1972, 2008; Miller et al., 2005). Now, according to Cohen and Brawer (1972), “The community college . . . has something for everyone” (p. 56). A brief examination of the history and development of American community colleges, including the students who attend and faculty who work at these institutions, will add to the context of this study.

A Brief History of the Community College

Early American higher education institutions were modeled after existing European colleges, and, as Rudolph (1962) notes, “The colleges were in no sense popular institutions. They were shaped by aristocratic traditions and they served the aristocratic elements of . . . society” (p. 18). Admission to these colleges was limited to the “elite”—the aristocratic who composed a very small portion of the population (Altbach, 2005; Berdahl, Altbach, & Gumport, 2005; Geiger, 2005; Rudolph, 1962). However, as the country began to grow and expand, so did American higher education; eventually, the country left behind the notion that only the elite could be educated and moved toward a “mass system” of education (Berdahl et al., 2005). “The public perceived schooling as an avenue of upward mobility and a contributor to the community’s wealth,” claim Cohen and Brawer (2008); therefore, colleges began adding “diverse programs” to meet the demands of their communities and “greater varieties of people” (p. 2).

According to Berdahl et al. (2005), three events contributed to the expansion and development of American higher education:

First, beginning in German universities and spreading to universities in other Western countries was the notion of the importance of science and research in higher education. Governments began to see the links among universities, economic growth, and military strength. Second, the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862 in the United States broadened the curriculum to include the agricultural and mechanical arts. This led to the diversification
of higher education institutions, a larger and more heterogeneous student body, higher state costs, and the notion of university public service . . . Third, the public and governments grew reluctant to increase public spending, which led to increased accountability on the part of higher education institutions and to a constraint on their growth. (p. 4)

Notably, a second Morrill Act in 1890 provided for additional land-grant institutions and opened avenues for African-Americans to attend college (Rudolph, 1962). The colleges established by the Morrill Acts also provided a more affordable alternative to private institutions (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Altbach (2005) also purports that the German influence helped American higher education embrace research as “an integral function of the university” and as a catalyst that “further transformed higher education by stressing the relationship between the university and society through the concept of service and direct links with industry and agriculture” (p. 17). According to Geiger (2005), the Morrill Land-Grant Acts were responsible for changing higher education by making it more “utilitarian” (p. 52) and by encouraging those of the “industrial” and “professional classes” (p. 53) to study at the same institution.

American higher education has continued to change. Unless institutions are private, they are no longer reliant on religious entities to provide funding or governance; instead, most colleges are public schools dependent upon local, state, and federal funding (AACC, 2010, “Community Colleges”). As previously noted, colleges have reformed to educate a larger number and more diverse group of students; broader access has allowed for a great change in student population. Additionally, higher education has embraced the German model of education, which places great emphasis upon graduate studies and research. Although debate continues over what should be included in the college curriculum, over time the traditional classical curriculum has given way to a more practical and utilitarian set of courses; such
programs of study are mainstays of technical and community colleges (Geiger, 2005; Rudolph, 1962).

The idea of two-year colleges was not new. At the end of the 18th century, Germany experimented with two-year institutions by adding extra years of study to secondary school requirements and allowing students who completed this course of study to move to a university. In America, private two-year colleges existed in the late 1800s, but these few colleges were small schools with few students and very limited programs (Witt, Wattenbarger, Gollattscheck, & Suppiger, 1994). According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) (2010), “Founded in 1901, Joliet Junior College in Illinois is the oldest existing public two-year college” in America, and it was an extension of the existing high school (“Community Colleges,” para. 2). Despite an increasing enrollment in secondary schools and the economic challenges of the 1900s that demanded a greater number of skilled laborers, a majority of high school graduates were not attending college “in part because they were reluctant to leave home for a distant college” (AACC, 2010, “Historical Information”; Cohen & Brawer, 2008). As an alternative, the earliest community colleges were secondary school extensions whose purpose was to provide higher education opportunities to a greater number of potential students (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). “By 1930, there were 440 junior colleges, found in all but five states,” report Cohen and Brawer (2008, p. 15).

Over time, the number of community colleges increased to meet the nation’s economic and workforce demands after World Wars I and II; the combination of “job-training programs” designed to ease high unemployment rates combined with the large number of returning soldiers who took advantage of the GI Bill “created a drive for more higher education programs” (AACC, 2010, “Community Colleges”). The GI Bill provided returning soldiers federal monies to pay
for their college tuition; additionally, this bill was the beginning of the federal government’s involvement in providing funding for those who could not afford to attend college (AACC, 2010, “Community Colleges”). With the increase in the number of community colleges came a surge in the number of students beginning college studies (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). As community colleges expanded in the 1940s, the Truman Commission sought to implement a national network of public community colleges and provide even greater access (AACC, “Community Colleges, 2010; Cohen & Brawer, 2008). By the mid-1960s, over 400 public community colleges made up this national network, and since then the number of these institutions has steadily grown to include over 1,000 public community colleges serving over 6 million students per year (AACC, 2010, “Community Colleges”; Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

Cohen and Brawer (2008) claim that “the simplest overarching reason for the growth of the community colleges was that an increasing number of demands were being placed on schools at every level. Whatever the social or personal problem, schools were supposed to solve it” (p. 2). Community colleges continue to meet such demands by remaining cognizant of society’s ever-changing needs, being innovative, evolving, and reflective institutions, and embracing and implementing modern instructional practices (Cohen & Brawer, 1972; Outcalt, 2000). Today, community colleges are found in all fifty United States and enroll over half of the nation’s entering undergraduates (AACC, “Community Colleges,” 2010; Cohen, 1977; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Miller et al., 2004; Pascarella, 1997). Today’s students attend community colleges for a number of reasons: to improve their social standing, to obtain or improve upon marketable and/or personal skill sets, and/or to earn transferable credit hours (Bryant, 2001; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Miller et al., 2004). Because they offer both academic and career-training
curricula, community colleges are appealing alternatives to larger and more expensive universities (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Laanan, 2000).

Miller, Pope, and Steinmann (2005) commend the success of community colleges to recruit, encourage, and prepare students to meet their respective community’s needs by claiming that the rise of community colleges is “one of the greatest success stories in all of American education” (p. 596). Witt, Wattenbarger, Gollattscheck, and Suppiger (1994) concur, stating that community colleges are “the most important higher education innovation of the twentieth century” (p. 1). Cohen and Brawer (2008) further applaud community colleges for creating “notable changes in American education, especially by expanding access” (p. 27). Undoubtedly, open-access policies, increasing numbers of and proximity to community colleges, and affordability have allowed more students to attend college (Bryant, 2001; Cohen & Brawer, 1982, 2008; Jenkins, 2005). Furthermore, community colleges continue to provide a variety of educational opportunities to a diverse student population, including non-traditional students, “ethnic minorities, lower-income groups, and those whose prior academic performance [is] marginal” (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 31). Cohen and Brawer (2008) succinctly summarize the existing opportunities for students to attend a community college: “Two years of post-secondary education are within the reach—financially, geographically, practically—of virtually every American . . . . Open-admissions policies and programs for everyone ensure that no member of the community need miss the chance to attend” (p. 35).

**Community College Students**

The population of students who attend community colleges is quite diverse. As the number of community colleges increased and provided greater access, the growth in enrollment included students from a variety of educational, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Bryant,
Bryant (2001) purports, “The two-year college, with its flexibility and open admissions, has provided opportunities for disadvantaged individuals who might otherwise not attend college” (p. 77). Jenkins (2005) claims that community colleges are “the most egalitarian of postsecondary institutions” because “almost anybody can attend . . . and almost anybody does” (para. 7). Indeed, the numbers indicate that community colleges continue to offer educational opportunities to students from all ethnic and socioeconomic sectors.

The American Association of Community Colleges (“Fast Facts,” 2010) estimates that over 8 million students attended credit-bearing courses in the nation’s community colleges in the 2008-2009 academic year. Additionally, over 5 million students sought workforce training and/or attended other non-credit-bearing courses. Combined, the number of students attending community colleges for credit and non-credit courses exceeded 13 million. Notably, since their beginnings American community colleges have served more than 100 million students (AACC, 2010, “Community Colleges”; Buckelew, 2007).

However, because such a diverse and large group of students attend community colleges, analyzing the culture of these institutions is often difficult (Miller et al., 2004; Saunders & Bauer, 1998). Saunders and Bauer (1998) offer insight into the environment of a typical community college campus:

Instead of one uniform student body with similar goals and objectives, similar programs, and similar lengths of stay, community colleges typically have many subgroups within their student bodies. Community colleges tend to be fairly large, usually public governed, and dependent on commuters. There is sparse campus life to draw students together. The climate encountered by students will depend upon the groups to which they belong, and how they then interact with the institution. Measuring, analyzing, and understanding the campus climate depends on the perspective of the student to a far larger extent than with a four-year traditional campus. (p. 13)
Providing an accurate depiction of community college students is difficult; as Miller et al. (2004) point out, “Caricatures and stereotypes often portray misleading, but commonly held perceptions of who community college students are” (p. 65). Pointedly, Jenkins (2005) proclaims, “There really is no ‘typical’ community college student” (para. 6).

The literature indicates that community college students vary in educational backgrounds, abilities, and goals (AACC, 2010, “Community Colleges”; Bryant, 2001; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Saunders & Bauer, 1998). Miller et al. (2004) suggest that students tend to enroll in community colleges “for a variety of personal, professional, social, and academic reasons” that can be categorized as “deficiency reasons and defined-purpose reasons” (p. 64). Those students who enter for “deficiency reasons” are stereotypically students who need academic and/or monetary assistance before attending a four-year university; students who enter with a “defined-purpose” are those who attend the community college for a specific reason, such as workforce skill training or general education credits needed for transfer (Miller et al., 2004). In their study, Voorhees and Zhou (2000) found that a majority of community college students surveyed (66%) entered college with the specific goal of earning a certificate, associate’s degree, or credit for transfer to a four-year school; additionally, 21% of respondents intended to gain job-related skills, and 12% attended for other reasons, such as to attend a special interest course. Cohen and Brawer (2008) provide a list of reasons why students may decide to attend a community college: students are “conditioned” to attend school each year; they desire to a career change or want to improve their work skills; they may have interest in “special interest courses”; and/or they may value the economic practicality of attending the community college before transferring to a four-year university (p. 61). Nearly 22% of students transfer from a community college to a four-year university and, allotted ample time, these transfer students graduate; notably, students who
complete an associate’s degree at the community college level are more apt to graduate from a four-year institution (Bryant, 2001). In addition to programs of study that lead to certificates and/or associate’s degrees, community colleges often offer adult education or personal interest studies available to the community at large. Likewise, community colleges may provide programs and facilities to accommodate local business and industry needs. In some cases, community colleges also offer recently unemployed or displaced laborers opportunities to gain new skills and/or find new employment within the community (Bryant, 2001; Miller et al. 2005).

Community colleges offer numerous services to their surrounding communities and their residents.

Additionally, the characteristics of community college students change rapidly (Miller et al., 2004). Miller et al. (2004) assert, “Students arrive on college campuses with a variety of backgrounds and experiences differing from even a decade ago” (p. 64). Student populations at community colleges tend to be similar to the ethnic and socioeconomic composition of the institution’s location (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Saunders & Bauer, 1998). Typical students often come from single-parent homes (Murray, 1997) and have more of a need to utilize student services, such as counseling (Gallagher, Gill, & Goldstrom, 1998). Additionally, students prefer to work cooperatively in group-centered activities (Murray, 1997), are proficient in the use of modern technology (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Tapscott, 1998), and are more focused on educational and career goals (Omelia, 1998) than their predecessors.

As noted previously, student populations at community colleges are ethnically diverse. According to Miller et al. (2004), two-year colleges “enroll more Native Americans, Blacks, and Hispanics than four-year universities” (p. 65). Statistics indicate that two-year schools “enroll 45 percent of all African American students taking higher education, 52 percent of all Hispanic
students, and 56 percent of all Native American students” (Saunders & Bauer, 1998, p. 14). Cohen and Brawer (2008) report, “In 2004, minority students constituted 36.5 percent of all community college enrollments nationwide, up from 20 percent in 1976” (p. 53). Access and affordability are likely reasons for the growth of minority student populations at community colleges, and future enrollment predictions suggest continued increases in these numbers (Miller et al. 2005). The number of Hispanic students now attending community colleges—a number that has more than doubled over the last three decades – gives credence to enrollment predictions that claim there will be a “shift in the racial makeup of community colleges” during the next decade (Miller et al., 2004, p. 72). Miller et al. (2005) also predict a substantial increase in traditional-age students.

In addition to an influx of minority students, community colleges have also experienced other changes in the characteristics of their students. Cohen and Brawer (2008) declare that the mean age of students attending community colleges in 2005 was 28. The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) reports that the mean age of community college attendees remained the same in 2010. According to Miller et al. (2004), within a 15-year span the percentage of non-traditional community college students over the age of 40 has decreased, while the number of traditional-age students has increased. The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac (2010) indicates that 35% of all undergraduate students who attended college in the nation in the fall of 2008 were over the age of 35; students ages 20-24 made up 39.4% of the total number of undergraduate college students in the fall of 2008. The AACC offers similar data, indicating that 46% of students attending community colleges in 2009 were 21 or younger and 16% were over the age of 40.
Concerning gender, over half the students who attend community colleges are female (AACC, 2010, “Fast Facts”; Bryant, 2001; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Laanan, 2000; Saunders & Bauer, 1998). Though the “traditionally gender-differentiated fields persist” (Cohen & Brawer, 2008), more female students may attend community colleges because of the schools’ efforts to assist women in meeting and overcoming challenges to education. For example, many colleges offer day-care facilities for students who have children, counseling services, programs of study generally undertaken by women, assistance with financial aid, and other student services (AACC, 2010, “Historical Information”; Bryant, 2001).

A unique group among those attending community colleges is that of first-generation college students. In 2009, 42% of students attending a two-year college were first-generation college students (AACC, 2010, “Fast Facts”). Typically, these students have initial angst about attending college, in part because they are or feel less academically prepared than other attendees (Inman & Mays, 1999; Matthews, 1994). First-generation college students are also less likely than their peers to have taken college-preparatory courses, and they typically have lower high school grade point averages than other entering college students (Inman & Mays, 1999; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). Generally, these students are also more likely to take remedial courses than other entering students (Reeves, 2007). Apart from academics, first-generation college students also struggle with low self-esteem and self-concept issues, which affect them socially and psychologically (Pike & Kuh, 2005; Schuman, 2005). In addition, these students typically come from low socioeconomic backgrounds and tend to have their own financial and social difficulties; these tough circumstances often influence first-generation college students’ decisions concerning their education (Schuman, 2005).
A majority of community college students are non-resident commuters (AACC, 2010, “Fast Facts”; Bryant, 2001; Evelyn, 2004; Miller et al., 2004, 2005; Pascarella, 1997; Saunders & Bauer, 1998). The American Association of Community Colleges (“Fast Facts,” 2010) reports that 258 of the 987 public and 63 of the 155 independent two-year colleges offer on-campus housing. According to Bryant (2001), residence halls are not “considered critical components” (p. 87) for community colleges because a majority of students commute. Contrarily, research by Moeck, Katsinas, Hardy, and Bush (2008) indicates that “on-campus housing plays an important role at America’s 553 rural-serving community college districts” because these colleges “can offer convenience and potential savings” to students who live on campus; additionally, on-campus housing may also generate potential revenue that may positively impact the “quantity and quality of services for on-campus and commuting students” (p. 247). Despite the residence hall offerings at some colleges, students often commute because of the convenience (Saunders & Bauer, 1998). Pascarella (1997) claims that for this reason “the classroom experience is likely to be the major institutional influence on the vast majority of community college students” (p. 16). In Laanan’s (2000) study, a majority of participants chose to attend a community college because of affordability and convenience; over half of the participants in this study lived within 10 miles of the community college that they had chosen to attend. Cohen and Brawer (2008) also note that the community college primarily serves its local population. Though most community colleges offer campus activities in an effort to recruit and retain students, a majority of attendees do not participate in these activities; instead, they tend to arrive for class, attend class, and leave afterwards to complete their assignments and studying at a time and location of their choosing (Evelyn, 2004; Miller et al., 2004, 2005; Saunders & Bauer, 1998).
Traditional-age students have a propensity to attend college full-time, while non-traditional-age students often attend college on a part-time basis (Bryant, 2001; Chronicle of Higher Education, 2010; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Saunders & Bauer, 1998). “Part-time enrollment reached a high of approximately 64% of the total community college enrollment in 1997,” asserts Bryant (2001). The increase in part-time students is a result of a number of factors. Cohen and Brawer (2008) offer an explanation as to why the number of part-time students has seen a dramatic increase:

The rise in the number of part-time students between 1980 and 2002 can be attributed to many factors: the opening of non-campus colleges that enroll few full-timers; an increase in the number of students combining work and study; and an increase in the number of reverse transfers, people who may already have baccalaureate and higher degrees, to name a few. (p. 47)

Additionally, Bryant (2001) points out that “the vast majority of students (both full-time and part-time enrollees) work at least part-time, with one-half of all students working full-time” (p. 86). In a study conducted by Miller et al. (2004), 75% of respondents (n=272) reported working while attending college, and of these students, 54% worked between 11 and 35 hours each week. Saunders and Bauer (1998) claim that students’ need for convenience has altered some community colleges’ methods of operation:

[Students’] employment has ramifications for how the students experience their college—working students are short on time, and features of the college that recognize this are favorably received. Automated registration, fast-food facilities, and ample, convenient parking all result from the unique special needs of this population. (p. 14)

Certainly, part-time students face additional obstacles to completing their studies; in addition to work responsibilities, many students have family and financial obligations that create additional challenges. According to Evelyn (2004), nearly two-thirds of community college students attend
part-time; therefore, these students need additional time to complete their programs of study and/or achieve their educational goals.

Typically, most students who attend community colleges, not just those who attend part-time, face challenges to their educational goals (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Evelyn, 2004; Jenkins, 2005; Laanan, 2000; Miller et al., 2004, 2005; Saunders & Bauer, 1998). Saunders and Bauer (1998) stress that community college students have “limited time” with “multiple demands,” so “education is only one part of their life, and often not even the primary focus” (p. 15). Miller et al. (2004) found that community college students have a difficult time “balancing academic and personal” responsibilities (p. 73). Many community college students are married and have children or other dependent family members that require financial support and attention (Evelyn, 2004; Miller et al., 2005).

Furthermore, many community college attendees are “lower-ability students” in need of remediation and other academic assistance (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Cross (1971) claims that a majority of community college students “come from the lower half of the high school classes, academically and socioeconomically” (p. 7). Jenkins (2005) reports that “many new students at community colleges are not prepared for college-level work” and that” at a typical two-year college, 30 to 40 percent of first-year students enroll in precollegiate (remedial) courses” (para. 10). Additionally, non-traditional students are apprehensive and uncertain of their academic abilities; some fear that they cannot keep pace with other or younger students (Saunders & Bauer, 1998).

Affordability is a factor in some students’ decisions concerning college attendance (Miller et al., 2005). Many community college students have financial limitations and face additional obstacles that may hinder their ability to enroll in and/or attend classes (Bryant, 2001).
However, financial aid often alleviates or lessens the financial factor for students by providing a means for them to pay tuition and other costs related to attendance. According to Cohen and Brawer (2008), “62 percent of full-time students and 44 percent of the part-timers attending public two-year institutions received some form of financial aid during the 2003-04 academic year” (p. 47). The American Association of Community Colleges indicates that 46% of students attending a two-year school in 2009 received some type of financial aid, and 31% received federal assistance. Clearly, the cost of college affects students’ decisions. Laanan (2000) indicates that participants in his study chose to attend a community college because of its convenience, affordability, and ability to provide skills and social mobility for attendees.

Laanan (2000) asserts, “It is clear that students today are becoming ‘smart consumers,’ in that they are aware of the demands of a changing marketplace—both locally and globally—and of the requirement to be an active participant” (p. 32). More students are realizing the importance of attending college, and, despite the challenges, students are finding ways to attend; additionally, colleges are working with students to make the idea of attending college a reality (Miller et al., 2005). Though the list of obstacles students face is lengthy, community colleges are aware of these existing barriers to students’ educational success and often provide academic and student services, such as remedial courses, tutoring, and counseling, to assist students in overcoming these obstacles (Miller et al., 2005; Saunders & Bauer, 1998).

According to Bryant (2001), the community college provides “opportunity and access” for students to “flourish academically and personally” (p. 89). Though this statement accurately generalizes community colleges, two-year institutions must continue to meet new challenges brought on by the diversity of student populations and the changing demands of the workforce (Baum, 2010; Bryant, 2001; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Miller et al., 2004, 2005). Miller et al.
(2005) assert, “The characteristics of college students are also broadly changing, reflecting a
generational shift in experiences and thinking about services and expectations” (p. 598).

As student demographics continue to change, these “shifts in student composition [will] shape the community college missions and policies” (Bryant, 2001, p. 89). Saunders and Bauer (1998) stress that community colleges must offer more “programs tailored to meet business demands and schedules” and make certain that “offerings [are] altered as the workplace changes” (p. 15). In the future, more students will attend community colleges for academic training, rather than workforce training; additionally, future students will likely be technologically savvy and independent in their thinking (Miller et al., 2004, 2005). Furthermore, Bryant (2001) and Laanan (2000) argue that more traditional-age students will realize the worth of attending the community college prior to transferring to a four-year university, so an influx of traditional-age students is likely.

What does the future hold for community colleges and their students? The literature encourages two-year institutions to change with the times, keeping students’ and their respective communities’ needs a top priority (Baum, 2010; Bryant, 2001; Cohen & Brawer, 1972, 2008, Miller et al., 2004, 2005; Pascarella, 1997). Concerning the future, Baum (2010) warns, “Our colleges and universities must meet a diverse set of goals in the coming years . . . . It is imperative that . . . colleges rethink seriously their ways of delivering instruction and administering their organizations” (para. 6). As for the community college’s struggle to find its identity, Cohen and Brawer (1972) offer a pointed update: “The community colleges can do nothing about their lack of tradition. But they can now enhance their sense of identity by finding out for themselves what they are all about” (p. 59).
Community College Faculty

Community colleges are widely recognized as being institutions devoted to teaching (Cohen & Brawer, 1972, 2008; Kozeracki, 2002; Levin, 2003; Outcalt, 2000; Seldin, 1975; Yates, 2000). Kozeracki (2002) contends, “Since the inception of the community college at the turn of the last century, the high priority assigned to the teaching role of the faculty has been unquestioned” (p. 47). According to Outcalt (2000), “Teaching occupies a hallowed spot in community colleges” (p. 57). Additionally, Cohen and Brawer (1977) note that community college faculty “care for students, not research; for information transmission, not knowledge generation” (p. 46). However, despite the acceptance of community colleges’ devotion to instruction and the body of existing research on teaching, Outcalt (2000) claims that researchers have given “scant attention” (p. 57) to the topic of community college teaching and that literature on the subject is lacking. Nonetheless, research indicates that community college teachers understand their role as instructors, have a personal commitment to the profession, and place great emphasis on providing quality instruction and interacting with students (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Kozeracki, 2002; Outcalt, 2000). Huber (1998) states, “no doubt many faculty at community colleges were attracted to those institutions through their interest in teaching, and, indeed, two-thirds say this orientation has not changed over time” (Chapter 5, para. 3).

Community college faculty characteristics and demographics. When compared to their counterparts at other institutions, community college faculty are unique (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Unlike faculty at most four-year institutions, most community college instructors do not often conduct original research and/or write in order to be published (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Outcalt, 2000; Yates, 2000). According to Levin (2003), community college faculty claim that they spend 85% of their time teaching; comparatively, faculty at research universities report that
they spend 47% of their time teaching. However, despite Seldin’s (1975) claim that “the
traditional cornerstones of academic success—research, publication, public service, and activity
in professional societies— [have] all declined in importance” since the mid-1960s, Outcalt
(2000) argues that in recent years community college faculty have felt more pressure to publish,
in part because some faculty possess a “strong tendency . . . to emulate their four-year
counterparts” (p. 60). Additionally, Boyer’s (1990) call to revisit the role of the professoriate
and redefine scholarship has also encouraged community college instructors to reexamine their
instructional practices, conduct research, and/or publish. Huber (1998) reports that 25.5% of
community college faculty surveyed regularly engage in research activities. Though community
college faculty may feel pressured to conduct research and publish, they understand and accept
their primary role as instructors (Cohen & Brawer, 2008), and most seem satisfied with their jobs
(Huber, 1998; Palmer & Zimbler, 2000; Yates, 2000).

Research indicates that a majority of community college faculty are satisfied with their
jobs and believe they make a difference in students’ lives (Cohen, 1974; Cohen & Brawer, 2008;
Cohen and Brawer (2008) offer an explanation as to why community college faculty find
satisfaction in their jobs: “Compared with university faculty, community college instructors are
more satisfied with their salaries, the reputation of their departments, and their institutions, the
time the spend with their family, and their social relations with other faculty” (pp. 102-103).
Additionally, Yates (2000) believes that community college faculty enjoy their jobs because they
have a clear and specific purpose—to teach. Most often, their jobs do not require research or
publication (Yates, 2000). Because many of the community college instructors have taught on
the secondary level, Yates (2000) suggests that they may find satisfaction in having more
academic freedom, greater flexibility, a lighter workload, and a stronger connection with students. Yates (2000) also notes the reward of teaching: “The [students] who succeed can make a teacher feel like a million dollars” (para. 22). A study by Hardy and Laanan (2006) found that 91% of the full-time faculty members at public, 2-year colleges in the United States “indicated that they would choose an academic career if they had the opportunity to ‘do it over again’” (p. 800). “Most full-time instructional faculty and staff (90 percent) indicated that, if they were to start over, they would again choose an academic career,” claim Palmer and Zimbler (2000). According to Rosser and Townsend (2006), faculty who are satisfied with their jobs are more effective than those who are dissatisfied.

The demographics of community college faculty also make them unique when compared to their peers at four-year institutions. Huber (1998) claims that community college faculty comprise 31% of the nation’s post-secondary faculty; additionally, these faculty instruct 39% of all higher education students and 46% of first-time college attendees. Community colleges have over 300,000 faculty members, and, overall, these colleges have fewer male faculty members than universities (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Huber, 1998). However, community colleges’ vocational programs have more male faculty members than female; in contrast, faculty in the health sciences have more female than male faculty members (Palmer & Zimbler, 2000). Hereford (2000) reports that 47% of all community college faculty members are female, and the number has steadily increased over the last 20 years. Palmer and Zimbler (2000) claim that “inroads have been made in increasing the proportion of women in the full-time ranks [of community college teaching]” (p. 7). Cohen and Brawer (2008) assert that the number of full-time minority and female community college faculty has risen over the last few decades:
In 1987, 9 percent of the full-time faculty in two-year public colleges were classified as Native Americans, Asians, African-Americans, or Hispanics; a proportion that rose to 15 percent during the 1990s, and nearly 20 percent by 2003. The ratio of women climbed from 38 to 48 percent during the same period. (p. 85)

The average age of a community college instructor is 51 (Huber, 1998). “Between 1975 and 2003, the median age [of faculty] increased from just over forty to just under fifty years; the modal age went from thirty-three to fifty-five,” report Cohen and Brawer (2008). However, predictions indicate that the average age of community college faculty members will likely decrease after the large number of faculty hired in the 1960s retires in the near future; likely, replacements for retirees will be younger (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

Concerning credentials, most community college faculty members hold master’s degrees or have the necessary occupational experience to teach courses in vocational programs (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). In recent years, the number of faculty members seeking and/or obtaining advanced degrees has increased significantly (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Outcalt, 2000). Though the recent trend is for community college instructors to have pre-service training relevant to community college pedagogy, “few community college instructors [are] prepared in programs especially designed for that level of teaching. Few [have] even taken a single course describing the institution before they [assume] responsibilities in it” (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 88). According to Cohen (1976), “Community college administrators frequently complain that graduate education is inadequate to train teachers for their institutions” (p. 54).

Palmer and Zimbler (2000) found that more than 60% of community college instructional faculty are above age 45; however, the researchers also report that, despite the difference in age, younger faculty members (those under the age of 35) tend to be very similar to their older counterparts in ethnicity, gender, educational backgrounds, and teaching practices. Huber (1998)
claims that community college faculty have taught on the collegiate level a mean of 18 years (Huber, 1998). Since many community colleges began as an extension of secondary schools, some faculty members initially hired possessed secondary school teaching experience; however, this trend has changed with time (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Outcalt, 2000; Yates, 2000). Debard (1995) reports that in 1973 nearly 54% of community college faculty had taught on the secondary level; in 2005, the percentage was just above 25%. Since the 1970s, the decline in community college teachers with prior experience in secondary schools has been steady because more instructors are “coming from graduate programs, the trades, and other community colleges” (Cohen and Brawer, 2008, p. 86).

Furthermore, the number of part-time instructors at community colleges has increased since the 1960s (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Levin, 2003; Outcalt, 2000). Levin (2003) suggests that community colleges began hiring more part-time faculty in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s to meet the increasing demand for instructors brought on by rising enrollment; however, he notes that “it was not until the 1980s that part-time faculty members began to out-pace full-time numbers” (para. 5). Similarly, Outcalt (2000) explains the increasing reliance on part-time community college faculty: “Part-time faculty account for an erratically, but inexorably growing proportion of community college instructors. They formed approximately one-third of the community college professoriate in the 1960s; this figure grew to 60% in 1986, but then declined to 53% in 1992” (p. 59). During the 1990s, part-time faculty “became an overwhelming majority on many two-year campuses” (Levin, 2003, para. 5). By 2003, 63% of community college instructors were employed part-time (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

Grubb (1999) argues that many colleges use part-time faculty as a cost-effective measure; however, he claims that this practice inadvertently places much more responsibility on a
shrinking number of full-time instructors because part-time instructors are often not required to participate in faculty meetings, assigned to committees, or involved in professional development activities. Furthermore, Grubb (1999) claims many part-time instructors end up working long hours with few of the benefits associated with a full-time position, a practice he believes is damaging to part-timers’ careers. Cohen and Brawer (2008) compare part-time faculty to “migrant workers” on the farm; they are cost-effective laborers (p. 95). Levin (2003) stresses that the practice of using part-time faculty adversely can affect instructional quality, damage the institution’s reputation, and cheapen the value of education. Similarly, Clark (1988) professes great disdain for the practice of using part-time faculty: “Nothing deprofessionalizes an occupation faster and more thoroughly than the transformation of full-time posts into part-time labor” (p. 9).

During a normal work week, full-time community college instructors work approximately 47 hours; on average, they teach 4.5 courses and put in 17 hours in the classroom each week (Palmer & Zimbler, 2000). Cohen and Brawer (2008) report that most full-time faculty spend 15 to 17 hours per week in the classroom. In one week, the average community college instructor teaches over 103 students, accrues approximately 486 student contact hours, and generates over 374 college credit hours for the institution (Palmer & Zimbler, 2000). Salaries for full-time community college faculty often depend upon location and duty; two-year faculty salaries are usually higher than secondary school teachers’ pay, but are relatively lower than their counterparts in four-year universities (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Levin, 2003). Aside from instruction, community college faculty are often required to participate in institutional advancement through service and/or by sponsoring organizations, clubs, or competitive teams (Reeves, 2007). Some community colleges offer tenure to full-time faculty, and the practice for
awarding tenure differs by location and/or institution (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). More than 28% of full-time instructors surveyed by Palmer and Zimbler (2000) claim that they had additional jobs—most of which included instruction at another institution.

Comparatively, the average work week for a part-time community college instructor includes 33 hours of work; on average, part-timers spend 11 hours per week on campus, including approximately 8 hours in the classroom. Each week, part-time faculty instruct over 42 students and teach an average of two classes (Palmer & Zimbler, 2000). The pay for part-time instructors is substantially lower than full-time rates and is usually provided on a per-class basis; however, part-time faculty tend to be less involved in institutional advancement and professional activities, which are requirements for full-time faculty (Outcalt, 2000). In most cases, tenure is not afforded to part-time faculty (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Despite the lower pay and underappreciation, part-time faculty tend to be satisfied with their opportunities to teach (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Over 79% of part-timers indicated that they had additional employment, and over one-third of them had additional employment as an instructor at another institution (Palmer & Zimbler, 2000).

**Challenges and rewards of teaching at a community college.** Despite the high number of faculty who are satisfied with their faculty positions at community colleges, instructors face a variety of challenges. First, teaching remains a very guarded activity: “Teaching still is generally regarded as a solo performance; the door to the classroom is jealously guarded” (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 106). Even with the increased interest in developing the scholarship of teaching and communities of learners, many faculty adhere to the lasting traditions of education as an isolated activity (Showalter, 1999, 2003; Outcalt, 2000). Grubb (1999) claims that teachers’ isolation adversely affects their attitudes toward instruction: “Most instructors speak of
their lives and work as individual, isolated, lonely” (p. 49). In contrast, collaboration leads to
greater job satisfaction and more effective instructional practice (Grubb, 1999). Additionally,
over the years the faculty have grown more diverse and less cohesive (Outcalt, 2000).

Another challenge community college faculty face is that students are often academically
unprepared to meet the demands of collegiate-level coursework (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Huber,
1998; Kozeracki, 2002). Student diversity brings a new series of challenges to community
college faculty; today’s students have a variety of career and personal goals, and they bring with
them an assorted mix of academic skills, expectations, and beliefs (Cohen & Brawer, 2008;
Reeves, 2007). Yates (2000) offers a listing of additional stressors for community college
faculty:

Half of the professors—50.4%—said what caused them the most stress or interfered the
most with their work was their students’ lack of preparation and commitment. Other
factors were workload (46.6 percent), lack of institutional support (41.1 percent),
intradepartmental strains (35.1 percent) and interdepartmental strains (31.3 percent).
(para. 26)

Additionally, more students attend part-time and have additional responsibilities beyond
academics; therefore, their commitment to education is often less of a priority and instructors
become discouraged by seeing their students fail or drop-out instead of succeed (Cohen &
Brawer, 2008). Furthermore, demands for accountability and the push to research and/or publish
have continued to increase alongside larger class sizes and faculty responsibilities; in contrast,
faculty salaries, academic freedoms, funding, and flexibility have seemingly planed or decreased
(Cohen, 1976; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Kroll, 1994; Yates, 2000). Even though such challenges
often present difficulties for community college faculty, many find satisfaction in the positive
aspects and rewards that accompany the job. Cohen and Brawer (2008) assert that most faculty
“find the community college a personally satisfying environment, welcoming their role and becoming highly involved with their teaching” (p. 82).

Research indicates that community college faculty enjoy a number of rewarding facets of their jobs (Cohen, 1974; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Huber, 1998; Kozeracki, 2002; Park, 1971; Yates, 2000). According to Yates (2000), many two-year faculty enjoy interacting and working with their students, rising to meet the academic challenge that accompanies teaching, and having the choice to teach their personal interests. A great reward for many instructors is guiding their students to success—whether in the classroom or toward a certain career choice (Kozeracki, 2002). Kozeracki (2002) touts the community college faculty members’ “[interest] in having their colleges play a stronger role in shaping the personal development of their students” (p. 51). Similarly, Cohen (1974) notes that faculty satisfaction is often a result of positive teacher-student interaction: “Community college instructors are professional teachers and see interaction with students as their main purpose” (p. 373). Likewise, because many community college faculty reside near the college in which they teach, they often feel a bond with the students and feel that they are contributing to the good of their surrounding community through continued education and service (Yates, 2000). Finally, faculty who are most satisfied with their jobs at two-year schools enjoy teaching (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Huber, 1998; Levin, 2003; Outcalt, 2000; Yates, 2000).

Furthermore, two-year colleges that have embraced the movement toward a more student-centered approach to teaching and learning (Barr & Tagg, 1995) “have begun designating themselves Learning Colleges in a hubristic attempt to call attention to their having adopted many of [these] instructional innovations” (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 200). Echoing the work
of O’Banion (1997), Cohen and Brawer (2008) provide a summary of the characteristics of the learning college:

Overall, learning colleges are realms (not tied by place and time) where diverse students find opportunities to grow academically and personally. The faculty become facilitators of the learning process, open to new methods and technologies now available. These learning colleges are responsive to workforce needs, lifelong learners, and nearly everything else that learners demand. They document assessment, maintain accountability, and attempt to please all stakeholders. (p. 201)

A central concept of the learning college movement is that faculty will respond to students’ needs by altering their instructional practices to make learning more practical and engaging; however, the process of change is slow, and generally “community college students are less engaged in college than are students at four-year institutions, a phenomenon certainly related to the nonresidential nature of most community colleges and the external constraints that occupy students’ time” (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 202). Cohen and Brawer (2008) remind educators that “although each new instructional medium . . . has forced educators to examine their teaching practices, none alone has revolutionized teaching” (p. 217). A student-centered approach to teaching also emphasizes assessment of student learning.

According to Palmer and Zimbler (2000), faculty use a variety of assessments to measure student learning. They report that 70% of instructors use multiple-choice examinations, and 60% require their students to create and deliver presentations as part of their course requirements. Fewer faculty (54%) used written responses or essays as a primary assessment tool, and 49% assign research papers as part of their course requirements. Though 38% allowed peer review of assignments, only 31% required students to review, revise, and resubmit drafts of written assignments. Class size and/or workload may contribute to faculty members’ decisions to require less written work from students (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Jaschik (2007) claims that
composition teachers instruct a mean of 94 students in one semester, which makes for a large number of essays to grade within a single academic term.

Generally, community college faculty have a passion for instruction and enjoy working with their students (Cohen, 1974; Huber, 1998; Palmer & Zimbler, 2000; Yates, 2000). Because two-year colleges do not often require their faculty to conduct research or publish, instructors are able to focus more on teaching and interacting with their students (Cohen, 1974; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Levin, 2003; Outcalt, 2000; Palmer & Zimbler, 2000; Yates, 2000). Despite slight demographic changes, community college faculty today have similarities to veteran two-year instructors (Huber, 1998; Palmer & Zimbler, 2000). Furthermore, faculty members seem receptive to new ideas and the move toward student-centered instruction, but the change is occurring slowly (Cohen and Brawer, 2008).

Scholarship of Teaching

In Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate, Boyer (1990) challenged higher education’s leaders and instructors to “rethink what it means to be a scholar” (p. 16). His challenge encouraged serious reflection about the lack of balance among the teaching, research, and service components many higher education institutions require of their faculty. Addressing the existing debate directly, Boyer (1990) proclaimed that higher education must move beyond the “tired old ‘teaching versus research’ debate” (p. 16) and emphasize the importance of teaching by reconsidering the term “scholarship.” His proposal suggests that the scholarship should be broadened to include “discovery, integration, application, and teaching” (p. 16). Acceptance of this broadened definition of scholarship would afford faculty more freedom to focus on teaching and would lessen the restrictive requirements and pressure to conduct research and publish results in order to gain tenure (Healey, 2000). Subsequent chapters include Boyer’s
assertion that effective teachers not only possess content knowledge, but also must remain aware of current developments within their disciplines, continuously seek to improve their practice to help students learn, and share their work to become a community of scholars. Boyer’s text includes a brief explanation of each of the four functions of scholarship; the remaining chapters focus on quantitative research results and further commentary explaining the need to rethink the focus of higher education. In addition, the text’s appendices include the results of The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching’s National Survey of Faculty for the year 1989.

**Evolving Definition**

Before the publication of Boyer’s (1990) work, Eble (1988) argued that teaching has not received the respect it deserves and that “improving teaching has been a chronic concern of higher education as well as individual institutions” (p. 217). Although Eble did not use the term “scholarship of teaching,” he expressed similar ideas about the importance and duty of teaching: “Being a teacher involves all these things: cooperating in many ways and at many points of affecting learning; affiliating with the profession outside one’s institutional and subject matter domains; and learning from one another” (p. 217). Since the publication of Boyer’s work, literature broaching the scholarship of teaching has grown vastly (Fink, 2003; Healey, 2000; Hutchings & Shulman, 1999). The work has also influenced the ways in which many higher education institutions view and value teaching (Healey, 2000). However, despite its influence, no clear or widely accepted definition exists for the term “scholarship of teaching.”

Within his text, Boyer (1990) provides a basis for the scholarship of teaching by suggesting that both teaching and research should be considered a form of scholarship; others have expanded his suggestion and have attempted to define or add to existing definitions of the term. Hutchings and Shulman (1999) claim that since 1990 “the scholarship of teaching has
been a catalyst for thought and action” (p. 12), and Cross and Steadman (1996) assert that there are “multiple scholarships of teaching” (p. 28). Parilla (1987) argues that many institutions see themselves as either research institutions or teaching institutions:

In American higher education we have come dangerously close to divorcing these two dimensions [scholarly learning and the teaching of students] into the isolated enterprise of basic research and relegated it to the university; on the other hand, we have come close to insulating the craft of teaching from the scholarship that nourishes it, by identifying certain colleges, community colleges in particular, as “teaching” institutions, with the implication that scholarship is irrelevant to teaching excellence. (p. 111)

There appears not only to be a lack of consistency among scholars’ ideas concerning a definition for the “scholarship of teaching,” but there also appears to be a lack of uniformity in how scholars use the term in the literature and within different subject areas (Huber & Hutchings, 2005). A growing amount of literature expands Boyer’s (1990) initial idea, and the definition for the term “scholarship of teaching” continues to evolve amidst debate (Boshier, 2009; Healey, 2000; Kreber, 2002; Trigwell, Martin, Benjamin, & Prosser, 2000).

Shulman (1999) proposes that the scholarship of teaching is more than acknowledgment of and respect for good teaching. In addition to effective instruction, Shulman (1993, 1999) claims that teaching is scholarship when it becomes public, is subject to review by peers and stakeholders, and is useful to members of the educational community. However, many instructors remain private about their practices because they are intimidated, apprehensive, or uncertain (Palmer, 1993). Shulman (1993, 1999) further asserts that teaching is not widely recognized as part of scholarship because many of its practitioners, past and present, have neither shared their research nor been forthcoming about their effective pedagogical practices; the literature, though growing in quantity and quality, is currently insufficient to support a scholarship of teaching. He strongly urges teachers to be a part of a “teaching community”:
“... if we wish to see greater recognition and reward attached to teaching, we must change the status of teaching from private to community property” (p. 6).

In addition, Shulman (1993) suggests that the scholarship of teaching should include the creation of artifacts. He asserts, “... if pedagogy is to become an important part of scholarship, we have to provide it with the same kind of documentation and transformation [as those that exist in other fields]” (p. 7). Moreover, Shulman (1999) envisions that the future will bring change because the scholarship of teaching will move forward and provide a “way of recording, displaying, examining, investigating, and building more powerful pedagogies for dealing with the challenges presented by the pathologies of learning” (p. 15).

Huber and Hutchings (2005) agree that the scholarship of teaching will transform the field of education because it will make public the research and resources that contribute to educators’ effectiveness. The authors assert that the scholarship of teaching will provide an ever-growing wealth of information, and they advocate that educators and stakeholders will greatly benefit from the sharing of this knowledge through the creation of a “teaching commons, an emergent conceptual space for exchange and community” (p. 1). In addition to presenting a brief overview of the scholarship of teaching’s evolution, the authors acknowledge that the definition for the scholarship of teaching is evolving and expansive; they provide a metaphorical representation that likens the scholarship of teaching to a large canopy under which much varied, yet related, work is completed. They state that the scholarship of teaching is simultaneously built upon “classroom inquiry, synthesizing ideas from different fields, and the improvement of practice” (p. 4).

Huber and Hutchings (2005) also argue that higher education has undergone tremendous and expansive change over the last several decades. Because of the changing demographics of
college students, the advancement of technology, and the ever-changing workforce demands placed on higher education institutions, new methods of teaching and learning are at the forefront of educational improvement plans. The authors conclude that higher education institutions must acknowledge and embrace such changes so that the field of higher education will continue to develop the scholarship of teaching and learning until “college teaching [begins] to look more like other professional fields, with a literature and communities that study and advance critical aspects of practice” (p. 13).

Developing a scholarship of teaching relies upon the action and dedication of higher education practitioners. Kemp and O’Keefe (2003) support the claim that effective teachers have a desire to improve their practice: “. . . faculty members, in general, want to be regarded as excellent teachers, recognize the synergistic relationship between teaching and research, and are willing to improve” (p. 112). However, Grossman and McDonald (2008) argue that research in teaching will only advance when the field develops and accepts a common vocabulary: “The field of teaching still lacks powerful ways of parsing teaching that provide us with the analytic tools to describe, analyze, and improve teaching” (p. 185). Furthermore, they believe that future research should include a broadened view of teaching—a view that moves beyond a single focus on content knowledge. Grossman and McDonald (2008) claim that teacher preparation programs must change their curriculums and provide future educators with the pedagogical and cognitive skills necessary to be effective classroom teachers. They predict that the development of a “framework for parsing teaching could dramatically transform both the field of research on teaching and the enterprise of teacher education” (p. 188). In addition, the authors suggest the need for researchers and practitioners from different disciplines to collaborate on and develop a common protocol for future research in higher education.
Trigwell, Martin, Benjamin, and Prosser (2000) also declare that multiple and developing definitions for the scholarship of teaching exist. The authors argue that “within the academic community there exists still only a vague notion of what scholarship in teaching actually is” (p. 156). Their study first sets out to provide a working definition for the term in question. Similar to previous scholars’ definitions (Boyer, 1990; Cross & Steadman, 1996; Healey, 2000; Huber & Hutchings, 2005; Shulman, 1993, 1999), the model for the scholarship of teaching that Trigwell et al. (2000) suggest includes a knowledge of the available literature regarding teaching and learning within a specific discipline and an ability to amass and share documentation related to the effectiveness of existing pedagogical and content-related theories of teaching and learning. In addition, the researchers conclude with a model of the scholarship of teaching that “offers a framework for making transparent the process of making learning possible”: “reflection, inquiry, evaluation, documentation, and communication” (p. 156). Their qualitative study focuses on a sample of 20 Australian university academic staff members’ understanding of the scholarship of teaching. Trigwell et al. asked two questions: “1) What do you think the scholarship of teaching is? and 2) Think of a time when you or someone demonstrated scholarship in their teaching. What was done?” (p.158). Using a phenomenographic approach, the researchers determined five categories of description for the scholarship of teaching: 1) knowing the literature related to teaching and learning; 2) improving instruction by using the knowledge from the literature; 3) reflection; 4) connecting the related literature to a specific discipline; and 5) amassing and sharing the related literature within a specific discipline. The results stress the knowledge and use of existing content and pedagogy-based literature and the importance of creating new knowledge and sharing it with other practitioners. Trigwell et al. indicate that teachers who remain cognizant of the literature related to teaching and learning are more likely to reflect on
their own practice and to consult with colleagues concerning aspects of teaching and learning.

The researchers sum up their model of the scholarship of teaching with a simple observation: “It is to make transparent how we have made learning possible” (p. 156).

**Scholarship of Teaching within Disciplines**

Martin, Benjamin, Prosser and Trigwell (1999) present a definition of the scholarship of teaching that complements those previously discussed, but places a focus on the development of the scholarship of teaching within a particular discipline. The authors suggest that the scholarship of teaching requires interaction between scholars who contribute to the body of knowledge in teaching and learning, personal reflection on teaching practice and student learning within specific disciplines, and discussion of existing and evolving ideas concerning theory, practice, and content knowledge. Similarly, Angelo and Cross (1993) emphasize the sharing of scholarship among colleagues within disciplines and/or professional organizations:

> It appears that once teachers begin to raise questions about their own teaching and to collect data about its impact on learning, there is a self-generated pressure to raise questions and discuss finding with colleagues . . . . What is missing, we believe, is the creation of more formal, institutionally recognized groups that are engaged in continuing intellectual exploration of research on teaching and its application in the classroom. Our finding that teaching goals are clearly associated with the discipline taught suggests a natural solution . . . . Departments and professional associations are the logical “homes” for next steps in Classroom Research and Classroom Assessment. (p. 382-382)

Likewise, Huber and Morreale (2002) argue that the scholarship of teaching and learning strengthens through its growth within particular disciplines: “Across the academy, ‘regular’ faculty are taking systematic interest in curriculum, classroom teaching, and the quality of student learning . . . . The scholarship of teaching and learning is taking shape within the extraordinary diversity of disciplinary cultures” (Situating the Scholarship, para. 1-3).
Healey (2000) also supports the idea of developing the scholarship of teaching within the disciplines. Building on previous definitions (Boyer, 1999; Shulman, 1993, 1999; Hutchings & Shulman, 1999, Martin et al., 1999), Healey (2000) asserts that the scholarship of teaching includes familiarity with content knowledge and current developments within the field, critical self-reflection concerning teaching practices, and assessment of student learning. Furthermore, he argues that “the scholarship of teaching in higher education is not divorced from the content of the discipline being taught” (p. 173). Instead, he believes the scholarship of teaching can aid in the discovery, creation, and spread of knowledge within a discipline. Healey and Jenkins (2003) offer five reasons that the scholarship of teaching should occur within specific disciplines:

1. Academic instructors are loyal to their own specific disciplines.
2. Teaching differs within each discipline.
3. Instructors must understand the content of their discipline(s) in order to develop curriculum.
4. Each discipline contains a unique culture and set of concerns.
5. Research is important in each discipline.

Shulman (1993) also stresses the importance of scholarship within the disciplines. He notes that in order to develop an effective “teaching community,” “we need to make the review, examination, and support of teaching part of the responsibility of the disciplinary community” (p. 6).

Young (2010) claims that a recent trend in research concerning college teaching has as its focus a discipline-specific pedagogy; however, the author notes that prior to this recent trend, most research on teaching and learning has “been dominated by a generic approach” (p. 116).
Young (2010) attributes the change in research focus to “an increased recognition of diversity and difference” (p. 116) among higher education instructors and students. In addition, the author believes that “the perception that teaching issues are discipline-specific is widespread and . . . remains significant in terms of reaching practitioners and holding their interests” (p. 116). Similarly, Young (2010) stresses that discipline-based research is needed because it “can provide understanding of the particular significance of more generic issues” (p. 122) and will “support academics in applying generically valid ideas to the particular context in which they work” (p. 116). Though a discipline-specific approach to teaching is favored by the author, she also suggests and supports a more “sophisticated mapping of teaching and learning across the disciplines” (p 115).

Chin (2002) proposes a question in the title of his study: “Is There a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Teaching Sociology?” To answer the question and prove the merit of articles published in the professional journal Teaching Sociology, which Chin edited from 1997 to 1999, the author takes on the task of reviewing all articles published between 1984 and 1999 to determine if these articles have contributed to the growth of the scholarship of teaching in the field of sociology and to decide if these works are worthy of being considered scholarship. After presenting the evolution of the scholarship of teaching and learning, Chin (2002) uses the ideas of Shulman (1999) and Hutchings (2000) as a framework for his discussion. Chin (2002) argues that the works published in Teaching Sociology between 1984 and 1999 “should be recognized as scholarship” (p. 60) because they meet Shulman’s (1999) criteria: they follow standards of rigor within a specific discipline, they are peer-reviewed, they build upon prior knowledge, and they have been shared publicly. Furthermore, Chin (2002) joins Hutchings (2000) in arguing that the scholarship of teaching is “deeply embEd.D.ed in the discipline” (p. 7). Chin (2002)
argues that the scholarship of teaching improves instructors’ pedagogical understanding and practice: “Unlike much basic research, the scholarship of teaching and learning has making the practice more effective as one of its explicit goals” (p. 55). Though Chin (2002) admits that academic administrators and other evaluative or review committees often discredit publications devoted to teaching, he concludes that such practices will change as the acceptance of the scholarship of teaching and learning expands. Chin (2002) asserts that the scholarship of teaching and learning in the field of sociology “has emerged as an area of study with a growing and committed community” (p. 55).

Using the discipline of geography as an exemplar, Healey (2000) also acknowledges the challenges associated with and the importance of developing a scholarship of teaching within a specific discipline. He admits that developing a scholarship of teaching is difficult, but necessary to establish a core of content and pedagogical knowledge beneficial to the academic community at large. Henkel (2005) contends that academic disciplines provide a sense of identity for their instructors, and, in turn, those who share these characteristics form a strong set of beliefs that become difficult to challenge or change. Similarly, Becher and Trowler (2001) declare, “Attempts to tackle issues related to teaching and learning that are not informed by an understanding of the diversity of academic tribes and their territories are likely to prove problematic” (p. 123). Healey (2003) uniquely summarizes the continuing debate concerning the scholarship of teaching: “Good teaching, like good research, is multi-dimensional, difficult, and contextual” (p. 183).

Witman et al. (2007) conducted a study to determine how particular disciplines have embraced the scholarship of teaching and learning since 1990. A group of fourteen graduate researchers, all participants in a selective graduate program called Preparing Future Faculty
Fellows, joined their professor to explore the integration of the scholarship of teaching and learning into various academic disciplines. The researchers sought to discover if discipline-specific journals included articles on the scholarship of teaching and learning. In addition, Witman et al. (2007) sought to determine if and how the scholarship of teaching and learning was being recognized at conferences. The researchers divided into four distinctive groups representing a variety of disciplines found within the categories of the humanities, natural sciences, social sciences, and the professions. To determine how the scholarship of teaching and learning was being used by the disciplines, each group utilized computer-based searches and informal faculty interviews to compile a list of North American professional organizations associated with the disciplines in each of the four categories. In addition, these researchers interviewed attendees at a meeting of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in October, 2004, to add to the list of professional organizations and/or publications.

Next, Witman et al. (2007) used the Internet to find and analyze these professional organizations’ web sites to compile a list of conferences, publications, and other artifacts that might contain references to the scholarship of teaching and learning. After compiling a list that included 20 individual disciplines from the four general categories, each group analyzed the web sites, documents, and artifacts to determine incorporation of the scholarship of teaching and learning within the disciplines. Each group summarized their findings.

Witman et al. (2007) conclude that the disciplines within the humanities have been “inconsistent and slow” (Discussion, para. 1) to develop a scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL); however, the authors claim that these “disciplines are beginning to acknowledge the value of SoTL” and are slowly including references to SoTL “in conferences, publications, and
 Similarly, disciplines within the social sciences are also slow to develop the SoTL. In contrast, the researchers conclude that, despite the lack of SoTL recognition at professional conferences, the disciplines within the natural sciences “have made a concerted effort to improve teaching quality, and are well positioned to increase involvement in the SoTL research” (Witman et al., 2007, Discussion, para. 3). Likewise, disciplines in the professions have “become a growing area of concentration” for SoTL (Witman et al., 2007, Discussion, para. 4). Witman et al. (2007) conclude that the humanities and social sciences appear to be “less attached” (Conclusions, para. 1) to the scholarship of teaching and learning than the professions and natural sciences. The researchers acknowledge the limitations of the study, particularly citing the number of disciplines and types of publications and artifacts utilized. Witman et al. (2007) recommend that further research include input form higher education administrators from a wider range of disciplines; furthermore, they recommend that future studies focus on the use of the scholarship of teaching and learning in faculty hiring, tenure, and promotion practices.

Kreber (2002) also agrees that the scholarship of teaching and learning should begin within the disciplines; however, she argues that higher education will only begin to fully embrace the idea when faculty begin researching and sharing the teaching and learning that occurs within their disciplines with their peers. Kreber (2002) asserts:

Discussions on the issues associated with the scholarship of teaching need perhaps to begin on each campus but should not end there. Each discipline has its own scholarly associations, with annual meetings, where traditionally the advancement of the knowledge in the discipline has been the focus. However, if faculty in disciplines other than education begin to build a career around exploring the teaching and learning dimension of their discipline, perhaps on a contractual and cyclical basis as proposed by Boyer (1990), and are encouraged to present their work at associations affiliated with their discipline, we witness a true shift in what counts as scholarship in academe . . . . Still for the scholarship of teaching to be granted equal recognition to research in the
future, discussions now need to continue, and perhaps focus, at the level of disciplinary associations. (p. 165)

Scholarship of Teaching in a Shifting Paradigm of Learning

Hutchings and Shulman (1999) claim that the scholarship of teaching is “a condition for excellent teaching” (p. 14). Effective teachers are not only focused on increasing their own content and pedagogical knowledge and/or improving their practices, but they are also concerned with creating meaningful learning experiences and increasing student success. Building on the ideas of Barr and Tagg (1995), Fink (2003) argues that higher education institutions must evaluate and change their methods of teaching to provide students with significant learning experiences.

Many colleges and universities are not adequately meeting the needs of their students because they continue to operate with a teacher-centered focus instead of a learner-centered focus (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Cross, 1971, 1999; Fink, 2003). Fink proposes a new taxonomy of learning and encourages instructors to change the ways that they teach in order to provide more meaningful learning opportunities for students. Within this context, Fink addresses the scholarship of teaching and learning; he indicates that faculty need strong institutional and administrative support in order to improve their teaching and affect learning. Fink (2003) presents a “multidimensional model of institutional effectiveness” (p. 200), which stresses the need for effective communication and collaboration among all stakeholders. Fink argues that teachers will likely improve their instruction if higher education institutions support faculty by providing changes in policies and procedures that allow teachers to focus on their instruction, developing centers for teaching and learning where faculty may engage in meaningful professional development activities, rewarding successful and innovative instructors, and
changing the academic culture by promoting a learner-centered philosophy of teaching and learning. In addition, Fink calls on scholars and teachers to write and share articles that “include information about important situational factors, the types of learning being promoted, the particular teaching and learning activities involved and how they were assembled into an effective strategy, and the feedback and assessment procedures used” (p. 233). The author believes that improving on the traditions of the past will lead to greater teaching and learning in the future: “. . . the real task for teachers is to learn about the new ideas, identify what is good in the traditions of their own particular discipline or realm of teaching, and then create a new form of teaching that combines the best of both” (p. 253).

Evaluating the Scholarship of Teaching

Just as defining the scholarship of teaching proves difficult, so does the task of evaluating it. Boyer (1990) argues for multiple methods of evaluation, including student surveys, document analysis, and judgment of artistic performance and/or written works. He expresses that evaluation should not be rigid; instead, it should be “systematic, but flexible” (p. 41). Furthermore, Boyer suggests that higher education institutions move from their current practice of using publication productivity as the primary measurement used to award tenure and/or promotion. Instead, he asserts “that colleges and universities develop . . . creativity contracts—an arrangement by which faculty members define their professional goals for a three-to-five-year period, possibly shifting from one principal scholarly focus to another” (p. 48). The goal with such an evaluative tool is to broaden the scope of evaluation to include the multi-faceted roles of teaching and learning under the broadened range of the scholarship of teaching. By reviewing the entire gamut of a faculty member’s contributions and/or accomplishments, those making a
judgment on his or her productivity, tenure, or promotion could focus more on individual strengths and talents rather than one “yardstick by which success is measured” (p. 43).

Glassick, Huber, and Maerof (1997) advocate a broadening of the definition of scholarship to include teaching. The authors suggest that scholarship can exist in several forms and offer six criteria to be used in evaluating all types of scholarship; they argue that scholarship must include: goals, preparation, methodology, results, presentation, and reflection. The authors stress that the act of scholarship should be performed respectfully to ensure that the standard of excellence is maintained.

Like Glassick et al. (1997), Bain (2004) believes that the act of teaching is a form of scholarship: “A teacher should think about teaching (in a single session or an entire course) as a serious intellectual act, a kind of scholarship, a creation” (p. 169). He metaphorically compares the evaluation of teaching to an instructor developing a case before his or her peers. He argues that the ideal case for teaching would include written evidence in the form of artifacts associated with instruction and assessment. Bain’s main premise is that an instructor could best argue the success of his or her teaching by writing a narrative explaining the success of the course and the progress of his or her students. The author specifies that the result of teaching “becomes the pedagogical equivalent of the scholarly paper, a document intended to capture the scholarship of teaching” (p. 169). Bain suggests that higher education institutions consider such evaluative measures to assess faculty.

**Classroom Instruction and Management**

Though possessing strong content knowledge, developing positive relationships with students, and participating in the scholarship of teaching all contribute to effective teaching, the ability to provide meaningful and impactful instruction is arguably the most important
characteristic of effective instructors. Effective teachers recognize that students have diverse backgrounds, different needs, and unique learning styles (Bain, 2004; Barr & Tagg, 1995; Chickering, 2000; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Cross, 1971, 1999; Stronge, 2007; Tomlinson, 2000). In order to meet the needs of these diverse students and optimize learning, teachers use multiple instructional strategies and provide various learning opportunities and assessments (Anderson & Carta-Falsa, 2002; Fink, 2003; McKeachie, 2002; Stronge, 2007).

A Shifting Paradigm: Student-centered Teaching and Learning

Education is undergoing a change in the teaching and learning paradigm; because there is a movement in higher education for instruction to become more student-centered, teacher-centered instruction is quickly becoming an outdated form of teaching (Al-Bataineh & Brooks, 2003; Bain, 2004; Barr & Tagg, 1995; Brint, 2008; Cross, 1971, 1999; Fink, 2003; Kember, 2009; Martin, Prosser, Trigwell, Ramsden, & Benjamin, 2000; Reinsmith, 1994; Weimer, 2003). Effective teachers are not only providing instruction, but are also making greater efforts to use a variety of instructional methods to increase learning among students (Anderson & Carta-Falsa, 2002; Bain, 2004; Wenglinsky, 2000). Teachers are utilizing methods that require students to become more than attentive listeners; both are working together to become “active, collaborative, and exploratory” (p. 134) participants in the learning cycle (Anderson & Carta-Falsa, 2002).

Barr and Tagg (1995) argue that the traditional method of teaching is no longer effective, due in part to the change in student demographics, technological advancement, and repeated shortfalls in educational funding. The authors assert that the traditional “Instruction Paradigm” (p. 13) is highly restrictive, focuses primarily on teaching and research, and fails to provide students with meaningful learning opportunities. In contrast, the authors support the “Learning Paradigm” (p. 13), which places emphasis on student learning, encourages teachers and students
to share the responsibility for learning, and challenges colleges to change their purpose from simply transmitting information “to creat[ing] environments and experiences that bring students to discover and construct knowledge from themselves” (p. 15). The authors also encourage higher education institutions to consider changes in their rigid schedules, class times, and program offerings so that more students may take part and succeed in college. Barr and Tagg encourage higher education administrators to remove such “barriers” (p. 20) and to become more flexible:

The Learning Paradigm prescribes no one “answer” to the question of how to organize learning environments and experiences. It supports any learning method and structure that works, where “works” is defined in terms of learning outcomes, not as the degree of conformity to an ideal classroom archetype. In fact, the Learning Paradigm requires a constant search for new structures and methods that work better for student learning and success, and expects even these to be redesigned continually and to evolve over time. (p. 20)

Flexibility paired with a student-centered focus and multiple teaching strategies leads to student engagement, learning, and “teacher effectiveness” (Stronge, 2007, p. 67).

Chickering and Gamson (1987) present seven effective practices for improving undergraduate education. The practices emphasize student engagement and call for faculty to interact with their students on multiple levels using a variety of techniques. The practices stress the importance of “activity, cooperation, diversity, expectations, interaction, and responsibility” (Chickering & Gamson, 1987, p. 4). According to the authors, effective teachers promote active and cooperative learning activities, make the best use of instructional time, have high expectations for students’ success, provide multiple assessment strategies followed by prompt feedback, and offer a variety of learning opportunities to meet diverse students’ learning styles. Stronge (2007) concurs, stating that “a teacher’s preparation, relationships with students, and classroom management techniques are inextricably linked with classroom success” (p. 67). In
addition, Chickering and Gamson not only charge teachers and students with the responsibility of improving undergraduate education, but also encourage higher education administrators, state and local legislators, and other stakeholders to be active participants in creating positive change in higher education institutions.

In 1971, Cross predicted that higher education would be forced to change its philosophy and practices in order to meet the demands of a “new clientele” (p. 32). She cited the influx of diverse college students and their varying skill levels as catalysts for change in educational and administrative practices. Cross noted that the group of “New Students” (p. 32) included non-traditional students who were granted access to college via open-door policies; she claimed that many of these students arrived at an academic disadvantage because of their lack of preparation. However, she suggested that colleges should combat these deficiencies by providing the academic and skill-building programs necessary to prepare these students for success. Colleges must become flexible in scheduling and offer myriad courses at times and places that are convenient for these students (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Chickering, 2000; Cross, 1971). Cross (1973) claims that education must change to meet the needs of its clientele—its learners:

A concept of education for all the people requires new methods of delivery to take education into prisons, homes, and industrial plants. We need new measures of competency that acknowledge that what is learned rather than how it is learned is the true measure of education. And we need new flexibilities that can begin to make lifelong learning a reality. (p. 33)

Higher education professionals have a responsibility to provide students with coursework focusing on the development of vocational and professional skills (Cross, 1971). Cross’s prediction about the change in student population has come to pass, and higher education continues its struggle to meet the various challenges such change has produced. Weimer (2003) agrees that “many traditional instructional approaches respond ineffectively to the learning needs
and life situations of today’s college students” (p. 49). The challenges higher education professionals now face include diversifying instruction to meet the needs of a varied group of learners who have different backgrounds, learning styles, and expectations (Anderson & Carta-Falsa, 2002; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Stronge, 2007).

Though the literature includes documentation of higher education’s shift to a learning-centered approach to instruction, Weimer (2003) suggests that too much focus is placed on student engagement and active learning strategies while other important elements of a learner-centered approach to teaching are overlooked. According to Weimer, a “commitment to learning . . . should change how [teachers] handle central elements of instruction like course design and assessment, and it should significantly change what teachers do when they conduct class” (p. 50). She further argues that a focus on active-learning practices often means the neglect of necessary assessment and an erosion of students’ sense of responsibility. To combat these issues and ensure the effectiveness of learner-centered teaching, Weimer recommends “Five Key Changes to Practice”:

1. In responsible ways, faculty should share decision-making with students.
2. Teaching should support student agency.
3. Faculty should create learning environments that motivate students to accept responsibility for learning.
4. Teachers should build their students’ knowledge base and develop their learning skills and learner self-awareness.
5. Evaluation activities should be used to promote learning and to develop assessment skills. (pp. 50-53)
Researching new instructional methods, planning extensively, and aligning teaching goals with learning outcomes increase teaching effectiveness (Stronge, 2007). Weimer (2003) believes that many instructors attempt to implement new strategies too quickly, and ultimately these techniques fail to yield the desired results; to garner success, teachers should complete preliminary research on new teaching strategies and should implement them incrementally. In addition, Weimer suggests that institutions should make such transitions slowly and should focus on target groups, courses, or programs: “Although learner-centered approaches are appropriate everywhere in the curriculum, their application in a general education curriculum holds special promise” (p. 54). Arguably, success with a learner-centered approach to teaching in the general education curriculum might inspire instructional reform throughout the institution (Kember, 2009; Weimer, 2003).

**Outcomes-based Approach to Teaching and Learning**

Because accrediting agencies, legislators, and other stakeholders are placing greater demands and higher accountability measures on higher education institutions, colleges are moving toward a “learning-outcomes” approach to education (Bresciani, 2006; Brint, 2008). In an effort to combat surmounting criticisms and prove their effectiveness, many colleges have succumbed to the demands of the “learning-outcomes movement” (Brint, 2008, p. 1). Brint claims that higher education’s adoption of the learning-outcomes approach is a reaction to the dismal findings of the Spelling Commission’s Report (2006) and the “growing opposition of large parts of the American public to continuing business as usual in higher education” (Brint, 2008, p. 2). The author predicts that the learning-outcomes movement is “idealistic” (p. 2) and will further diminish the autonomy of higher education institutions, especially if government entities impose more requirements, such as standardized testing. Instead, Brint (2008) asserts
that educators can avoid “bureaucratic-managerial control” (p. 3) by embracing and performing their duties as professionals. He also challenges institutions to stress professionalism in their teacher-preparation programs, increase the rigor of their hiring process, consistently evaluate their instructors, take student evaluations seriously, and provide adequate professional development programs to ensure that employees are performing at the optimal level.

Bresciani (2006) provides several examples of institutions who have successfully implemented an “outcomes-based” approach to teaching and learning. Though the importance of measuring students’ learning has not changed, the methods of measurement have undergone significant alteration and/or revision since the inception of higher education (Bresciani, 2006). Paralleling higher education’s move toward a “learner-centered” (Bresciani, 2006, p. 10) approach to teaching and learning, teachers are creating new or modifying existing assessment tools to measure learning. Likewise, accrediting agencies have adopted standards that require higher education institutions to prove that they are learner-centered:

In 2003, all seven regional accrediting agencies in the United States agreed on principles of good practice that . . . emphasize the importance of the involvement of faculty, co-curricular specialists, and all university stakeholders in the entire process for improving higher education and, in particular, for improving student learning.” (Bresciani, 2007, p. 10)

Discussing the learner-centered institution, Bresciani (2006) provides an overview of outcomes-based assessment and stresses the importance of using such assessments to review institutional programs. The author provides a set of nine criteria necessary for program review and a set of key questions to guide implementation of an outcomes-based assessment program review. Both the criteria and questions emphasize the importance of creating a strong mission statement, determining clear goals, establishing and maintaining effective communication, being transparent throughout the process, and working collectively to overcome barriers. Bresciani
(2006) asserts that “outcomes-based assessment and its pervasive practice are necessary to the improvement of higher education” (p. 11). The author’s recommendations address the need for higher education institutions to be more mindful of the need for change; she suggests that colleges must change their current practices to meet the diverse needs of their students, create meaningful assessments, “emphasize the connection of curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, and faculty development to delivery and evaluation of student learning” (p. 146), and alter financial management practices to ensure productive programs receive adequate funding. Higher education institutions must provide sufficient learning opportunities for students, and effective teachers must specifically determine the knowledge and skills they expect their students to obtain (Baiocco & DeWaters, 1998; Barr & Tagg, 1995, Fink, 2003).

**Planning for Instruction**

Arguably, the greatest determining factor in the success of teaching and learning is instruction (Bain, 2004; Marzano, 2007; Stronge, 2007). Effective teachers establish meaningful learning goals and provide multiple pathways for students to achieve success (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Eble, 1988; Fink, 2003; McKeachie, 2002; Stronge, 2007). A primary part of teaching is planning for instruction and preparing learning activities that lead students to understanding. Effective teachers adequately allocate instruction time to include multiple activities that optimize student interaction and lead to learning (Bain, 2004; Covino & Iwanicki, 1996; Marzano, 2007; Stronge, 2007). Bain (2004) reports that the effective teachers change class activities at ten-to-twelve minute intervals. Walberg (1984) indicates that there is a positive correlation between the amount of time students are actively engaged in a learning activity and student learning. Effective teachers plan their class sessions so that every moment is used efficiently. In addition, effective instructors arrange class sessions to include a variety of activities where students are
actively engaged; interaction between instructor and students increases learning and students’ satisfaction with the learning process (Anderson & Carta-Falsa, 2002; Bain, 2004; Barr & Tagg, 1995; Marzano, 2007; Stronge, 2007).

Effective teachers develop and follow a course syllabus as a guide for their course sessions (Eble, 1988; Fink, 2003; McKeachie, 2002). The typical syllabus provides a plan for a specific course and includes session dates, learning goals and objectives, topics for discussion, and assessments (Eble, 1988; McKeachie, 2002). McKeachie (2002) notes that the syllabus forces teachers to prioritize their plans for the course: “Constructing [the] syllabus will force [instructors] to begin thinking about the practicalities of what [they] must give up in order to achieve the most important objectives within the limitations of time, place, students, and resources” (p. 15). In addition to providing a plan for the instructor, the syllabus also serves as a guide for students so they may anticipate and prepare for class sessions. McKeachie (2002) suggests that the syllabus also helps provide clarification and consistency: “When the students know what to expect, they can direct their energy more productively” (p. 21). The syllabus provides answers to many general questions students may have about the course.

Fink (2003) advocates a “backwards design” (p. 63) to syllabus development: “Experience suggests that backward design, that is, doing the feedback and assessment first, greatly clarifies and facilitates answers to the questions of what the teaching and learning activities need to be” (p. 63). Fink (2003) argues that the learning goals are the end result of the education process and that assessment results indicate whether students have met these goals. Therefore, Fink believes that effective design occurs when instructors first establish the long-term learning goals, design how the goals can and will be measured, and then develop the
teaching strategies that will lead to students’ understanding. Bain (2004) advocates a similar design to course development:

Because the best teachers plan their courses backward, deciding what students should be able to do by the end of the semester, they map a series of intellectual developments through the course, with the goal of encouraging students to learn on their own, engaging them in deep thinking. (p. 114)

Bain (2004) also reports that teachers plan activities based on their understanding of their students’ abilities and/or needs: “Highly effective teachers design better learning experiences for their students in part because they conceive of teaching as fostering learning. Everything they do stems from their strong concern for and understanding of the development of their students” (p. 67). Effective teachers understand that long-term planning is essential to ensure curriculum coverage and student achievement.

Chickering (2000) advocates course planning that establishes a sense of community among learners, especially at community colleges where most students are commuters. He believes that students should take more responsibility for their learning; therefore, instructors should encourage students by providing them with opportunities to determine their own learning goals and to design their own classroom activities and assessments (Chickering, 2000).

Chickering encourages instructors to create and implement “learning contracts” (p. 26) as a part of instruction; learning contracts allow students to determine their own learning objectives, assessment activities, and means of evaluation. Chickering (2000) claims that “learning contracts give [instructors] a way to respond to individual differences among the students in prior knowledge and competence, motivation, learning style, and developmental stage” (p. 26). The author also encourages instructors to plan “workshops” (p. 26) where students work collaboratively to present and/or discuss course-related content. Chickering (2000) recommends
that instructors preparing to teach should consider implementing some or all of the following activities to establish a sense of community among learners:

1. Design course activities based on differences in learning style.
2. Combine group activities and individual projects.
3. Maximize interactions during class meetings.
4. Use ongoing experiential contexts that are part of students’ daily lives.
5. Create learning teams.
6. Encourage interactions between classes.
7. Provide explicit criteria for evaluation. (p. 29)

Such activities provide multiple opportunities for interactive learning and the development of interpersonal relationships among students. Kember (2009) claims, “It is possible to improve the quality of teaching and learning by encouraging teachers to adopt student-centered forms of teaching” (p. 2). Well-planned and meaningful educational activities have the potential to maximize student learning and increase the sense of community among learners.

Martin, Prosser, Trigwell, Ramsden, and Benjamin (2000) also believe that teacher planning is imperative to effective instruction. In a qualitative study, the researchers interviewed and observed 26 university professors from four different disciplines to determine if a correlation exists between “teachers’ intentions concerning what it is that students should learn” and “teachers’ expectations of how students do learn and how they can be helped to learn through teaching” (p. 388). The results indicate that teachers’ intentions do determine and/or affect their actions; a “clear relationship between the teachers’ intended object of study and their intended approaches to teaching” (p. 409) exists. Therefore, Martin et al. (2000) suggest that teachers give greater consideration to the “object of study” (p. 411), or what it is they wish their students
to learn; building on the object of study, effective teachers can then develop teaching strategies
that will guide students to learn. Extensive planning will assist teachers in determining their
objects of study and in developing subsequent teaching strategies and classroom activities.

Lecture

Despite a shift toward student-centered teaching and learning, lectures remain the most
commonly used instructional method in higher education institutions (Edwards, Smith, & Webb,
2001; Lammers & Murphy, 2002; McKeachie, 2002). However, recently the lecture has come
under scrutiny as an ineffective instructional practice (Bain, 2004; Barr & Tagg, 1995;
deWinstanley & Bjork, 2002). Bain (2004) explains the existing debate concerning the
effectiveness of lecture as classroom instruction:

A growing national debate [exists] about lecturing in class. One side in that squabble is
convinced the research has proven that lectures never work; the other is often
passionately devoted to using the ancient pedagogical device. While this debate has no
doubt opened some minds to the possibilities of using tools other than a formal lecture, it
has just as often produced rigid positions that shed little light on good teaching, each side
convinced that they know a simple truth. (p. 98)

Barr and Tagg (1995) proclaim, “The Learning Paradigm ends the lecture’s privileged position,
honoring in its place whatever approaches serve best to prompt learning” (p. 14). However,
some instructors, despite the current trend of participatory and student-centered teaching and
learning, remain complacent and prefer traditional classroom techniques such as the lecture
(Anderson & Carta-Falsa, 2002; Bain, 2004; Barr & Tagg, 1995; Kember, 2009; McKeachie,
2002). Though the lecture allows teachers to cover content quickly, ineffective lectures can
often confuse or discourage students (Palmer, 1990). In part, lectures persist as a primary
instructional tool because instructors find them easy to develop and present; likewise, students
and administrators accept and often expect them as adequate classroom teaching (Eble, 1988).
Reeves (2007) suggests that instructors continue to utilize the lecture because it is a familiar cost and time effective method of instruction that may be easily altered or restructured to fit a variety of instructional circumstances.

Though current negative views toward lecturing exist, this form of instruction can be effective (Bain, 2004; deWinstanley & Bjork, 2002; McKeachie, 2002; Reeves, 2007). Defending the lecture, deWinstanley and Bjork (2002) argue that the negative views of lecturing are “unfortunate and inaccurate”; the authors claim lectures are often necessary and “can be a successful method of teaching” (p. 19). Lectures are effective when they lead students to learning, and instructors may enhance lectures by creating and delivering lectures that require students to become actively engaged in “effective processing” (p. 20) of the content. Engaging lectures are well organized, include visual images, allow time for students to listen rather than take notes, provide and encourage use of mnemonic devices to increase learning, and are divided into multiple segments to combat student lethargy and disinterest (deWinstanley & Bjork, 2002; McKeachie, 2002). In addition, instructors should design lectures to capture students’ attention and motivate them to be active participants by including relevant examples, startling facts, thought-provoking questions, suspenseful lead-ins, pauses providing opportunities for questions and discussion, humor, gestures, or any other technique that might encourage and hold attention (deWinstanley & Bjork, 2002; Eble, 1988; McKeachie, 2002). In contrast, lectures are ineffective when “students assume a passive, nonthinking, information receiving role” (McKeachie, 2002, p. 67). Bain asserts, “In the hands of the most effective instructors, the lecture then becomes a way to clarify and simplify complex material while engaging important and challenging questions, or to inspire attention to important matters, to provoke, to focus” (p.
Careful planning, effective delivery, and student engagement are key components of effective lectures (Bain, 2004; Eble, 1988; McKeachie, 2002).

**Cooperative Learning**

Current literature concerning effective teaching styles indicates that students and instructors value cooperative learning activities (Anderson & Carta-Falsa, 2002; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Reinsmith, 1994; Stronge, 2007). Several studies indicate that cooperative learning has a positive effect on the teaching and learning process (Bain, 2004; Johnson, Maruyama, Johnson, Nelson, & Skon, 1981; Kember, Jenkins, & Ng, 2003). Anderson and Carta-Falsa (2002), Johnson, Johnson, and Taylor (1993), and McKeachie (2002) agree that cooperative learning activities can successfully motivate students to learn in ways that traditional methods may not. Research indicates that students who have participated in cooperative learning activities believe that they have increased their ability to work with others in future endeavors and that they had positive learning experiences (Johnson, Johnson, & Taylor, 1993; Miller & Groccia, 1997). In the classroom, most students have a “desire to work together, to share, and to learn and interact with each other” (Anderson & Carta-Falsa, 2002). Morgan (2003) studied 140 college seniors who had participated in cooperative learning activities resulting in one group grade. Results indicate that group participants believed that they had improved their ability to work in a team; likewise, participants suggested that they were more conscientious about their work because they sought the approval of their peers. Of those participants surveyed, 30% indicated that participating in the cooperative learning activity had increased their understanding of the course material. McKeachie (2002) claims that students benefit from cooperative learning activities because they are more apt to admit their confusion to and seek answers from their peers.
than from their instructors. Chickering and Gamson (1987) suggest that an increase in learning occurs when students work in groups.

Johnson (1991) advocates the use of cooperative activities to foster student learning, especially in community colleges. According to Johnson, students who participate in cooperative activities such as interactive simulations, case studies, or long-term projects have higher success and degree or certificate completion rates than those who do not. The author stresses the importance of student-centered teaching methods and the need for cooperative learning activities in college classrooms, indicating that this type of instruction leads students to develop skills needed for employability. Nelson (1999) and McKeachie (2002) note that students will likely use skills honed through cooperative learning activities in their future vocations; therefore, such activities prepare students to be successful and productive workers. Pauley (2001) indicates that cooperative learning activities helped students acquire conflict-management, team-building skills, and communication skills. Teachers have the responsibility to plan appropriate lessons and activities that will teach students the necessary skills to be productive post-graduation.

Effective instructors know best how to create cooperative learning groups (Bain, 2004; McKeachie, 2002). Some instructors group students using random numbering, proximity, alphabetical ordering, and a variety of other methods (McKeachie, 2002). However, some instructors carefully plan their groups in advance to ensure that they are heterogeneous, yet inclusive of students with varying skill levels; such grouping ensures that there is a balance among members and that no one group is weighted with high-achieving or struggling students (Bain, 2004). Stronge (2007) notes, “Effective teachers use a variety of grouping strategies, including cooperative grouping, flexible grouping, and ability grouping with differentiation to
support student learning” (p. 71). McKeachie (2002) suggests that cooperative learning works best when all participants understand the objective and contribute to the task and when the instructor participates and/or guides students throughout the process. Furthermore, the best results from cooperative learning arise from those activities that are best planned. Bain (2004) suggests that meaningful group work provides a challenge for the students involved and affords them a chance to be problem solvers and learners simultaneously: “The best group work [leads] students to grapple with important questions, to reason collectively through perplexing, intriguing, and significant issues, and to brainstorm solutions to fascinating problems” (p. 129). Meaningful cooperative learning involves and challenges students of all ability levels and encourages them to apply their skills and knowledge as they participate.

Some instructors are reluctant to incorporate cooperative learning activities into their instructional repertoires (Bain, 2004; Strom & Strom, 2002). Anderson and Carta-Falsa (2002) suggest that many faculty members prefer traditional teaching models because collaborative teaching strategies “are not well understood” (p. 137). Reeves (2007) believes that instructors are reluctant to use cooperative teaching methods because evaluation of group efforts and/or processes is difficult. Furthermore, Reeves (2007) claims that instructors are concerned about the effective use of instructional time, and cooperative learning “creates tremendous frustration for both the instructor and the students” (p. 46) when it requires more time than originally allotted. However, effective teachers know that careful planning can provide cooperative learning opportunities that support student learning (McKeachie, 2002; Stronge, 2007).

Problem Based Learning

A form of cooperative learning, Problem Based Learning (PBL) affords students the opportunity to learn through active participation. According to Connor-Greene (2002), “In PBL,
small groups work collaboratively to investigate a real or hypothetical case and identify effective solutions. This approach to learning is student rather than teacher directed” (p. 193). Steeped in the pragmatist philosophies of John Dewey and Jerry Bruner, PBL challenges students to work cooperatively in small groups to discover answers and solve problems presented by instructors (Fink, 2003; Herron & Major, 2004; McKeachie, 2002). McKeachie (2002) claims that PBL “is based on the assumptions that human beings evolved as individuals who are motivated to solve problems, and that problem solvers will seek and learn whatever knowledge is needed for successful problem solving” (p. 197). The current practice of PBL began in medical schools in the 1970s; instead of lectures, instructors began incorporating real-world scenarios and case studies into their courses to encourage students to learn and work together to solve problems related to their fields of study (Connor-Greene, 2002; Fink, 2003; McKeachie, 2002). PBL encourages students to learn through interaction and discovery.

Problem Based Learning activities begin with a problem or specific case study, and students then work collaboratively to develop questions and determine solutions to the problem (Connor-Greene, 2002; Fink, 2003; McKeachie, 2002). Learning to work in a sequence is an important aspect of learning that occurs in PBL activities; students learn what is required and in what order it must occur to solve the problem (Fink, 2003). During this process, the instructor acts as a guide and, through dialogue, encourages discovery and application (Fink, 2003; McKeachie, 2002). Students ultimately discover their “knowledge deficiencies relative to the problem” (Reeves, 2007, p. 44) and seek the knowledge necessary to determine the solution. Fink (2003) notes, “If the process includes a full review of the learning process at the end, it will contain all three components of active learning: experience, reflective dialogue, and information and ideas” (p. 136). The discussion following PBL activities provides an opportunity for
instructors to summarize the students’ findings, assess the learning that has occurred, and make the connection to the students’ existing knowledge (McKeachie, 2002).

Not only does PBL present students with the opportunity to learn through collaboration, but it affords them opportunities to develop critical-thinking skills (Conner-Greene, 2002; Herron & Major, 2004). Herron and Major (2004) conducted a qualitative study of community college leaders who had participated in a year-long academy where problem based learning activities were utilized. Using focus group interviews, the researchers determined that these community college leaders believed that they learned more by working with others than they would have through more traditional classroom instructional methods; likewise, the participants indicated that “problem based learning helped them to develop creative problem-solving skills, team skills (such as learning to value others’ contributions), and research skills” (p. 819). PBL is an effective teaching method that encourages student engagement and facilitates learning.

**Using Multiple Methods**

To provide many pathways to learning, effective teachers should possess and utilize multiple instructional methods that appeal to a diverse student population (Anderson & Carta-Falsa, 2002; Angelo & Cross, 1993; Bain, 2004; Johnson, 1991; Lei, 2007; Reinsmith, 1994; Stronge, 2007). Barr and Tagg (1995) claim that a teacher’s main focus should be “producing learning with every student by whatever means works best” (p. 13). Reinsmith (1994) asserts, “Teaching is a process of creating different encounters by which students can learn and thus come to know” (p. 131). No prescribed set, or “master key” (Anderson & Carta-Falsa, 2002, p. 134), of instructional strategies exists; hence, an effective teacher develops and incorporates myriad content-appropriate strategies to aid students in achieving desired learning goals (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Stronge, 2007; Weimer, 1990). Angelo and Cross (1993) proclaim
that “each class develops its own ‘microculture’” and “most successful faculty members are those who recognize and respond to these differences by fitting their teaching to the context of the class, even as they subtly shape that context through their teaching” (p. 6). Research indicates that teachers who use a variety of instructional methods are more effective than those who use one predictable method of instruction (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Stronge, 2007). Therefore, an effective instructor’s arsenal should include a variety of instructional methods to meet learners’ various needs.

Because of the shift toward a student-centered approach to teaching and learning and a move in the direction of outcomes-based assessment, a growing number of instructors are realizing the importance of using multiple methods of instruction to improve student learning (Anderson & Carta-Falsa, 2002; Bain, 2004; Kember, 2009; McKeachie, 2002). Anderson and Carta-Falsa (2002) argue that employing a variety of instructional practices positively affects teacher and student cooperation, increases motivation, and improves students’ performances on “course outcome measures” (p. 134). Stronge (2007) asserts that a teacher’s interaction, discretion, suppleness, and expertise impact instructional effectiveness; effective teachers actively engage and guide their students to generate learning. In addition, effective instructors challenge their students by providing various complex activities that require higher-order thinking skills and by encouraging students to think critically and creatively (Bain, 2004; McKeachie, 2002; Stronge, 2007).

Bain (2004) presents seven “unifying principles” (p. 99) that guide effective instructors as they plan and deliver instruction to their students. These seven principles call for students to be active participants in a non-threatening environment that fosters learning. These seven
principles also include a variety of instructional practices that take students’ various learning styles into consideration. The seven unifying principles claim that effective teachers:

1. Create a natural critical learning environment.
2. Get [students’] attention and keep it.
3. Start with the students rather than the discipline.
4. Seek commitments [from students].
5. Help students learn outside of class.
7. Create diverse learning experiences. (pp. 99-116)

Teachers who adhere to these seven principles provide students with opportunities to learn through a variety of instructional methods. Each of these principles provides for student-centered learning and encourages and/or requires students to take responsibility for their learning by becoming an active participant in the learning process. Furthermore, Bain (2004) asserts that such learning activities, when provided in “the natural critical learning environment” (p. 102), supply opportunities for students to use critical thinking skills by “encouraging them to compare, apply, evaluate, analyze, and synthesize, but never only to listen and remember” (p. 102).

Teachers who utilize these seven principles when planning and providing instruction optimize learning opportunities for their students. Effective teachers use instructional differentiation to encourage and increase student learning (Stronge, 2007)

**Classroom Management**

Not only should teachers plan effectively for instruction, but they should also establish rules and procedures that create an environment favorable for teaching and learning (Bartlett, 2004; Seidman, 2005; Sorcinelli, 1994; Stronge, 2007). Effective instructors understand that, in
addition to content knowledge and instructional methods, classroom management skills are an important aspect of teaching and learning; instructors must determine and organize the curriculum, prepare informative and engaging instructional activities, assess students’ learning, provide feedback, and maintain a positive teaching and learning environment (Fink, 2003; Okpala & Ellis, 2005; Reeves, 2007; Stronge, 2007; Temes, 2002). Just as planning provides structure and purpose for both teachers and students, institutional or classroom policies provide guidelines for all participants in the learning process (Young, 2003). Stronge (2007) stresses the importance of classroom management as a key of effective teaching:

The effective teacher is not just someone who knows how to support student learning through instructional techniques, strong curricular materials, and rapport with the class. The effective teacher must create an overall environment conducive to learning. Orchestrating this supportive learning environment requires that a teacher practice skills in classroom organization and management. It also requires consistency in behavioral expectations and responses. The effective educator attends to these elements in a proactive way to establish positive classroom environment . . . (p. 40)

Teachers should foster a classroom climate that promotes teaching and learning; the classroom should be “a space for fun, interaction, and trust” (Robinson & Kakela, 2006, p. 202) where teachers and students work together.

McKeachie (2002) and Bartlett (2004) suggest teachers can proactively combat possible problems and disruptions by clearly communicating expectations verbally and in writing on the first day of class. Sorcinelli (1994) concurs, noting that preventing problematic behaviors is often more effective than trying to combat or correct them. Furthermore, by clearly establishing and adhering to classroom rules and procedures, instructors remove ambiguity and are able to make instructional and disciplinary decisions based on clearly defined expectations (Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010; Young, 2003). Stronge (2007) claims, “Teachers who set and reinforce clear expectations for student behavior have more success in classroom control and fewer discipline
problems than those who fail to do so” (p. 45). In order to maintain a positive and orderly learning environment, teachers must firmly and consistently adhere to the rules and expectations that govern their classrooms (Bartlett, 2004; McKeachie, 2002; Sorcinelli, 1994). However, in some instances instructors may need to alter or modify classroom rules and procedures during the term to ensure that teachers and students are working together toward a common goal (Eble, 1988). Sorcinelli (1994) offers strategies that instructors might employ to establish and maintain positive classroom environments and curb disruptive student behaviors:

1. Clearly present behavioral expectations at the beginning of the course.
2. Establish interpersonal relationships with students.
3. Obtain feedback from students throughout the course.
4. Provide opportunities for active learning experiences.

Similarly, Bartlett (2004) suggests that instructors can maintain a positive learning environment by establishing trust, caring for students, and being consistent when enforcing rules or disciplining students.

The literature indicates that students’ disruptive classroom behavior is becoming commonplace and has worsened over time (Bartlett, 2004; Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010; Sorcinelli, 1994; Young, 2003). Sorcinelli (1994) claims, “There is increasing concern—both nationally and among faculty members—about student behavior that is, at the least troublesome, and at the most, disruptive” (p. 365). Students’ rude and disruptive behaviors inhibit learning and can negatively affect students’ perceptions about their instructor and institution (Feldmann, 2001; Sorcinelli, 1994). Furthermore, Sorcinelli (1994) claims that one or two students who exhibit uncivil behaviors can alter the learning environment for all students. Disruptive behavior can also impact student retention (Seidman, 2005).
Not only has students’ classroom decorum declined in recent years, but their attitudes toward professors have changed, as well (Young, 2003). Young (2003) claims that students now feel they are entitled to an education and that their professors work for them: “Students increasingly see themselves as customers, viewing their professors as employees rather than instructors” (p. A30). Students also want their professors to be more accommodating (Young, 2003). Managing students’ disruptive behaviors is among college instructors’ greatest challenges, particularly since most instructors are not adequately trained in this area (Seidman, 2005; Sorcinelli, 1994). Students in today’s college classrooms not only appear to be less respectful, but they also place greater demands and provide additional challenges for their instructors (Bartlett, 2004).

What types of uncivil behaviors do professors face in college classrooms? The list is lengthy and varied; furthermore, there is a lack of consistency as to which behaviors are acceptable and which are deplorable. Appleby’s (1990) qualitative study determined that professors shared common beliefs about annoying student behaviors. The researcher divided the students’ behaviors into three categories: immature behaviors, which included disruptive actions, late arrivals, and unsolicited interruptions or discussion during instruction; inattentive behaviors, which included lack of preparation, sleeping, skipping class, and preparing to depart before dismissal; and miscellaneous behaviors, such as focusing on grades rather than learning, asking irrelevant or unnecessary questions, and cheating. Appleby’s (1990) study found that professors considered these and other behaviors immature and irritating; furthermore, such behaviors negatively affect the teaching and learning process. Charles (1999) claims that students’ uncivil behavior falls into one of five categories: aggressive, immoral, defiant, disruptive, and silly. Charles also notes that these behaviors may be intentional or inadvertent.
Despite the efforts of these and other researchers, determining which classroom behaviors are unacceptable or annoying is difficult, at best. Bjorklund and Rehling (2010) agree, noting classroom incivility is difficult to define:

What one faculty member may experience as problematic in a classroom may not bother another. What faculty may experience as troublesome and see as interfering with classroom learning may not mirror the experience of the students they teach. One faculty member may not mind if students quietly eat their lunch or sip coffee during class, while another may find it disruptive. Students may not see the student sleeping in the back row as interrupting their learning, but a faculty member may see it as very uncivil. (p. 15)

Despite professors’ difficulty in determining and/or agreeing on what constitutes uncivil classroom behavior, the research indicates that students prefer clearly defined expectations and “clear signals” about acceptable classroom decorum (Bartlett, 2004; Young, 2003).

Seidman’s (2005) study provides insight into the effects of students’ disruptive behaviors on teaching and learning in college classrooms. The purpose of the study was to identify and understand students’ disruptive behaviors. The researcher electronically sent out 243 surveys to recent graduates who attended traditional classes at a medium-sized Southeastern business school; only 28 alumni responded to the survey within the allotted ten-day time frame. Though Seidman (2005) acknowledges the response rate is low, he claims that the results are acceptable. The survey was derived from a standard end-of-course evaluation that included questions dealing with “instructor responsiveness, classroom democracy, student participation, and learning” (p. 42). Students were asked what inhibited their learning while they attended college classes; participants provided written responses to this open-ended question. Seidman (2005) divided the responses into five categories: “disruptive students, the professor, lack of resources/time constraints, group work, and no or unclear hindrances” (p. 43). Results indicate that “incidents of disruptive behavior are becoming more common in college classrooms . . . [and] disruptive
behavior impacts the students just as much – if not more—than the professors” (Seidman, 2005, p. 44). Furthermore, the survey results indicate that students identified “an unsatisfactory learning environment” (p. 45) as their primary reason for leaving college before graduating. Seidman (2005) urges faculty and administrators to address the problem of disruptive student behavior by familiarizing themselves with behavioral guidelines found within school publications, discussing expected and acceptable behaviors with students on the first day of class, setting positive examples for students to follow, establishing meaningful relationships with students, and creating a positive culture for teaching and learning. The author recommends that future research include qualitative studies and/or the use of “shorter, more well-defined alumni surveys” (Seidman, 2005, p. 45) to determine the impact disruptive behaviors have on college classrooms.

Seidman’s (2005) research indicates that students are often as distraught over classroom misbehavior and disruptions as their professors; additional research supports his claim (Bartlett, 2004; Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010; Perlman & McCann, 1998; Young, 2003). According to Young (2003), the University of Arizona surveyed its students to determine which disruptive behaviors were prevalent in their classrooms; the results indicated that disruptive behavior was widespread and that students were frustrated by their classmates’ “loud gum chewing and popping, pen and pencil tapping, packing up while [the] professor is still speaking, body odor, skimpily clad individuals, and off-topic discussions” (Calls for Action section, para. 1). In addition, students preferred their professors to be stricter, especially when handling disruptive behaviors (Young, 2003).

Bjorklund and Rehling (2010) also conducted a study to determine students’ perceptions about uncivil behavior in the college classroom. Their study sought to answer two questions:
“What classroom behaviors by other students do students find most uncivil? And which potentially uncivil behaviors do students observe most frequently in their classes?” (p. 15). The researchers sought participants by e-mailing a letter to approximately 19,700 students at a Midwestern public university; of these students, 3,616 participated in the study. The participants took an electronic survey that included a list of 25 behaviors “generally regarded to be uncivil” (p. 16). Using a Likert-type scale, students evaluated the 25 behaviors and the frequency in which they observed them. According to the results, students ranked “continuing to talk after being asked to stop,” “coming to class under the influence of alcohol or drugs,” “allowing a cell phone to ring,” and “conversing loudly with others” (p. 16) as the most uncivil behaviors. Additionally, students identified “text messaging” and “packing up books before class is over” (p. 16) as the most frequently observed uncivil classroom behaviors. The results of the study indicate that students are aware of the uncivil classroom behaviors; furthermore, the results provide insight into which behaviors students perceive as uncivil and how often they are experiencing these incidents in the college classroom (Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010). The researchers tout their study as one that offers “concrete guidelines” (p. 17) for faculty and administrators seeking to create rules and procedures for their colleges and classrooms. Additionally, Bjorklund and Rehling (2010) claim, “The present study provides clear rationale for choosing particular classroom behaviors to focus upon in our efforts to improve civility and moves us in the direction of learning environments that are more welcoming for all of us” (p. 18). The authors recommend that future research should focus on different college types in other areas of the country; they also suggest that future research examine students’ perceptions of effective classroom management.
Students not only perceive their classmates’ uncivil behaviors as disruptive, but they also consider some of their instructors’ behaviors disorderly (Miley & Gonsalves, 2005; Perlman & McCann, 1998). However, faculty are not always aware of students’ perceptions about their instructional practices and behaviors (Appleby, 1990; Perlman & McCann, 1998). Perlman and McCann (1998) claim, “There are often differences between how well faculty believe they teach and students’ satisfaction with the delivery of instruction” (p. 201).

Several studies sought to identify students’ perceptions of annoying faculty classroom behaviors (Appleby, 1990; Kelsey, Kearney, Plax, Allen, & Ritter, 2004; Miley & Gonsalves, 2005; Perlman & McCann, 1998; Rallis, 1994). Appleby (1990) reports that students are annoyed by professors who have poor communication skills and lack compassion when dealing with their students. Kelsey, Kearney, Plax, Allen, and Ritter (2004) found that some instructors’ behaviors can negatively impact student learning. Likewise, Miley and Gonsalves (2005) report that students believe “faculty disorganization in class presentations and course goals” (p. 20) to be the top annoying habit of their instructors; students also disliked instructors who lectured too fast, too long, or with an unchanging tone of voice.

Perlman and McCann (1998) conducted a survey of undergraduate psychology students at a public regional university to determine which faculty classroom behaviors they found to be annoying. Thirteen faculty members assisted the researchers by surveying students in 25 sections of undergraduate psychology during the spring semester of 1997; the researchers provided students with an index card that included a prompt, which asked students to write down “two or three major pet peeves about faculty when they teach” (p. 201). Instructors distributed the cards at the first class meeting, and 671 students participated. The researchers created four categories based on participants’ responses: “Teaching, Respect, General, and Negative
mannerisms” (p. 202). Most of the responses (65%) focused on teaching, specifically mentioning instructors’ lack of organization or planning, methods of instruction, and assessment techniques. The remaining categories elicited fewer comments, but raised concerns relevant to teaching and learning. Perlman and McCann (1998) note that 11 of the 13 participating faculty members changed their methods of instruction after reviewing the data from the study. The authors recommend that future research focus on instructors’ use of student evaluations and/or feedback to modify their teaching.

Effective teachers understand the importance of establishing and maintaining a positive environment for teaching and learning (Bain, 2004; McKeachie, 2002; Stronge, 2007). Likewise, instructors face the challenge of keeping classroom order while engaging students in a variety of active learning activities (McKeachie, 2002). Today’s classroom instructors also struggle to teach and keep the attention of a diverse group of students accustomed to fast-paced, technologically enhanced communication; in addition, today’s students have high expectations and often believe that they are entitled to an education (Bartlett, 2004; Young, 2003). Nonetheless, instructors who clearly communicate their expectations, are consistent in the enforcement of their rules and policies, and show students they care are more apt to have positive classroom environments and to foster student success (Bain, 2004; Bartlett, 2004, McKeachie, 2002; Sorcinelli, 1994; Young, 2003). Ultimately, instructors have the responsibility to create and maintain a positive classroom environment and to motivate students to be active learners (Kelsey et al., 2004).

**Teaching Literature**

Cohen and Brawer (2008) assert that “the collegiate function encompasses two concepts: student flow and the liberal arts curriculum” (p. 345). Their reference to student flow is
indicative of an existing belief that education should consist of a seamless continuation of studies from the elementary grades through graduate studies. As part of this continuous education, colleges offer a liberal arts curriculum “founded on the humanities, sciences, and social sciences” (p. 345), a grouping often referred to as “general education courses,” because early American higher education institutions were founded on medieval European models whose curricular focus emphasized subjects that “reflect[ed] the best in human thought” (p. 345). With time, existing ideas and definitions of education began to change, and academic disciplines evolved as scholarship took the forefront in many higher education institutions. “The conversion of the liberal arts from these precepts to academic disciplines reflected a major shift away from the individual to the organization as the arbiter of learning” (p. 347), claim Cohen and Brawer (2008). Community colleges further changed education not only by offering general education courses following the liberal arts tradition, but also by offering programs of study reflective of changing economic needs and educational philosophies (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

In order to attain respect among four-year schools and to be considered “full-partners in higher learning” (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 347), community colleges designed their courses, especially those core classes that served as transfer courses, to be similar to those offered at universities. Even today, community colleges work to ensure that their courses will be accepted by universities; however, since the 1970s “the collegiate function in community colleges has been characterized by a reduction in emphasis on the academic disciplines” (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 364). As a result, Cohen and Brawer (2008) pointedly argue that community colleges must reevaluate their academic course offerings to meet the needs of today’s diverse student population: “The academic disciplines need reconceptualizing to fit remedial and vocational education, the institution’s dominant functions in addition to transfer” (p. 365).
Though changes in the community college curriculum have occurred over the last several decades, a liberal arts, general education curriculum remains a requirement for most students, especially those planning to transfer to four-year universities. Cohen and Brawer (2008) stress the importance of students’ completing general education requirements:

The rationale for general education in the community college is the freedom enjoyed by the informed citizen . . . . Because we are embEd.D.ed in families, tribes, and communities, we must learn to be free-thinking citizens, learning the literacy necessary for life in a civil society, the competence to participate in the broader community, the ability to think critically. A general education that leads to the ways of knowing and the common beliefs and language that bind society together is offered in every culture through rituals, schools, and apprenticeships. The community colleges are responsible for furthering it in the United States. (pp. 376-377)

As part of their general education core requirements, community colleges require students to take several English courses. The Commission on the Future of Community Colleges (1988) suggests that the teaching of literacy skills should be the primary curriculum goal of two-year colleges, and all undergraduate students are required to take some type of composition course. Additionally, most community college programs of study require undergraduate students to complete an American, British, or world literature survey as part of core curriculum and/or transfer course requirements (Kroll, 1994).

Community College English Faculty

English classes compose a large portion of course offerings at community colleges (Kroll, 1994), and community college English faculty “constitute a sizable portion of full- and part-time” instructors (Clark, 1987; Kroll, 1994; Raines, 1990). Kroll (1994) conducted a survey of full and part-time English faculty and curriculum at a group of 411 public and private community colleges in a 19-state region. Kroll sent questionnaires concerning teaching practices, institutional culture, scholarship, and curriculum to English department chairs at each of these
institutions. With 169 community colleges participating, Kroll received 777 usable responses (55% full-time and 45% part-time faculty).

Of the respondents in Kroll’s (1994) study, 68% of full-time and 65% of part-time faculty had earned master’s degrees—not necessarily in the field of English studies. Over 30% of the full-time instructors surveyed had 20 or more years’ experience; in contrast, most of the part-time faculty had fewer than 20 years’ experience. Despite the fact that literature survey courses are offered at community colleges, 84% of full-time and 92% of part-time faculty indicated that they primarily taught composition courses. Both groups stated that their primary function was to teach the process of writing, regardless of the course title. Both part- and full-time faculty recommended that future instructors take graduate courses specifically focusing on rhetoric and composition; DeBard’s (1995) study also found that there is a growing need for current and future community college English faculty to engage in additional graduate studies in composition.

Concerning work load, Kroll (1994) found that full-time community college English instructors worked an average of 51 hours per week and taught a minimum of four classes each term. Additionally, Kroll reports, “Full-time faculty are more likely to attend conferences, belong to professional organizations, and read professional journals than they are to publish” (1994, p. 45). Full-time faculty indicated that they spend fewer than four hours each week reading journals, conducting research, or writing for publication; part-time faculty have even less interest in scholarship activities, in part because of time and/or economic constraints (Kroll, 1994).

A majority of full-time faculty (87%) indicated that they had great interest in teaching over scholarship (Kroll, 1994). Concerning the curriculum, over 90% of both groups believed that providing students with the skills to write and read well was a very or fairly important goal;
likewise, more than 80% of both groups believed that the goal of teaching students to appreciate literature and the arts was very or fairly important. Additionally, more than 75% of full- and part-time faculty believed preparing students for a career was a very or fairly important learning goal. Concerning assessment, a majority of both groups felt that multiple-choice tests were inadequate tools to measure learning and that state-mandated tests impeded teaching and learning. Additionally, over 70% of respondents felt that the general education requirements for English curriculum were “about right” (Kroll, 1994, p. 44).

Full-time English faculty have an allegiance to their discipline, with over 90% indicating that their discipline and departments were “very important or fairly important” (Kroll, 1994, p. 50). However, their ties to the institution do not appear to be as strong; over half of the respondents indicated that the “intellectual environment on their campus was fair or poor” (p. 50). Nonetheless, both groups indicated that they, above all, enjoyed teaching and interacting with students (Kroll, 1994).

Kroll (1994) also found that English faculty at community colleges remain “relatively unchanged from English faculty 30 years ago” (p. 51). However, Kroll does point out that colleges now rely more heavily on part-time faculty than in the past. Additionally, colleges seem to be offering fewer literature courses and more composition courses; therefore, Kroll (1994) points out that prospective English faculty need more training in rhetoric and composition. Kroll also recommends that future researchers explore the relationship between a lack of scholarship by two-year English faculty and their teaching effectiveness. Finally, Kroll suggests that future research focus on the decline of literature course offerings and the impact this change has had on community college English faculty and programs of study.
Among the concerns of scholars and instructors in English studies is the continuing trend of collegiate English departments shifting to an emphasis on rhetoric and composition studies rather than a focus on literature (DeBard, 1995; Elbow, 2002; Isaacs, 2009; Kroll, 1994; Levine, 2001; Showalter, 1999, 2003). In the past, most English faculty received their graduate training in literature studies; however, the current trend is for prospective English scholars and faculty to enter programs that require more training in rhetoric and composition (DeBard, 1995; Isaacs, 2009; Showalter, 2003). Isaacs (2009) claims, “In the last two decades, graduate programs in English have changed . . . . Most doctoral programs in English have developed strong training and support programs in teaching composition for their literature graduate students” (p. 102). Additionally, Levine (2001) purports that “while many of us have a stake in conceiving of ‘English’ as consisting of literary or cultural criticism, we know that the majority of our profession teaches writing (even those who earned their degrees in literature)” (p. 7). Recognizing the change, Logan (2006) declares that “this trend signals increasing recognition of the need to develop nondiscursive communication skills, skills that college English should engage itself in perfecting” (p. 107). Nonetheless, some faculty feel ill-at-ease about the shift, and conflict between the two camps—composition instructors and literature teachers—remains a topic of great debate (Elbow, 2002; Isaacs, 2009; Levine, 2001; Showalter, 2003).

Additionally, the trend toward a student-centered approach to teaching and learning has shaken the traditions associated with teaching literature, and some instructors remain reluctant to adopt or utilize more modern teaching methods (Showalter, 2003). Likewise, despite Boyer’s (1990) call for a reevaluation of the professoriate and a call to broaden the definition of scholarship, some instructors remain steadfast in their belief that research supercedes instruction (Levine, 2001; Showalter, 2003). Rather than building a scholarship of teaching among peers, as
Shulman (1999) proposes, some English faculty choose to remain isolated from others and to continue their traditional methods of research and/or instruction without interacting or sharing with their peers (Bickman, 2004; Showalter, 2003). Bickman (2004) explains, “Many of us come into the field already as isolates, as alienated intellectuals” (p. 148); however, he suggests that teachers improve their instructional practices by forming communities to share successful ideas and practices. Other faculty may feel inadequate because of their lack of training in instructional methods; however, through professional development and the sharing of ideas, instructors can overcome such feelings and improve their pedagogy (Showalter, 2003). Showalter (2003) asserts, “One of the best aspects of the work of teaching is that, unlike scholarship, it does not have to be original to be good. We can borrow ideas and methods from our colleagues and our predecessors” (p. 9). By teachers’ working together with their colleagues to improve pedagogy, teachers and students benefit (Bickman, 2004).

However, the existing conflict between scholarship and teaching is not so easily resolved. Levine (2001) argues that the profession of literature “badly needs a whole new orientation toward the question of the relation between teaching and scholarship, and a whole new genre that would make it possible to see discussions of teaching as integral to the development of knowledge” (p. 12). However, the conflict remains because, as Showalter (2003) reveals, “We call teaching our jobs, but we call research our work. And the two conflict for our attention and time” (p. 11). Similarly, Levine (2001) claims that there exists an “internal division, often even in the work of individual faculty, between dedication to teaching (which may in some instances impede professional success) and dedication to research (which is the preliminary condition for stardom)” (p. 9). Teachers often struggle to balance the desire to provide exceptional instruction and the requirement to produce quality research.
If professional development and creating communities of learners is not the answer, then what is? Graff (1992) suggests that literature faculty work to conduct “research in ways that make it more teachable” (p. 123). On the other hand, Showalter (2003) suggests that literature instructors “reconceive [their] pedagogy to make it as intellectually challenging as [their] research” (p. 11). An obvious connection exists between the topics that faculty research and what they teach in their classrooms, and “preparing to teach is an intense form of research” (Showalter, 2003, p. 44); therefore, in some cases literature teachers could easily incorporate their research into their classroom instruction (Showalter, 2003). Additionally, many colleges now provide new instructors with pedagogical training; institutions may also have their own centers for teaching and learning that provide professional development, advanced and/or innovative technological and pedagogical training, and an array of resources for faculty (Showalter, 2003). Because teaching is dialogical and interactive, more colleges are encouraging their faculty to present their research findings or share their innovative classroom practices with their peers; these institutions are helping to create a unique academic atmosphere while encouraging a scholarship of teaching (Shulman, 1993; Showalter, 2003).

Why Teach Literature?

Why teach literature? Throughout the years this question has been the center of much debate among scholars in the field (Beach & Marshall, 1990; Showalter, 2003). Simplifying the discussion, Showalter (2003) surmises that literature is “what gets taught” (p. 22), noting that literary studies are derived from a conglomeration of various genres and works from “the classics, the canon, the great tradition of English and American works . . . to popular literature, including best-sellers” (p. 22). But why teach these works? Scholes (2009) believes, “Most English teachers would agree that one of our proper functions is to open a wider world of culture
for our students . . . [by] opening the past so they can connect it to the present” (p. 232). Davidson (2000) argues, “We need literature—and trained teachers of English—to help us understand what change is, what the anxieties are that come along with the exuberance of discovery, what other social costs have been . . . in other times of speeded-up change” (p. 99).

Many English instructors believe that teaching literature helps students to become better citizens by providing them with a greater knowledge of human nature and various cultures; therefore, the content in literature courses has changed with time to include socially and historically relevant texts that reflect such shifts in society and challenge students to think about humanity (Logan, 2006; Showalter, 2003).

When literature was first introduced into the college curriculum in the 1800s, educators believed the study of literature would help students “moralize, civilize, and humanize” (Showalter, 2003, p. 22). In the 1930s, literature study reached its peak, and colleges viewed literature as a way to engage students in thought about “human existence” (p. 23). In the 1940s and 1950s, literature studies became more formal, scientific, and practical; in the 1960s, literature was used to fuel and sustain the era’s political ideologies and spirit of rebellion. By the 1970s and 1980s, the focus of literary studies rested on philosophical and theoretical shifts occurring in the nation and throughout the world (Showalter, 2003). Over the last several decades, literary studies have expanded to include technological innovations, digital texts, graphic novels, advertisements, and other culturally relevant texts beyond the traditional canon (Bauerlein, 2008; Linkin, 2009; Logan, 2006; Scholes, 2009; Showalter, 1999, 2003).

Though education has changed by embracing innovative technologies, new educational philosophies, and a more diverse student population, the impetus for the study of literature has not diminished; if anything, the need to teach students to be active readers and clear writers is
greater (Isaacs, 2009; Logan, 2006; Showalter, 2003). Hicks (1960) argues, “Given the ethos of a modern industrial society, the values of literature, as a moving record of what happens to human beings and how it feels to be one, increase rather than diminish in importance” (p. 25).

The problem, however, is that literature teachers “want to sell what most of our potential customers do not want to buy and they want to buy what we cannot be bothered to sell” (Scholes, 2009, p. 233). The remedy, according to Scholes (2009), is that literature instructors “must find ways of making what we wish to teach more interesting to those who may come to us for instruction” (p. 233).

The solution sounds simple, yet finding a balance between classical texts in traditional classrooms and today’s texts in a technologically advanced and fast-paced world proves problematic (Bauerlein, 2008; Isaacs, 2009; Linkin, 2009; Logan, 2006). Linkin (2009) ponders, “How do we find a common language?” (p. 168). Scholes (2009) again offers a suggestion: “We need to get over ‘literature’ and think of textuality, teaching texts that are interesting, powerful, and help us understand our world” (p. 233). Primary reasons for teaching literature not only include providing students with a view of the human condition throughout the ages, but also include training them “to think, read, analyze, and write” about all types of texts (Showalter, 2003, p. 25). Beach and Marshall (1990) argue that “reading, discussing, and writing about literature help students to better understand what texts mean and how texts mean” (p. 17) and that literature study “provides practice in reading comprehension and can greatly enhance students’ vocabulary as well as their ability to synthesize and think critically” (p. 17). Showalter (2003) provides a list of competencies and skills expected of today’s literature students:

1. How to recognize subtle and complex differences in language use.
2. How to read figurative language and distinguish between literal and metaphorical meaning.

3. How to seek out further knowledge about the literary work, its author, its content, or its interpretation.

4. How to detect the cultural assumptions underlying writings from a different time or society, and in the process to become aware of one’s own cultural assumptions.

5. How to relate apparently disparate works to one another, and to synthesize ideas that connect them into a tradition or literary period.

6. How to use literary models as cultural references, either to communicate with others or to clarify one’s own ideas.

7. How to think creatively without problems using literature as a broadening of one’s own experience and practical knowledge.

8. How to read closely, with attention to detailed use of diction, syntax, metaphor, and style, not only in high literary works, but in decoding the stream of language everyone in modern society is exposed to.

9. How to create literary texts of one’s own, whether imaginative or critical.

10. How to think creatively within and beyond literary studies, making some connections between the literary work and one’s own life.

11. How to work and learn with others, taking literature as a focus for discussion and analysis.

12. How to defend a critical judgment against the informed opinions of others. (pp. 26-27)
Emphasizing the importance of such skills as those listed above, Logan (2006) stresses, “We must teach students to read a range of visual and discursive texts, texts that convey an array of culture-bound experiences” (p. 109). According to Beach and Marshall (1990), such skills will “empower students to become more generally literate and, in the long run, more articulate and productive members of society” (p. 17). Showalter (2003) concludes that teachers should have “a definite educational justification for every activity, every piece of content, that is presented” (p. 25). Instruction should have a purpose: student learning.

**Instructional Methods in Literature**

According to Levine (2001), “Teaching literature is a subject, and a difficult one. The reality of engagement with students makes the already difficult questions about the nature of literature and literary study even more difficult” (p. 14). Many teachers believe that the way that they were taught is the best instructional method, so they lessen the difficulty of teaching by replicating the methods of their past instructors (Showalter, 2003). According to Bickman (2004), “Such replication is almost never a conscious decision: most often it is the result of a failure of resources and imagination” (p. 143). However, some instructors move beyond replication and become innovative practitioners. Showalter (2003) presumes, “No teacher ever uses one method alone. In planning and teaching . . . a professor will draw on many techniques, but the best . . . will include more active than teacher-centered methods” (p. 75).

In teaching literature, as in other subject areas, teachers approach their pedagogy differently. Though the literature concerning teaching and learning is quite voluminous, research specifically concerning literature instruction, particularly in the community college setting, is limited. However, the literature addressing pedagogy in secondary teacher-preparation programs and secondary school language arts and literature classrooms includes instructional strategies.
that are applicable to the community college setting (Beach & Marshall, 1990; Blau, 2003; Burke, 1999; Stronge, 2007). In fact, because of changing accreditation standards, the demand for greater accountability, and greater expectations for students’ success, both secondary and post-secondary schools are moving toward a student-centered approach to teaching (Blau, 2003; Burke, 1999). In addition to a movement toward student-centered instruction (Barr & Tagg, 1995) and the growing emphasis on measurable learning outcomes (Bresciani, 2006), Bickman (2004) stresses that importance should be placed on pedagogical practice: “Pedagogy should not be simply slipped into the interstices and existing structures of the field but should help us radically rethink and transform our professional lives” (p. 148). Certainly, instructional style and methods affect learning (Burke, 1999; McKeachie, 2002).

Blau (2003) postulates that the pedagogy of literature instruction is founded on “some model of what it means to read and what it is that skilled or competent readers do or think about when they engage in the process of reading and talking about or writing about their reading” (p. 203). But what is it that instructors desire for their students to learn from studying and analyzing a variety of texts? Blau (2003) suggests that the “aim and proper end of literary study for all students . . . [is] literary competence or disciplined literacy” (p. 203). According to Blau, three “crucial domains of knowledge” contribute to students’ “literary competence”: “textual literacy, intertextual literacy, and performative literacy” (2003, p. 203).

Blau (2003) defines “textual literacy” as students’ ability to read, understand, and evaluate a text; he also refers to these basic abilities as “procedural knowledge” (p. 204). He argues that English teachers are charged with the task of helping students understand not only the literary works included in the curriculum, but also teaching them to read and understand “all the texts of their lives as public and private persons” (Blau, 2003, p. 205). In addition, Blau (2003),
building on Hirsch’s (1987) idea of cultural literacy, believes that students, in order to fully understand a text, must become mindful of the social, historical, and political context of the works; Blau calls such knowledge “intertextual literacy” (p. 206). Like Hirsch (1987), Blau (2003) also believes that students who possess a knowledge of the “background information” (p. 206) surrounding a literary text have greater potential for understanding than those who read the text without such knowledge. Finally, Blau (2003) claims that students who acquire “literary competence” (p. 203) must also possess “performative literacy,” “the kind of knowledge that enables [them] to perform as autonomous, engaged readers of difficult literary texts at any level of education” (p. 210). According to Blau (2003), “Taken together, these three domains of knowledge may be said to map the instructional territory of the literature class and the goals and most efficacious strategies for literary instruction” (pp. 204-205). Using these domains of knowledge as a basis for lesson development, effective instructors may strengthen their students’ abilities to read, understand, analyze, and appreciate a variety of texts from the classics included in the literary canon to the messages of the modern age.

Some literature instructors create their courses to be subject-centered, where the teacher serves as the transmitter and students act as receivers; often teachers of these traditional courses present their material from a specific perspective or “intellectual conviction” (Showalter, 2003, p. 28). In short, teachers who employ a subject-centered approach to instruction are often those “specialists who have spent many years studying a writer or genre” (p. 29) and who design their courses around their area(s) of expertise (Showalter, 2003). In some instances, instructors will conduct a course focusing on particular themes, one specific literary movement, or a single author’s works, which allows both the professor and students to delve more deeply into a topic (Showalter, 2003).
Some instructors have a more teacher-centered approach to instruction and view themselves as performers and the class of students as the audience (Leblanc, 1988; Lowman, 1994, 1996; Showalter, 2003). Eble (1988) claims that the classroom proves itself a platform for performance: “It is commonly forgotten that the classroom offers the rudiments of a stage. . . . There is little to be lost and much to be gained in using the classroom, when appropriate, as theater” (p. 51). Instructors who use this approach to teaching thrive on spontaneity, often employ comedy, and capitalize on teachable moments with impromptu speech or activity; in such a setting, the teacher truly is the center of the classroom (Showalter, 2003).

Additionally, some teachers develop a classroom persona that, to some extent, is “an exaggeration or an evasion of [their] private sel[ves]” (Showalter, 2003, p. 38). Cultural, geographical, and educational backgrounds, along with personal and academic interests, work in tandem to shape professors’ classroom personalities (Eble, 1988; Lowman, 1996; Showalter, 2003). Showalter (2003) claims that professors’ demeanors and behaviors can be strong indicators of their expectations for students: “Everything, from what you wear, to whether you sit or stand, to your tone of voice conveys a message about the level of formality, difficulty, and flexibility of the course” (p. 47).

On the other hand, student-centered instruction places student learning as the primary focus (Barr & Tagg, 1995). However, Showalter (2003) quips, “The teacher still performs, but the class is not primarily about the teacher’s brilliance, omniscience, personality, or originality on the podium” (p. 36); instead, the teacher acts as a “facilitator rather than a star” (p. 36). With the student-centered instructional approach, active learning and student collaboration take center stage (Showalter, 2003). Bickman (2004) concludes that an active teaching style that encourages student engagement produces desired results: “learning is deepest when students construct their
own knowledge . . . [and] activity and continual expression are more effective than passive absorption” (p. 142).

Using formative assessments to determine students’ needs, teachers who utilize a student-centered approach to instruction build course activities that encourage active participation and higher-order thinking skills (McKeachie, 2002). Showalter (2003) emphasizes the importance of such assessments: “In order to be effective teachers, we have to think about how students learn and how to help them learn” (p. 36). Models for student-centered literature instruction provide students with opportunities to be actively involved in text interpretation, including “performance, imitation, generic focus, comparison, connection, engagement, [and] evaluation” (Showalter, 2003, p. 78). Likewise, Al-Shalabi (2009) asserts that his students learn best when they are actively engaged in a classroom “where students willingly practice writing, raise questions related to the material discussed, and make as many comments as they want” (p. 1). In recent years, this style of teaching has become the most favorable among professional educators (Kemp & O’Keefe, 2003; McKeachie, 2002; Showalter, 2003).

Though much debate exists concerning the use of lecture as a primary teaching tool (Bain, 2004; Barr & Tagg, 1995; deWinstanley & Bjork, 2002), it remains a top choice for many literature instructors (Showalter, 2003). Though the lecture may be effective for some relay of information, research indicates that it is less effective than other forms of instruction (Bain, 2004; Bickman, 1995; Bligh, 2000; McKeachie, 2002; Showalter, 2003). Lectures that include short segments, breaks, or opportunities for communication and interaction are more effective; good lectures are well prepared, include video clips, incorporate humor and/or personal anecdotes, and should be interactive (Bain, 2004; deWinstanley & Bjork, 2002; McKeachie, 2002; Showalter, 2003). However, the best lectures combat listeners’ attention spans and “human issues of
perception and retention” (Showalter, 2003, p. 49). Though active for the person delivering the presentation, lectures are passive learning activities for students (Bickman, 1995). Showalter (2003) also warns that lectures can often be “more intimidating than inspirational” (p. 50).

Building on the student-centered approach to teaching, Blau (2003) argues that students learn best when they are actively engaged in reading, analyzing, and discussing a text; through interaction and repeated encounters with the text, learners will likely gain much more understanding than they would from listening to an instructor discuss what the text means. In traditionally structured classrooms instructional methods are often ineffective because “the experience of being taught [is] merely an experience of witnessing and possibly recording the teacher’s learning, and not an experience of learning for oneself” (Blau, 2003, p. 3). Beach and Marshall (1990) claim that “the teaching of literature [should be] a three-way interaction among the teacher, the students, and the text” (p. 6) instead of a one-sided transmission of knowledge from teacher to student. To improve instruction and increase learning, Blau (2003) suggests that literature teachers “renovate the culture of instruction in literature to render it more consistent with the process-oriented, collaborative, and learning-centered practices [that make] students rather than teachers the responsible agents for learning in the classroom” (p. 5). Additionally, he believes instructors should work to transform literature classrooms into “communities and cultures that are more conducive . . . to the study and learning of literature throughout an educational career and literate lifetime” (Blau, 2003, p. 5). To meet these learning objectives, instructors must use a variety of instructional strategies, provide a number of learning opportunities, and utilize multiple assessment techniques to ensure student learning (Anderson & Carta-Falsa, 2002; Bain, 2004; Barr & Tagg, 1995; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Eble, 1988; Fink, 2003; McKeachie, 2002; Showalter, 2003; Stronge, 2007).
With their openness to interpretation, literary texts invite students to develop and use close reading, investigative, and analytical skills (Burke, 1999; Blau, 2003; Showalter, 2003). According to Blau (2003), literature studies “teach students a pattern or discipline for thinking that is applicable to every field of study and probably every complex human endeavor” and require “critical thinking in virtually every context” (p. 52). Blau (2003) points out that reading is a process of thought which requires students to create meaning through their multiple “interactions with words on a page and in the course of conversations with other readers” (pp. 214-215). Burke (1999) agrees, “The reading process requires that we use our own experiences and knowledge about the world to help us further understand [texts]” (p. 41). Noting that “the building blocks for such thinking are words, language” (p. 134), Burke (1999) also stresses that literature studies require and encourage critical thinking. To encourage students to use these skills, Burke (1999) proposes that teachers provide students with adequate time to think, instruct them to “embrace the contradictions and the complexity we find everywhere in our world,” and “model how to think in the classroom” (p. 134). Similarly, Smith (1990) and Gardner (1992) suggest that teachers should use a variety of instructional methods and stimuli to encourage students’ skill development, thinking, and learning.

Emphasizing that literature studies require close reading and provide students with skills “of evidentiary reasoning that [are] the basis for effective intellectual work in any academic field or profession” (Blau, 2003, p. 53), Blau offers three principles of teaching literature:

1. Reading is a process of constructing meaning or composing a text, exactly like writing. The reading of any difficult text will entail drafting and revision (largely in the reader’s head) and will frequently begin with what amounts to a zero draft. Just as
writing may be defined as rewriting, so is any reading worth doing essentially a process of rereading.

2. Reading is, and needs to be in classrooms, a social process, completed in conversation. Students will learn literature best and find many of their best opportunities for learning to become more competent, more intellectually productive, and more autonomous readers of literature through frequent work in groups with peers.

3. Literary reading and literary study, as they are ordinarily sponsored in rigorously conducted English classes, teach students an intellectual discipline that defines critical thinking in every field and fosters academic success in every subject of study. (pp. 53-57)

These three principles stress the importance of students’ interaction with each other and their repeated involvement with a variety of texts.

Similarly, Rosenblatt (1978) suggests that the act of deriving meaning from a text requires the reader to develop a relationship with the text. She indicates that the text serves as words or symbols that encourage the reader to think in a certain manner; in turn, readers interpret these words, using their prior knowledge and experiences to help them think about the text and create meaning. Rosenblatt (1978) claims that the result of this interaction is the “poem,” or the meaning created by the interaction of the text and the reader.

Effective literature instructors strive to create learning activities that require students to interact with text while using multiple levels of thinking (Burke, 1999). Burke (1999) suggests that in addition to choosing texts, teachers “need to decide which mode of thinking is best” (p. 136) for analysis and lead students to meet the desired learning outcomes. Additionally, Burke (1999) proposes that teachers build their classroom activities using several “domains of thinking”: “talking, writings, drawing, questioning, reading, [and] integrating” (p. 136).
Likewise, Beach and Marshall (1990) offer a set of “response strategies” that readers may use to make sense of a text:

1. Engaging. We can say that readers are engaging with a text whenever they articulate their emotional reaction or level of involvement.

2. Describing. Readers describe a text when they restate or reproduce information that is provided verbatim in the text . . . . Such a strategy is important because it serves to identify those parts of the text that will be useful in establishing meaning.

3. Conceiving. When readers conceive of characters, settings, and language, they are moving beyond the description of information in order to make statements about its meaning.

4. Explaining. [By explaining our ideas,] we broaden the scope of our explanations to include larger perspectives.

5. Connecting. It is when readers “connect” their own experiences to the materials in the text that the interactions between the reader and the text become most evident.

6. Interpreting. When readers interpret a text, they employ the reactions, descriptions, conceptions, and connections they have made to articulate the theme or “point” of specific episodes or [sic] of the overall text.

7. Judging. When we pull away from a text, . . . we make judgments about the characters in the story or about the literary quality of the text as a whole. (pp. 28-34)

These strategies encourage students to interact with a text, analyze its complexity, and arrive at meaning using higher order thinking skills.

Applebee (1997) believes that effective teachers structure their curriculum in terms of the conversations in which they want students to engage instead of building their courses solely on
content or specific texts. Building on this idea of “inquiry-based instruction” (p. 4), Beach and Myers (2001) suggest that teachers develop literature studies that focus on “social worlds” (pp. 4-5) that are intriguing to students. The researchers argue that students seem to be more engaged in learning when they are interested in the subject matter; therefore, Beach and Meyers (2001) suggest that teachers should create lessons that encourage students to think critically, become active participants and decision-makers, and recognize connections between the texts and their own lives.

Another method of instruction that requires student-teacher interaction and encourages multiple levels of thinking is the literature workshop. In *The Literature Workshop: Teaching Texts and Their Readers*, Blau (2003) identifies a literature workshop as a problem-based learning activity and as a “case study conducted by the participants” (p. 13). Blau (2003) explains the features of a literature workshop:

1. There is the posing of genuine questions on problems that face readers of literature individually and in groups as they engage in literary study or participate in the discourse literature.
2. There is the demand that workshop participants monitor how they experience the problems set by the assignment, along with the related demand that:
3. Participants reflect on and talk about or write about the problems they encountered and how they addressed them. (p. 13)

Furthermore, Blau (2003) explains that the literature workshop encourages students to take an active role in the learning process, noting that they act as “experts” (p. 13) who report their own experiences with and interpretations of the text. As the facilitator for learning, the instructor’s purpose is not only to select texts that will generate meaningful learning experiences, but also to
monitor students’ participation and “[offer] commentaries, glosses, and reflections that supplement and frame the experience of the workshop in some larger conception of disciplinary knowledge in literature” (Blau, 2003, p. 14). Students can gain valuable insights into the multiple meanings of a text by engaging in conversations with their peers, who likely view and discuss the text from differing perspectives; as students discuss the text, they begin to reflect on their own and others’ interpretations as they make decisions concerning meaning (Blau, 2003). The workshop redefines the roles of both teacher and student by “requiring students to engage in what amounts to metacognitive processing—thinking about and reporting on their own thinking in their encounter with a problem—[and] positions students and teachers in a pedagogical relationship that entails a shared or distributed expertise” (p. 13). The literature workshop is one activity that encourages critical thinking and discussion.

Discussion allows the students to take an active role in learning and provides them with opportunities to present their own ideas, opinions, and unique perspectives on course topics (Bain, 2004; Burke, 1999; McKeachie, 2002; Showalter, 2003). Bligh (2000) suggests that discussions are more engaging and thought provoking for students than lectures. Linkin (2009) believes that students enjoy and benefit from classroom discussion: “Most students respond positively to the importance of discussion in my classes on their evaluations of them, identifying discussion as helpful, interesting, effective, enjoyable, and informative” (p. 169). Likewise, Al-Shalabi (2009) indicates that student involvement in discussion is key to arriving at an understanding about the literature he teaches: “I arrange for keeping students involved and making learning enjoyable by allowing students to make comments on the material read and raise any relevant questions” (p. 3). Similarly, Burke (1999) believes that encouraging students to talk in the classroom leads to greater understanding and learning, and he recommends a
variety of strategies to increase students’ depth of understanding: full-class readings, small-group conversations, full-class discussions, debates, interviews, performances, and student-assisted text annotations. As a multiple-use instructional tool, discussion can include the entire class and can simply be a conversation about a literary topic or question between two students; teachers can vary the structure of discussions to fit their instructional needs or purposes (Showalter, 2003).

According to Palmer and Zimbler (2000), teachers in the humanities are more apt to utilize classroom discussions, cooperative learning activities and assignments, or seminars than their peers in other disciplines; similarly, humanities instructors tend to require more writing assignments, including essays and research papers, than their peers in other fields. Building on her personal experience as an instructor, Showalter (2003) claims that providing students with meaningful feedback is essential when teaching writing; students can only improve if they are mindful of their errors when they write again. However, she also warns that poor grades offer little motivation, and that instructors should make certain that grading is “useful for student learning” (Showalter, 2003, p. 59). Likewise, Eble (1988) feels that grades can be a “hang-up” (p. 163) to effective teaching and learning, and he claims that success in student learning will occurring after teachers “[make] a shift from grading to useful evaluating” (p. 163).

Because they feel a great responsibility to promote literacy, instructors in the humanities also emphasize questioning, reading, and writing (Palmer & Zimbler, 2000; Showalter, 2003). Showalter (2003) advocates teacher modeling, the practice of leading students to understanding by providing them with instruction and exemplary model:

Providing models of good writing, and allowing time for student to discuss them, can help establish realistic goals. Even before we are asking students to write, we can talk to
them about how to use their texts, how to do useful annotation, how to underline, how to keep a running index in paperbacks of key terms, characters, and plot lines. (p. 55)

Students in college-level literature courses should encounter more complex texts than they read at the secondary level; these college-level texts should challenge students not only to become active readers, but also to become effective writers and communicators (Burke, 1999; Showalter, 2003). Literature teachers can empower students to succeed by providing them not only with the skills to complete the tasks of reading and writing, but also by giving them models to emulate; these examples provide a sense of security for students who might feel uncertain about their abilities (Bain, 2004; Elbow, 2002; McKeachie, 2002; Showalter, 2003). Students who have the ability to read, understand, analyze, and explain a variety of texts are also more likely to enjoy success in their other academic courses (Blau, 2003; Burke, 1999; Showalater, 2003).

The goals for teaching literature have changed little over the years, but current and future literature instructors face the growing challenges of teaching an ever-expanding and quickly changing body of texts to a technology-savvy and culturally diverse group of students. The need to teach students how to read, analyze, and understand a variety of texts has never been greater. However, change in education is often slow (Showalter, 2003). Scholes (1985) warns, “We must stop ‘teaching literature’ and start “studying texts’ . . . . All kinds of texts, visual as well as verbal, polemical as well as seductive, must be taken as occasions for further textuality” (p. 16). Literature instructors share the responsibility for preparing students to become competent readers and effective communicators (Blau, 2003; Burke, 1999). To meet these goals and provide students with the best education possible, effective instructors are moving beyond traditional classroom methods to more student-centered pedagogical practices.
Theoretical Framework

In higher education, the movement toward a student-centered model of teaching and learning has gained momentum in recent years, and, as a result, the traditional paradigm of teacher-centered instruction is often considered ineffective and antiquated (Bain, 2004; Barr & Tagg, 1995; Brint, 2008; Cross, 1971, 1999; Fink, 2003; McKeachie, 2002; Reinsmith, 1994; Weimer, 2003). According to Fink (2003), colleges should embrace this paradigm shift because “society and individual learners now have different needs, in terms of both what people need to learn and how they can and should learn” (p. 11). Many traditional pedagogical practices do not effectively meet the learning needs of today’s college students (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Weimer, 2003).

Barr and Tagg (1995) claim that traditional methods of instruction are often ineffective because they are teacher-centered, not learning-centered; they argue that teacher-centered pedagogical methods fail to provide significant learning experiences for students. The researchers support a student-learning, outcomes-based instructional focus that allows for student input and participation. Fink (2003) acknowledges that “this change is a paradigm shift in which institutions are thinking less about providing instruction (the teaching paradigm) and more about producing learning (the learning paradigm)” (p. 17). As a part of this changing paradigm, more teachers are reflecting on their pedagogical practices and making efforts to differentiate their instructional methods to improve learning among students (Anderson & Carta-Falsa, 2002; Bain, 2004; Blau, 2003; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Fink, 2003; McKeachie, 2002; Stronge, 2007; Wenglinsky, 2000). Fink purports, “If higher education hopes to craft a more meaningful way of educating students, . . . then college professors will need to find a new and better way of teaching, one that focuses on the quality of student learning” (p. 27).
However, such a charge is difficult to carry out, in part because higher education professionals now face greater challenges. More so than in the past, teachers must diversify their instruction in order to meet the needs of a growing student population with varied ethnic and educational backgrounds (Anderson & Carta-Falsa, 2002; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Stronge, 2007). Additionally, accrediting agencies, legislators, and other stakeholders are placing more emphasis on learning outcomes, requiring higher education institutions to provide evidence that they are learner-centered institutions and that students are actually learning (Bresciani, 2006). To meet these challenges, many higher education institutions and their instructors are striving to provide optimal, student-centered learning opportunities for their students (Barr & Tagg, 1995, Fink, 2003). Many colleges are placing greater emphasis on instruction (Bain, 2004; Fink, 2003; McKeachie, 2002)

Notable scholar and consultant L. Dee Fink has extensively examined the role of the instructor in the teaching and learning process. Like Barr and Tagg (1995), Fink (2003) believes that instructors can significantly improve student learning by designing their courses to be learner-centered. Furthermore, he argues that instructors must provide students with opportunities for “significant learning experiences” (p. 29). Fink’s (2003) Model of Integrated Course Design (ICD) offers an explanation of how teachers can provide students with significant learning experiences.
The ICD Model stresses that significant learning experiences occur because instructors design their courses “in a way that is learning-centered, systematic, and integrated” (Fink, 2007). As figure 1 illustrates, Fink (2003) believes that instructors can design significant learning experiences for students by focusing on “five key components of integrated course design”: “situational factors; learning goals; feedback and assessment; teaching and learning activities; and connection and integration” (p. 63).

**Situational Factors**

To provide significant learning opportunities, instructors must take note of the situational factors that govern and impact the learning environment. Fink suggests that a careful consideration of situational factors “positions [instructors] to see important needs and contextual factors and will often even suggest answers to the design questions that need to be considered next—important learning goals, meaningful forms of feedback and assessment, and appropriate teaching and learning activities” (2003, p. 73). Situational factors important to instructional decisions include the culture of the institution, context of the classroom, “expectations of
external groups, the nature of the subject, and characteristics of the learners and the teacher” (pp. 68-72). The context and culture of an institution can influence teachers’ instructional decisions. To prepare optimal learning experiences, teachers must consider the expectations of all stakeholders involved in the education process as they prepare to teach. Likewise, instructors preparing to teach also must consider the context of the teaching and learning situation. For example, the number of students in a classroom; the frequency, location, and time of the class sessions; and the method of course delivery all influence the decisions of an instructor (Fink, 2003).

Additionally, Fink asserts that instructors’ designing a course and preparing for instruction must also consider the “nature of the subject” (2003, p. 70) as they plan. For example, Fink argues that instructors should consider whether a course is “divergent” or “convergent” when planning because such “characteristics need to be reflected in the way the course is designed” (2003, p. 70). Divergent courses often have learning goals that are broad and subjective; students in these courses are encouraged to develop their own interpretations of a problem or event by exploring and analyzing the various existing ideas and explanations. Many of the courses in the humanities are divergent, including American literature courses. In contrast, convergent courses have learning goals that are more objective in that “the intellectual effort is aimed at problems that have a single correct answer” (Fink, 2003, p. 70). Generally, math and science courses are convergent (Fink, 2003). The nature of the course and its content can certainly affect instructional decisions, including the development of learning goals, classroom activities, and assessment and feedback techniques.

Additionally, instructors must consider the characteristics of the learners as they design the course and prepare to teach (Fink, 2003). The classroom is typically composed of a diverse
group of learners, and the community college classroom is often composed of students of varying ages and differing educational backgrounds (Cohen and Brawer, 2008; Fink, 2003). Therefore, when planning for instruction, teachers should consider students’ “different feelings, relevant experiences, and prior knowledge” (Fink, 2003, p. 71) and how this diversity might affect the course. Fink explains, “A teacher would need to plan differently for a class that consists primarily of single nineteen-year-olds living on campus than for a class with a high percentage of students who are parents, perhaps married, twenty-five to forty years old, and working full or part time” (2003, p. 71). In addition, teachers should consider their students’ various learning styles and should work to develop diversified learning opportunities that will provide optimal learning experiences for their students (Fink, 2003).

Just as instructors should consider their students’ learning characteristics when planning for instruction, teachers must also consider their own personalities and characteristics (Fink, 2003). When designing a course, teachers should reflect upon their pedagogical practices in order to determine their strengths and identify areas in need of improvement; teachers can then build upon their strengths and “take on more challenging goals and more powerful teaching strategies” (Fink, 2003, p. 71). Furthermore, Fink suggests that instructors should design their courses to fit their personal philosophies of teaching: “When designing a given course, it’s essential to take [beliefs and values] as given and shape the course design decisions accordingly” (2003, p. 71). Finally, a teacher should consider the “special pedagogical challenge” (Fink, 2003, p. 71) of the course. Fink defines the “special pedagogical challenge” as “the special situation in [the] course that challenges both students and teacher to make [the class] a meaningful and important learning experience” (2003, p. 72). For example, students’ lack of
confidence in writing might be an obstacle that both teacher and student must face before significant and meaningful learning can take place.

As instructors develop and prepare to teach their courses, it is important that they “do a careful, in-depth job of collecting and analyzing information about various situational factors” (Fink, 2003, p. 73). Though not all of these situational factors will affect planning or pedagogical practice for every course, instructors should take time and review them to determine which need to be considered or discarded during course design and instruction. Instructors should consider these and other situational factors as they develop the learning goals, teaching and learning activities, and assessments for the course (Fink, 2003, 2007).

**Learning Goals**

What is it that teachers want students to learn? Answers to this question provide the learning goals teachers use to design their courses (Fink, 2007). Emphasizing the concept of backwards course design (Wiggins, 1998), Fink (2003, 2007) recommends that instructors, after consideration of the situational factors, develop the learning goals first. He argues that after teachers have developed the learning goals for the course, they may make better decisions about instruction and assessment activities. Building on Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning (1954), Fink (2003) developed a “new taxonomy, one that describes various ways in which learning can be significant” (p. 30). According to Fink (2003), “Significant learning requires that there be some kind of lasting change that is important in terms of the learner’s life” (p. 30). Unlike Bloom’s (1954) hierarchical taxonomy, Fink’s (2003) taxonomy is “relational, interactive,” and “synergistic” (p. 32).
Fink (2003) recommends that instructors use his Taxonomy of Significant Learning to develop their learning goals. As illustrated in figure 2, the types of learning included in the taxonomy are interrelated; therefore, students’ achieving success at one level of learning “simultaneously enhances the possibility of achieving other kinds of learning” (Fink, 2003, p. 32). Fink’s (2003) main premise is that teachers can improve students’ levels of learning by designing their course goals and learning activities so that students are actively engaged in the learning process. Therefore, Fink’s Taxonomy of Significant Learning includes opportunities for students to engage in six types of learning: “foundational knowledge, application, integration, human dimension, caring, and learning how to learn” (pp. 30-49). Fink (2003) believes that teachers who provide students with opportunities to engage in all six types of learning have succeeded in creating “a learning experience that can truly be deemed significant” (p. 32).

**Foundational knowledge.** Foundational knowledge is the “basic understanding that is necessary for other kinds of learning” (Fink, 2003, p. 31). Ultimately, all other types of learning
will be built on students’ understanding of general foundational knowledge—the facts, concepts, relationships, and principles that compose the course content. By example, in American literature, this knowledge might include students’ remembering the terms associated with literary analysis or identifying authors within a certain literary period. Instructors are not only responsible for teaching students this general knowledge, but also for leading them to a greater understanding of the major concepts of the course content (Fink, 2003).

**Application.** Fink (2003) defines “application” as the students’ ability to use foundational knowledge to “[develop] particular skills, [learn] how to manage complex projects, and [develop] the ability to engage in various kinds of thinking” (p. 38). According to Bain (2004), “[Effective teachers] think about teaching students to understand, apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate evidence and conclusions” (p. 115). Teachers often design learning activities that require students to apply their foundational knowledge; some of these learning opportunities include problem-based, collaborative, cooperative, and creative classroom activities and assessments (Anderson & Carta-Falsa, 2002; Bain, 2004; Fink, 2003; Herron & Major, 2004; Morgan, 2003; McKeachie, 2002; Stronge, 2007). Furthermore, teachers, especially those in the humanities, encourage students to pair their critical thinking skills with their creativity as they interpret, evaluate, and analyze literary and scholarly works (Fink, 2003). Teachers often have their students apply their foundational knowledge by “find[ing] new forms and styles for expressing themselves in painting, writing, music, and other media” (Fink, 2003, p. 42). By example, teachers of American literature might have their students analyze a piece of literature, create a table or chart comparing literary styles of two authors, or use specific literary devices to write an original work.
**Integration.** Effective teachers also provide opportunities for students to see the relationship and connection between subjects, concepts, principles, theories, ideas, etc. (Fink, 2003). An American literature teacher might have his or her students identify the cause and effect relationships between the British acts of tyranny and the persuasive literature preceding the Revolutionary War. Additionally, the instructor might have students read other works of literature from different parts of the world during the same time period to determine similarities in content and theme. Such activities will allow students to see the historical, social, religious, and political connectedness of the literature. Institutions and teachers who help students make connections between the disciplines encourage integration.

Furthermore, some colleges employ learning communities to encourage interdisciplinary learning and to help students connect with each other through course pairings, structured living arrangements, and other group-centered activities (Fink, 2003). Colleges can also promote integration by providing students with opportunities to participate in internships, field experiences, and service-learning projects (Fink, 2003). Through integration, teachers empower students with knowledge and provide them with opportunities to learn by connecting “ideas, people, and realms of life” to their own experiences (Fink, 2003, p. 30). By example, during a unit of study concerning war literature, an American literature teacher might have his or her students interview a veteran and present are their findings with the class. Such an activity would allow students to have a genuine experience of connecting real events with their literature and/or history studies.

**Human dimension.** The “human dimension” of learning occurs when students “learn something important about themselves or about others” (Fink, 2003, p. 31). Self-knowledge and social awareness can change a student’s life forever; some learning may lead students to develop
a new “self-image” and/or possess a “new vision for what they want to become” (p. 44).
Additionally, students may learn to understand the behaviors and actions of others, and this knowledge may lead students to a greater awareness of human nature and improve their abilities to work cooperatively with others. Effective teachers also encourage students to develop a greater understanding of humanity through pedagogical practices that incorporate multi-cultural studies, team-building exercises, cooperative-learning activities, and character and citizenship development lessons (Fink, 2003). By example, through the study of literature students may develop “an understanding of our society and culture and of ourselves as we function within that society and culture” (Carter & Long, 1991). By leading students in a study of certain texts, American literature instructors can lead students to become more aware of their own actions and more understanding of how others think about and respond to certain situations.

**Caring.** Fink asserts, “When students care about something, they then have the energy they need for learning more about it and making it a part of their lives. Without the energy for learning, nothing significant happens” (2003, p. 32). Thus, learning experiences that cause students to change their “feelings, interests, or values” (Fink, 2003, p. 48) about a subject are significant and lasting. When students begin to value the subject matter, then other significant forms of learning will likely occur (Fink, 2003). Effective teachers structure learning activities that not only engage students in active learning, but motivate them to care about the subject and to continue learning from themselves (Bain, 2004; Fink, 2003). By example, American literature instructors can encourage their students to value their own freedoms by recognizing and understanding the struggles and sacrifices of past Americans. Additionally, students may become more interested in how the literature of this country has been and remains reflective of the diversity of its people.
Learning how to learn. Ideally, since students gain limited knowledge throughout their educational careers, instructors should strive to teach their students to become lifelong learners (Fink, 2003). Fink asserts, “If we can help people learn how to learn—both during the course and after the course is over—learners will be capable of continuing their learning for the rest of their lives” (2003, p. 50). Arguably, this type of learning can also lead students to become more adept learners, to develop their own questions, to seek and discover their own answers, and to become “self-directed learners” (Fink, 2003, p. 53). For example, after completing an American literature course, students might be able to analyze the motives of and the rhetoric in a politician’s speech, read texts more closely and carefully, and continue their appreciation and study of American literature texts.

Fink (2003) claims that instructors who develop their course goals by incorporating multiple levels of learning are more successful in creating significant learning experiences for their students. Moreover, Fink believes that all types of learning must be present in order for the learning to be significant: “When a course or learning experience is able to promote all six kinds of learning, one has had a learning experience that can truly be deemed significant” (2003, p. 32). Additionally, student-centered learning goals lead to the creation of pedagogical practices and activities that include and emphasize significant learning experiences for students (Fink, 2003, 2007). Fink asserts, “If teachers use a combination of significant learning goals, it will be possible to create some interaction effects and synergy that greatly enhance the achievement of significant learning by students” (2003, p. 33). It may be the case that teachers who develop their course goals using Fink’s Taxonomy focus less on covering course content and, instead, stress the need for deeper learning on multiple levels (Fink, 2003, 2007).
Assessment and Feedback

Fink (2003) claims that assessment should be more than instructors assigning grades to students; instead, he argues that assessments should be purposeful and educational. In order to make assessments meaningful, Fink suggests that all assessments should be “educative” (2003, p. 83) and require students to use base knowledge to perform “authentic tasks,” be based upon “clear criteria and standards” for measurement, provide students with “opportunities for self-assessment,” and yield opportunities for instructors to offer feedback (pp. 82-95). To further learning, instructors should develop assessments that will help students to better understand and learn course content (Fink, 2003).

Fink proposes that assessments should be “forward-looking” (2003, p. 86) in that teachers should design them with the learning goals in mind; specifically, assessments should provide students with opportunities to complete “authentic tasks” where they apply the knowledge and skills they have gained throughout the course. Teachers who create and utilize forward-looking assessments gain valuable insight into their students’ mastery of course content and may use the results to determine if their instruction has made or is making a difference in their students’ understanding (Fink, 2003). Assessments should be designed so that they allow instructors to determine whether students have met or are meeting the intended learning goals of the course (Fink, 2003). According to Fink (2003), “If we want assessment procedures that are good, we as teachers must make clear for ourselves and for our students what criteria we are going to use to measure student performance and what standards we have for each criterion” (p. 92).

Additionally, as part of educative assessment, teachers should provide students with opportunities to “self-assess” their own academic performance (Fink, 2003). In some instances, teachers may involve students in developing the criteria for class assessments, which will help
students to understand their teachers’ expectations and provide them with a way to check their own work prior to submitting it. Additionally, instructors might have students use the criteria to check the work of other students. Some teachers might also have their students grade their own work based on a set of established criteria, which encourages self-reflection (Fink, 2003). Fink (2003) suggests, “When students can do this effectively, they have succeeded in learning how to engage in honest self-assessment” (p. 93).

Finally, Fink (2003) suggests that educative assessment include “FIDeLity feedback” (p. 95). According to Fink (2003), “Feedback occurs whenever teachers, fellow students, or even people from outside the course look at a student’s performance and give the student an evaluation of it” (p. 95). An instructor’s feedback should provide students with affirmation about the good qualities of the work while pointing out areas in which the work could be improved; feedback should be dialogical and lead to further understanding (Fink, 2003). Fink (2003) claims that “high-quality feedback” should be “frequent, immediate, discriminating,” and “done lovingly” (p. 95). Fink (2003) created an acronym to make the concept memorable: “FIDeLity” (p. 95). Feedback should occur frequently and immediately so that teachers can gauge their students’ progress, reflect on their instructional practices, and re-teach concepts as needed (Fink, 2003). Students may also benefit from frequent and immediate feedback because such dialogue, written or oral, provides them with comments about their academic performance and suggestions on how they might improve their future efforts (Fink, 2003). Feedback should also be “discriminatory” (p. 96), meaning that it should “be based on clear criteria and standards” (Fink, 2003, p. 96). When teachers and students share an understanding of expectations and criteria, any dialogue between the two becomes more “discriminating and useful” (Fink, 2003, p. 96). Finally, Fink (2003) asserts that feedback should be “done in the context of a loving, caring
relationship” (p. 96) because students are more likely to accept and respond to feedback that is presented “in empathy, personal understanding, and love” (p. 96). Together, these four components compose educative assessment.

**Teaching and Learning Activities**

Teaching and learning activities should be designed to lead students toward content mastery (Fink, 2003). In recent years, the literature on teaching and learning has noted the shift from teacher-centered instruction and passive learning to learner-centered instruction and active learning (Bain, 2004; Barr & Tagg, 1995; Fink, 2003; McKeachie, 2002). Building on this premise, Fink (2007) also believes that activities requiring student engagement lead to greater learning: “If we want students to achieve more powerful kinds of learning, we need more powerful learning activities” (Learning activities section, para. 1). Therefore, Fink (2003) recommends that instructors move beyond traditional methods of instruction and develop their pedagogy to include active learning experiences for students. Fink (2003) provides three strategies to implement active learning: (a) develop meaningful learning experiences; (b) present information and ideas in new and exciting ways; and (c) encourage self-reflection about learning experiences.

To provide students with significant learning experiences, Fink (2003) suggests that instructors develop teaching and learning activities that lead students to understand the basic principles and ideas of the course content, use and apply this knowledge, and reflect on and write about their experiences in the learning process. Active learning experiences include opportunities for students to participate directly in realistic settings or through simulated experiences; for example, future teachers might visit a classroom for a week as an observer and/or as a guest instructor to teach a lesson (Fink, 2003). Similarly, students studying public
policy, economics, or business administration might observe and/or participate in meetings open to the public. Additionally, students might participate in simulated events that mirror real-world experiences; such learning experiences may be created within classroom, via technology, or through other “vicarious form[s] of doing” (Fink, 2003, p. 109). Such experiences provide students with opportunities to realize the importance of their knowledge and skills to their futures. Finally, Fink (2003) proposes that students reflect on these experiences in order to assign meaning to these experiences.

Connection and Integration

As a final step in providing students with significant learning experiences, Fink (2007) recommends that teachers make certain the components of learning “reflect and support each other” (Integration section, para. 1). Planning is instrumental in ensuring the connection between each component, and Fink (2003) stresses that the “learning goals, the teaching and learning activities, and the feedback and assessment procedures all need to support each other” (p. 125). In addition, each activity should complement previous learning activities and build on students’ prior knowledge and experiences (Fink, 2007). Ideally, instructors will carefully choose pedagogical methods, learning activities, and assessments that, when used collectively, will produce and/or measure learning and lead students to meet the established learning goals (Fink, 2007).

As illustrated by his model, Fink believes that effective instructors create significant learning experiences by “promoting learning that [goes] beyond foundational knowledge and include[s] important aspects of active learning” (2003, pp. 157-158). As Fink (2003) suggests, effective teachers provide students with the opportunity to learn on multiple levels and teach students to become self-directed and lifelong learners. Several studies tout the changing power
of Fink’s Integrated Course Design (ICD) model, and some professors indicate that their use of Fink’s model has not only changed their pedagogical practices, but has also improved their students’ learning (Fallahi et al., 2009; Fink & Fink, 2009; Rose & Torosyan, 2009; Weeks, 2003).

Fallahi et al (2009) used Fink’s model to redesign six courses and claim that “the approach we used in redesigning our courses was capable of creating measurable improvement in all six categories of Fink’s taxonomy” (p. 50). Fallahi et al. (2009) also claim that Fink’s (2003) model provided positive change by helping them “reach the larger goals of improved student learning, engagement in the scholarship of teaching and learning, and dissemination of these ideas beyond [their] university” (p. 51). In fact, these researchers proclaim that “Fink’s ideas about course redesign provide a means for teachers in all disciplines to create more significant learning for their students” (p. 51). Similarly, Weeks’ (2003) study concluded that “when applied to a graduate-level course in information theory and coding theory, a carefully constructed set of course goals and accompanying set of active learning techniques resulted in statistically significant improvement in student morale, course evaluations, and overall learning” (Introduction, para. 7). Additionally, Weeks (2003) claims that his study is “convincing evidence that the incorporation of active learning strategies and explicitly stated course goals can lead to dramatic improvements in student evaluations, attitudes, motivations, productivity, and grades while providing tremendous satisfaction to all parties involved in the learning process” (Conclusion, para. 1).

Rose and Torosyan (2009) used Fink’s (2003) model to redesign their philosophy and art history courses. The researchers report that after their transition to Fink’s active learning paradigm, “evidence showed that learners gained interest, internalized knowledge creatively, and
found relevance in subjects that can often alienate the uninitiated” (Rose & Torosyan, 2009, p. 70). Additionally, Rose and Torosyan (2009) claim that they improved their instruction by becoming reflective instructors and learning to “specify guidelines and [provide] models for student work” (p. 70). Fallahi et al. (2009) and Rose and Torosyan (2009) claim improvement in their pedagogical practice and significant increases in their students’ learning because they utilized Fink’s (2003) Integrated Course Design Model.

Additionally, those who found success with Fink’s ICD model were eager to share their stories, so they “also discovered an expansion of their professional careers in the form of contributing to the scholarship of teaching and learning” (Fink & Fink, 2009, p. 112). Fink’s (2003) ICD model has encouraged educators to become self-reflective and improve their attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and pedagogical practices (Fallahi et al., 2009; Rose & Torosyan, 2009). Fink (2007) claims that his design yields success:

Professors in higher education are finding that, when they use the model of integrated course design to restructure the learning experience, students respond by becoming more engaged in the learning process by achieving more significant kinds of learning. This happens because students become co-creators of their own learning, the intended learning has greater meaning, and students are given a wider range of tools to create this learning. (Conclusions, para. 1)

**Use of Fink’s Model in the Current Study**

Fink’s (2003) Integrated Course Design (ICD) model and Taxonomy of Significant Learning provide a framework for this study. The researcher used the ICD Model and the Taxonomy of Significant Learning to examine the course design and instructional decisions of rural community college American literature instructors and to determine to what extent the instructors reflect Fink’s beliefs about instruction. Using Fink’s (2003) ICD Model and Taxonomy of Significant Learning, the researcher created the interview protocols, classroom
observation data collection instruments, and rubrics for document analysis. The researcher sought to determine if and to what degree rural community college American literature instructors reflect the over-arching qualities and components of Fink’s ICD Model.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presents an overview of the literature concerning literature instruction at community colleges and provides a framework for further examination of the course design and pedagogical practices of community college literature instructors. The review includes an examination of (a) the community college, including an overview of its history, students, and faculty; (b) the scholarship of teaching; (c) methods of instruction; (d) teaching community college literature; and (e) the theoretical framework of the study. The findings of this review indicate that instructors often share comparable characteristics, use similar teaching methods, and have a passion for their profession.

Furthermore, the literature indicates that though most instructors are satisfied with their jobs, they face similar challenges, including inadequate training for a changing instructional paradigm, a diverse and unprepared student population, growing pressures to conduct research, and time constraints. Additionally, administrative, student, and stakeholder expectations continue to increase while academic rigor and financial support continue to decline; therefore, teachers increasingly feel that they are facing insurmountable odds. Though the literature contains research about pedagogical practices, the scope of the literature includes little information specifically concerning the pedagogical practices of community college American literature instructors. The current study examines course design and pedagogical decisions of community college American literature instructors and may provide current and/or prospective educators with insights for improving teaching and learning. Chapter III presents the research
design and methodology for the current study. Chapter IV includes the data analysis, including a discussion of the emerging themes. Chapter V presents the findings of the study and recommendations for practice.
CHAPTER III:

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the course design decisions and pedagogical practices of American literature teachers at three rural community colleges in North Alabama. This study will add to the knowledge base in this field and fill a gap in the existing literature concerning teaching at community colleges. Research in the area of community college teaching is important to future instructors who could benefit from an understanding of instructors’ course design decisions and pedagogical practices that positively affect collegiate-level teaching and learning. Chapter III provides information regarding the research approach, context of the study, theoretical framework, research questions, data collection, data analysis, researcher positionality, and a timeline for the study.

Research Perspective

This research study was guided by a postpositivist paradigm. Postpositivists believe that “reality can be approximated but never fully apprehended” (Hatch, 2002, p. 14). As a result of this belief, postpositivists work to determine close depictions of reality, but they realize that a perfect truth does not exist (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002). Researchers using this paradigm as a basis “view inquiry as a series of logically related steps, believe in multiple perspectives from participants rather than a single reality, and espouse rigorous methods of qualitative data collection and analysis” (Creswell, 2007, p. 20). To improve validity and reliability, postpositivists use rigorous research techniques to collect data and “low inference, systematic
procedures” (Hatch, 2002, p. 14) in analysis. In this paradigm, knowledge is produced and presented in the form of generalizations, patterns, descriptions, and grounded theory (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002). One of the advantages of using the postpositivist approach to qualitative investigation is that the researcher serves as the data collection instrument and, through a number of validity approaches, he/she can determine patterned behaviors that participants utilize to create meaning from their environments (Hatch, 2002). Because this study sought to understand rural community college American literature instructors’ course-design and instructional decisions, the postpositivism served as a guiding research paradigm for the investigator.

**Research Approach**

Qualitative methods allow researchers to explore, understand, and explain human behaviors, emotions, or attitudes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2007, 2009; Padgett, 2004). According to Creswell (2007), “Qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, [collect] data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and . . . [pay] closer attention [than quantitative researchers] to the interpretive nature of inquiry” (p. 37). Similarly, Corbin and Strauss (2008) note that “qualitative research allows researchers to get at the inner experience of participants [and] to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture[s]” (p. 12). Using qualitative methods also provides the researcher with “the opportunity to connect with [participants] at a human level” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 13). Additionally, qualitative research allows the researcher to “direct [his or her] attention away from the blind pursuit of answers toward thinking about the questions” and to “assume a perspective that is open to interstitial meaning” (Padgett, 2004, pp. 3-4). Because this study will focus on the course design decisions and pedagogical practices of community college American literature teachers, qualitative research methods are appropriate.
More specifically, the case study approach to qualitative research allows the examiner to “explore a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and [to] report a case description and case-based themes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). Noting the importance of gathering and analyzing multiple sources of data to qualitative research, Merriam (1998) also advocates using the case study approach for research in the field of education; she believes that the case study approach, which broadens the scope of research to include the analysis of multiple sources of data, allows the researcher to delve deeper into the subject. Creswell (2007) suggests, “A case study is a good approach when the inquirer has clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the cases” (p. 74). Likewise, Yin (2003) believes that the case study approach allows the researcher to observe, study, and report on occurrences that take place within their natural environment.

This study will go deeper than simply soliciting participants’ perceptions of their pedagogical practices; in addition, the study will include classroom observations and document analysis. Because the focus of this study is to examine the course design and pedagogical practices of community college American literature instructors within three rural institutions in the Alabama Community College System, the basic case study approach will be the best method for gathering and analyzing data and for reporting results. Additionally, the researcher will test Fink’s Integrated Course Design Model and determine how and to what extent the participants reflect the over-arching qualities and components of the model. The results of this study will provide insight into how community college American literature instructors design and teach their courses.
Context of the Study

The setting for this study includes three rural North Alabama community colleges within the Alabama Community College System (ACCS). In addition to 21 community colleges located throughout the state, the ACCS includes four technical colleges, an upper division institution, a workforce training center, and a technology network (ACCS, 2009). In the 2008-2009 academic year, the ACCS had over 140,000 for-credit students enrolled in academic and career technical education programs, including over 7,500 dual enrollment students (ACCS, 2009). During the same academic year, nearly 130,000 students were involved in the ACCS’s workforce development program, and just under 29,000 adult students were served by the ACCS’s adult education program. The ACCS attributes its growth to its keeping tuition low and its commitment to help students overcome barriers to higher education enrollment (ACCS, 2009).

In the 2008-2009 academic year, the average age of for-credit students attending a community college in Alabama was just over 25, and nearly 60% of all students enrolled were awarded financial aid (ACCS, 2009). Approximately 30% of community college attendees in the 2008-2009 school year were minority students; over 60% of all students attending were female, while fewer than 40% were male (ACCS, 2009). Claiming to “[hold] the key to Alabama’s Economic Recovery,” the ACCS purports that it is “committed to providing a unified system of institutions delivering excellence in academic education, adult education, and workforce development” (ACCS, 2009, para. 4). The three rural North Alabama colleges from the Alabama Community College System chosen as research sites for this study vary in Carnegie classification and location. In order to establish the context for the study, the following paragraphs provide a description of each of the colleges that will serve as a research site.
College A

College A served as the third research site for this study; it is one of the smallest colleges in the Alabama Community College System and is classified by Carnegie as a small, rural, public Associate’s college. The college has two satellite instructional locations (College A, 2011). The college originally began as a seminary in 1898, and over time the institution grew and took on the dual function of serving as both a seminary and a secondary school (College A, 2011). Ultimately, in 1935 the secondary school was recognized by the State of Alabama as a junior college. In 1967, the college became part of the Alabama Community College System (College A, 2011). College A is among the oldest Associate’s degree-granting colleges in the Alabama Community College System (SSCC, 2011).

College A’s enrollment averages 2,300 students annually, and the college employs over 40 full-time personnel (College A, 2011). In 2009, the college enrollment was slightly higher than 2,400 students; approximately 35% of attendees were males, and 65% were females. Over 57% of these students attended college full-time, while 43% of students were enrolled part-time (ACHE, 2009). In 2009, the student population included 70% white/non-hispanic, 27% “other races,” and 3% African-American (ACHE, 2009). College A boasts that students are its greatest asset; proving its commitment to students, the college has the “highest freshman-to-sophomore retention rate in the Alabama Community College System” (73% in 2009) (College A, 2010, p. 1).

The English department is part of the college’s Humanities Division, which is one of the college’s seven academic divisions. In the spring of 2011, the English department included one full-time English instructor and two full-time instructors who teach four English classes and have additional administrative duties. Additionally, the English department employed two part-time
instructors and 12 adjunct instructors. All full-time English faculty have taught or currently teach American literature, but only one full-time and one adjunct instructor were teaching American literature in the spring term of 2011. The college offers American literature courses every semester. In the fall and spring, they offer seven sections; in the summer, the college offers ten sections (personal communication, May 20, 2011).

The researcher chose College A as a research site because of its size and location. College A’s small size provides a point of contrast with College C and College B, both larger institutions. Additionally, the English department is much smaller than either College C’s or College B’s English departments. Like College B, College A is also located in the northeastern section of the state; however, when compared to College C’s and College B’s main campus locations, College A’s host city is a very small, rural, and conservative municipality with strong ties to its community college.

**College B**

College B is classified in the 2011 Carnegie Basic Classification System as a large, public, rural-serving Associate’s institution. However, the college’s enrollment of 7,031 credit students in December of 2010 actually places the college in the category of a medium, public, rural-serving Associate’s institution (College B, 2011a). The college has a total of six instructional sites in its service area: four sites are in the college’s host city, and additional sites are located in surrounding counties. Additionally, the college serves students at a local correctional facility and at three local high schools (College B, 2011b).

College B had its beginnings as a technical college in 1925 (College B, 2011b). During the 1960s, College B became a junior college, and in 2003 the Alabama State Board of Education (ASBE) merged College B with a local trade school, creating multi-campus college
The school’s proximity to a major waterway and its accompanying industries make it a center for workforce training. Additionally, College B is near a regional institution and provides students an opportunity to take transferable general education courses (College B, 2011b).

In 2009, College B reported an enrollment of fewer than 7,000 credit students; the student population was made up of 39% males and 61% females. Of these students, 39% were enrolled part-time, and 61% were enrolled full-time. The student population included 71% white, 22% African-American, 2% Hispanic, and 5% “other races” (ACHE, 2009). In the 2009-2010 academic year, College B employed over 423 full-time personnel, including 119 full-time faculty positions. More than 62% of the full-time faculty possessed a master’s degree, and less than 1% held doctoral degrees (T. Rhea, personal communication, April 4, 2011).

The English department is part of the college’s Language and Fine Arts Division, which is part of the Instructional Services Division. In the spring term of 2011, the English department included 14 full-time faculty and 29 part-time instructors. Of the full-time English faculty, 12 instructors taught American literature in the spring of 2011. The college offers American literature every semester, but the number of sections is based on demand and funding. The college offered 17 sections of American literature in the fall of 2010, 21 sections in the spring of 2011, and 18 sections in the summer of 2011 (T. Rhea, personal communication, May 21, 2011).

The researcher chose this site because of its size and location. College B is a rural college located in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains and mostly serves students from the northeastern section of the state. It evolved from one of Alabama’s earliest technical colleges and has served countless students through its workforce training and academic programs. Though College B is classified as a large institution, recent enrollment has vacillated near
7,000 students, which is below the 7,500 students required to be considered a large, public, rural-serving Associate’s institution in the Carnegie Basic Classification System. It is possible that College B may be reclassified as a medium, public, rural-serving Associate’s institution when the next five-year reclassification occurs. Despite the size difference, College B is comparable to College C in several areas, including student demographics, programs of study, and course offerings.

**College C**

With an enrollment that currently surpasses 11,900 credit-hour students, College C is classified by Carnegie as a large, public, rural-serving Associate’s institution, is among Alabama’s largest community colleges (College C, 2011). The college has two large campuses and two additional instructional sites-- one at a local military installment and the other at a correctional facility. The college was established in 1947, became a technical junior college in 1965, and was formally designated a community college by the Alabama State Board of Education in 1973 (College C, 2011). Accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), College C currently offers 49 associate’s degree programs and over 50 workforce training or certificate programs (College C, 2011). The college boasts a state-of-the-art aerospace technology and robotics programs (College C, 2011). The school’s proximity allows it to work closely with area businesses and corporations to meet workforce development and training needs. Likewise, the college has specialized programs that enable students to work in cooperative programs and/or to train specifically for jobs related to the area’s federal and state programs (College C, 2011).

In 2009, College C reported a total enrollment of 11,340 students; the student population was made up of 56% males and 44% females. Of these students, 68% were enrolled part-time,
and 32% were enrolled full-time. The student population included 71% white, 20% African-American, 3% Hispanic, and 6% “other” (College C Fact Book, 2009). In 2009, the college employed over 325 full-time personnel, 41% of which held faculty positions. More than 50% of the full-time faculty possessed master’s degrees, and fewer than 25% had earned doctoral degrees (College C Fact Book, 2009).

The English department is part of the college’s Humanities Division, which is part of the Instruction and Student Success Division. In the spring term of 2011, the English department included 17 full-time faculty and employed 55 part-time instructors; all full-time English faculty have taught or currently teach American literature, but only 9 part-time instructors were teaching American literature in the spring term of 2011. American literature courses are offered every semester, and the college offers 24 sections in the fall and spring terms, but reduces the number of sections to 12 in the summer term (B. Jones, personal communication, April 4, 2011).

The researcher chose this site mainly because of its size and prominence in the Alabama Community College System. The college, despite having campuses near two large municipalities, serves several rural North Alabama counties. When compared to other community colleges in the state, College C’s English Department, like the college’s student population, is larger.

**Theoretical Framework**

The study is grounded on Fink’s (2003) Integrated Course Design (ICD) Model and Taxonomy of Significant Learning. According to Fink, instructors can significantly improve student learning by designing their courses to be learner-centered and providing students with opportunities for “significant learning experiences” (2003, p. 29). By “significant learning,” Fink means learning that “adds value to [students’] personal, professional, social, or civic lives
after the course and after college” (Fink, 2007, p. 2). Fink’s ICD model illustrates how teachers may provide students with significant learning experiences by designing their courses to be learning-centered, logical, and integrated (Fink, 2003, 2007). An instructor’s ability to design a course and deliver content knowledge are key components to the teaching and learning cycle (Fink, 2003, 2007). Located in Chapter II, Figure 1 illustrates the ICD model and its five key components:

- **Situational factors** are variables that instructors take into consideration when making decisions about course design. For example, instructors might consider: frequency and time of class meetings, number of students, course content, students’ ability levels and current life circumstances, stakeholders’ expectations, and their own competency and confidence (Fink, 2003).

- **Learning goals** identify what instructors want their students to learn from participating in the course. Fink (2003, 2007) recommends that instructors use the Taxonomy of Significant Learning (see Figure 2) as a basis for developing learning goals. The taxonomy encourages six types of learning:
  
  - **Foundational knowledge**: Students’ understanding of key concepts, terms, facts, and ideas relevant to the course
  
  - **Application**: Students’ ability to use the content knowledge
  
  - **Integration**: Students’ ability to see relationships between the content and other subjects
  
  - **Human dimension**: Students’ arrival at self-knowledge and social awareness
  
  - **Caring**: Students’ changing their feelings, interests, or values about a subject
Learning how to learn: Students’ knowing how to continue learning about the subject after their participation in the course has ended

- **Learning activities** should be based on and lead students to achieve mastery of the learning goals. Fink (2003) stresses that learning activities should be meaningful and engaging.

- **Feedback and assessment activities** should be designed to determine and/or measure how well students have achieved mastery of the learning goals. Assessment activities should require students to use the knowledge and skills they have acquired, should be based on clear and measurable criteria, and should encourage students to be self-reflective about their own learning (Fink, 2003).

- **Integrating the course** ensures the connection between each component of the ICD model. Fink (2003) stresses that the learning goals, learning activities, and feedback and assessment activities should support each other.

Fink (2003) asserts that significant learning can take place when all six types of learning are achieved.

Fink’s (2003) Integrated Course Design (ICD) model and Taxonomy of Significant Learning provided a framework for this study. The researcher used the ICD model and the Taxonomy of Significant Learning to examine the course design decisions and pedagogical practices of rural community college American literature instructors and to determine to what extent the instructors reflect Fink’s beliefs about effective instruction and significant learning experiences. Using Fink’s (2003) ICD model and Taxonomy of Significant Learning, the researcher created the interview protocols, classroom observation data collection instruments, and rubrics for document analysis used in this study. The researcher attempted to determine if
and to what degree rural community college American literature instructors reflect the over-
arching qualities and components of Fink’s Integrated Course Design Model.

Participant Identification and Selection

This study will involve a purposeful sampling of participants. According to Creswell
(2007), purposeful sampling “means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study
because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central
phenomenon in the study” (p. 125). Because this study examined the course design and
pedagogical practices of rural community college American literature instructors, the participants
for this study were selected from the full-time English faculty at three North Alabama
community colleges.

The instructors at these community colleges varied in age, ethnicity, gender, prior
experience, and educational background. Full-time instructors who teach in the Alabama
Community College System are required to hold at least a master’s degree in their field of
instruction; nonetheless, the educational backgrounds and experience levels of participants
differed. Some had taught at the secondary level and obtained state certification through a
teacher-prep program, and others began their teaching careers at the community college level
without any formal training in pedagogy. Some instructors continued their graduate studies and
earned a specialist or doctoral degree, and others were awarded higher degrees prior to their
faculty appointments. At some community colleges, English faculty teach multiple courses,
including remedial/developmental English, English Composition I and II, and/or sophomore-
level American, English, or world literature survey courses. Because the purpose of this study
was to examine the course design and teaching practices of rural community college American
literature instructors, the American literature instructors from three rural North Alabama
community colleges provided the population from which the participants of this study were
drawn.

The researcher contacted a “gatekeeper” (Creswell, 2009, p. 178) — a department chair,
faculty lead teacher, or other appropriate administrator from each institution—in order to explain
the study’s purpose, gain access to the research site, establish rapport, and gather the names of
the instructors who were teaching American literature during the fall term of 2011. From the list
of full-time instructors teaching English courses, the researcher invited three full-time American
literature instructors from each of the three research sites to participate in the study. The
researcher contacted each potential participant via phone, briefed them on the study, and invited
them to participate. After the initial contact was made, the researcher sent a follow-up e-mail
containing general information about the researcher and the research project to the participants;
the e-mail again requested their participation, provided the researcher’s contact information so
that the prospective participants could respond to the request, and included an attachment
containing the consent form. The researcher asked the participants to sign and return the
informed consent form prior to the initial interviews. After receiving the participants’
confirmations and initial consent forms, the researcher scheduled times to conduct interviews
and class observations with those instructors.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are grounded in Fink’s (2003) model of integrated
course design. This study will seek to answer a central research question: How do rural
community college English instructors design, deliver, and evaluate student learning in
American literature courses? The sub-questions are as follows:
1. How and to what degree do rural community college English instructors take into account *situational factors* in the conceptualization and design of American literature courses?

2. How do rural community college English instructors determine the *learning goals* for American literature courses?

3. How do rural community college English instructors determine the methods to be used to *assess and provide feedback* concerning student learning in American literature courses?

4. How do rural community college English instructors determine the *teaching and learning activities* to be used in American literature courses?

5. How do rural community college English instructors determine what learning materials (i.e., literary works) to utilize in the teaching of American literature courses?

6. What are the most commonly identified *learning goals, teaching and learning activities, assessment and feedback methods*, and materials (i.e., literary works) being used in American literature courses at rural community colleges?

7. How and to what degree do rural community college English instructors work to ensure successful integration of the four primary aspects of course design (situational factors, learning goals, assessment methods, and learning activities) in American literature courses?

8. To what degree do the situational factors, course learning goals, teaching and learning activities, and assessment and feedback methods considered and/or utilized by these rural community college English instructors reflect the over-arching qualities and components of Fink’s Integrated Course Design Model?
Data Collection and Instrumentation

To gather data, the researcher relied on three methods of qualitative research: interviews, observations, and document analysis (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). Creswell (2007) and Yin (2003, 2009) recommend collecting and analyzing multiple forms of data when conducting a case study. Creswell (2007) asserts that the collection and analysis of multiple forms of data will assist the researcher in creating “an in-depth picture of the case” (p. 132). Yin (2009) claims, “For case studies, the most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources” (p. 103). The researcher planned to conduct two interviews with each participant, observe each participant teaching in a classroom context, and examine and analyze documents associated with classroom instruction and management. Ideally, the course observation would have occurred after the first and prior to the last interview.

Each interview lasted approximately one hour. During the interviews, the researcher recorded handwritten field notes about the verbal responses and non-verbal cues; additionally, he audio-recorded and created transcripts of each interview in order to review the data for significant details. The separate interviews were designed to have a specific focus related to Fink’s (2003) Integrated Course Design Model and/or the Taxonomy of Significant Learning. The researcher used a separate protocol for each interview (see Appendix A). In the initial interview, the questions focused on the instructors’ demographics, situational factors, learning goals, and the types of significant learning. In the second interview, the researcher asked questions concerning the instructors’ feedback and assessment techniques, teaching and learning activities, and course integration and management; additionally, the researcher also asked follow-up questions derived from the previous interview and/or the classroom observation.
Though the interview protocols contained previously prepared questions, the researcher encouraged interviewees to go beyond these questions and provide candid and open responses.

At the end of the initial interview, the researcher worked with each participant to schedule an additional interview and one classroom observation. Observing these instructors in the classroom environment allowed the researcher to witness first-hand the participants’ instructional methods and their interaction with students. Additionally, by observing the classroom environment, the observer was able to compare the participants’ actions to their interview responses. In order to document important activities during the observation, Creswell (2007) advises the qualitative researcher to take field notes that “record aspects such as portraits of the informant, the physical setting, particular events and activities, and [the researcher’s] own reactions” (p. 134). During the observations, the researcher used an observational protocol (see Appendix B) as a method to record extensive field notes of the observed instructors’ behaviors, pedagogical practices, and interactions with students (Creswell, 2007, 2009). Paired with the interview data, the classroom observations provided rich information for later analysis and allowed the researcher to code and identify themes from the data. At some point before, during, or after the initial interview, the researcher asked each participant for syllabi and other documents related to classroom instruction and management.

Yin (2009) asserts, “Because of their overall value, documents play an explicit role in any data collection in doing case studies” (p. 103). The researcher collected, analyzed, and coded documents germane to the teachers’ course design and pedagogical practices, including syllabi, supplemental handouts, assignments, assessments, and textbooks. Document analysis provided additional sources of data that supplemented the information garnered from the interviews and observations (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 1998; Yin, 2003, 2009). These
documents provided the researcher with existing written data that were “thoughtful in that
participants have given attention to compiling them” and allowed him to “obtain the language
and works of participants” (p. 180). Likewise, these documents provided a unique perspective
on the participants being studied and supplied concrete, “nonreactive” (Hatch, 2002) data useful
in triangulation. The researcher used a rubric (see Appendix C) to analyze and evaluate the
documents.

As the researcher read and analyzed the documents, he also annotated and coded them.
When compared to the data attained from the interviews and classroom observations, the
document analyses assisted the researcher in determining recurring and/or emerging themes.
The information gleaned from these documents not only provided insight into what materials and
assessments the instructors utilized in teaching their courses, but they also revealed additional
information about the instructors’ teaching philosophies, instructional styles, personalities, and
expectations.

Data Security and Participant Confidentiality

During the fall 2011 and spring 2012 terms, the researcher collected data by conducting
interviews, completing classroom observations, and examining documents related to classroom
instruction and management. After each interview, the researcher created a transcript using a
word processor; the transcripts were stored in an electronic format on the researcher’s personal
computer and flash drive, which, along with any hard copies, were stored in a locked file cabinet
in the researcher’s home office. The researcher also took field notes during the interviews, and
these notes were stored with the hard copies of the transcripts. To maintain participants’
confidentiality, the researcher used pseudonyms instead of participants’ actual names when
reporting the findings of this study. Likewise, the researcher used pseudonyms when referring to the institutions where the data were collected.

During the classroom observations, the researcher used the observational protocol (see Appendix B) to record information; additionally, to ensure accuracy, the researcher took handwritten field notes. The observations allowed the researcher to see the participants in an instructional role and provided an opportunity for the researcher to “explor[e] topics that may be uncomfortable for participants to discuss [in an interview]” (Creswell, 2009, p. 179). These observations focused on the instructors’ behaviors and pedagogical practices; students were not described by name or characteristics in the study. After each observation, the researcher began analyzing and organizing the data. Paired with the interview transcripts, the evidence collected during classroom observations allowed the researcher to begin synthesizing the data. The records from the classroom observations were also stored in the locked file cabinet in the researcher’s home office, located on the first floor of his private residence.

Finally, the researcher collected, analyzed, and coded course syllabi and other course-related documents. Such documents “could be accessed at a time convenient to the researcher” (Creswell, 2009, p. 180) and could be analyzed without transcription. Document analysis also led the researcher to new insights concerning the participants’ course design and delivery practices. The researcher began reading and analyzing the transcripts and field notes and developed further generalizations about the data. All handwritten documents were stored in the locked file cabinet in the researcher’s home office. The researcher will make certain that all electronic, written, and audio records are properly deleted, shrEd.D.ed, or incinerated after the study has ended.
Data Analysis

The researcher collected data via personal interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The data were analyzed using standard qualitative techniques (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 1998). Merriam (1998) asserts that “the sense we make of the data . . . is equally influenced by the theoretical framework. That is, our analysis and interpretation—our study’s findings—will reflect the constructs, concepts, language, models, and theories that structured the study in the first place” (p. 48). Building on Merriam’s (1998) suggestion, the researcher used Fink’s Integrated Course Design (ICD) model and Taxonomy of Significant Learning as a basis for coding during data analysis. During data collection and analysis, the researcher looked for evidence of significant learning experiences as defined by Fink’s Integrated Course Design Model and Taxonomy of Significant Learning (2003).

Data analysis occurred concurrently with data collection (Seidman, 1998). As the researcher completed the interviews, he transcribed and began reviewing, reducing, and sorting the information into categories (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Seidman, 1998). Likewise, as he completed the classroom observations and collected the course-related documents, he began analyzing and coding the observation protocols and field notes, looking for similarities in teaching styles, philosophies, instructional language, activities, classroom context, and other relative points of comparison. Similarly, once these documents for the study were gathered, he read, reviewed, and coded the documents and rubrics, noting the evidence of effective course design and instruction according to Fink’s (2003) definitions.

Merriam (1998) also explains that “devising categories is largely an intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study’s purpose, the investigator’s orientation and knowledge, and the meanings made explicit by the participants” (p. 179). Repeated readings and
coding not only allowed the researcher to reduce and organize the data, but also led him to establish connections between the data collected and the research questions (Creswell, 2007; Seidman, 1998). Multiple readings of interview transcripts and constant coding allowed the researcher to “make sense out of the data” (Merriam, 1998, p. 178) and determine the recurring ideas and themes present in the raw data.

The researcher eventually cross-referenced the data to develop the final themes and descriptions (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1998) based on the in-depth understanding that arose from analysis. Yin (2009) believes that “the use of theory . . . is an immense aid in defining the appropriate research design and data collection. The same theoretical orientation also becomes the main vehicle for generalizing the results of the case study” (p. 40). Therefore, the researcher, through in-depth analysis, attempted to determine if and to what degree rural community college American literature instructors reflect the over-arching qualities and components of Fink’s Integrated Course Design Model. The researcher used the emerging themes and descriptions as a basis for interpretation and reported his findings in Chapter IV.

**Researcher Positionality**

Because of the qualitative researcher’s direct involvement in the context of the study, Creswell (2007) claims that “clarifying researcher bias from the outset of the study is important so that the reader understands the researcher’s position and any biases or assumptions that impact the inquiry” (p. 208). To maintain the integrity of the research, qualitative researchers should make known their “past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). Adhering to this protocol, I wish to acknowledge the personal biases that might influence or compromise the collection and interpretation of data as I conduct this research project.
I am an English instructor with thirteen years of experience teaching on both the secondary and post-secondary levels; therefore, over time I have come to develop strong opinions about what constitutes effective teaching and learning. I spent the first nine years of my career as a secondary English teacher, working with students at all levels of learning. During my career, I have also taught at two northern Alabama rural community colleges. As an adjunct instructor, I taught evening English composition and American literature courses at Calhoun Community College in Decatur, Alabama. Additionally, for two years I served as a full-time English faculty member at Wallace State Community College (WSCC) in Hanceville, Alabama. After a two-year stay at WSCC, I returned to secondary education and currently teach college-level Advanced Placement (AP) and dual enrollment English courses, both of which include the instruction of literature. I am familiar with the secondary and post-secondary schools in the North Alabama region, and I have experience working with students of all ages, including the traditional high school students and non-traditional and traditional community college students.

Because of my interest in teaching and learning, I became a fellow of the Red Mountain Writing Project, part of the National Writing Project, in the summer of 2007. The experience allowed me to work with some of the region’s best English and language arts instructors while familiarizing myself with the literature, research, and pedagogy related to instruction in reading and writing. In spring of 2008, I was a participant in Wallace State Community College’s Master Teacher Academy. I am also a member of the National Council of the Teachers of English (NCTE). In addition to my teaching duties, I currently serve as the lead English teacher for the Hartselle City School System, and my responsibilities include curriculum design, teacher evaluation, and vertical team development and implementation for grades 6-12.
My goal as an instructor has always been to provide my students with the best education possible. Likewise, I have always desired to create within my students a passion for learning similar to my own. My hope is that my students not only learn to appreciate the course content, but that they also become life-long learners. Above all, I want to be a catalyst for students’ success. Because of my passion and desire to be a better teacher, I developed an interest in pedagogy.

I will attempt to avoid bias during data collection, analysis, and reporting by using the following strategies: triangulation and peer debriefing (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2009). However, I realize that my past and current experiences, paired with my strong opinions on teaching and learning, could possibly lead to bias. By revealing this information at the forefront of the study, I hope to remain cognizant of the possibility of bias and remain an objective researcher throughout the study.

**Trustworthiness**

Qualitative researchers must design their studies to include and document certain procedures and methods in order for the results to be considered reliable and credible (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Merriman, 1998; Seidman, 1998; Yin, 2003). To ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the study, this researcher adhered to the recommended methods of a well-designed qualitative research design. The researcher used triangulation and peer debriefing to establish trustworthiness (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

During the study, the researcher collected and analyzed multiple sources of data to achieve triangulation (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Mirriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Creswell (2007) suggests that qualitative researchers should compare “evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective” (p. 208). Therefore, collecting and analyzing multiple data
sources such as field notes taken during interviews and observations and interview recording and transcripts allowed the researcher to “provide corroborating evidence” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208) when answering the research questions. Also, the researcher used peer debriefing to establish credibility. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the peer debriefer is someone whom the researcher allows to review the study, poses difficult questions concerning the study’s design, results, and conclusions, and offers suggestions and feedback to enable the researcher to improve, complete, and report findings of the research. This researcher asked colleagues and community college faculty not directly involved in the study to serve as peer reviewers. This system of checking and establishing accuracy strengthened the data and increased credibility.

**Timeline**

After completing the required coursework in June of 2010, the researcher began the preliminary research for this study. In July of 2011, the dissertation committee members gave approval to conduct the study, and in September of 2011 The University of Alabama’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the request to conduct field research. In fall of 2011, the researcher conducted the field research and began analyzing data. In the fall of 2011 and spring of 2012, the researcher completed data analysis and wrote Chapters IV and V. The researcher presented the results of the study to the committee in the spring semester of 2012.

**Chapter Summary**

Using qualitative methods, this basic case study examined how American literature teachers from three different rural, North Alabama community colleges design, deliver, and evaluate student learning in their courses. Additionally, the study sough to determine how and to what extent the participants reflect the over-arching qualities of Fink’s Integrated Course Design Model. The results of this study may help other instructors better understand the relationship
between teaching and learning and may assist them in designing their own college courses. Additionally, this study contributes to the existing literature regarding community college instruction and will fills a gap in the literature concerning American literature instruction in the community college setting. This chapter has provided information regarding the research approach, context of the study, theoretical framework, research questions, data collection, data analysis, researcher positionality, and a timeframe of the study. The following chapter will present the data collected in the study.
CHAPTER IV:
RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the course design decisions and instructional practices of rural community college American literature teachers in North Alabama. Additionally, the researcher sought to determine if and to what degree rural community college American literature instructors reflect the over-arching qualities and components of Fink’s Integrated Course Design (ICD) model. In order to develop an understanding of how rural community college instructors design and deliver their American literature courses and if and to what extend these instructors reflect part or all of Fink’s ICD model, the researcher selected ten full-time American literature instructors from three rural North Alabama community colleges of various sizes to participate in the study. This chapter presents the research data collected from the semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and course-related document analysis.

Demographics

To better understand the course design and pedagogical decisions of rural North Alabama community college American literature instructors, the researcher sought to include a representative group of instructors in this study. The protocol for the initial interview included questions that solicited general demographic information from participants. A summary of this information is included as Table 1. Ten rural North Alabama community college instructors participated in the study. Participants included five males and five females. Nine participants
were Caucasian, and one participant was Hispanic. The age range was 30 years, with the youngest participant being 34 and the eldest being 64; the mean age of the participants was 48.2. Five participants hold a Ph.D. in English, one has an Ed.D. in Higher Education Administration, and four possess master’s degrees in English (with a minimum of 18 hours of graduate-level English courses—a requirement to teach in Alabama’s community colleges).

All participants have at least five years of experience teaching American literature at the community college level, and three instructors have over 30 years experience teaching the subject. The mean of the participants’ years of experience is 20.7. Three instructors have less than three years’ experience teaching in their current positions; two of the participants have over 30 years’ experience teaching in their current positions. To familiarize readers with the ten participants, the researcher has included a profile of each participant. The profiles are derived from the interviews, course observations, and course-related document analyses conducted during field research. The names used throughout the study are pseudonyms.
Table 1

General Demographic Information of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Highest Degree Earned</th>
<th>Highest Degree Earned in English/Language Arts</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Years in Current Position</th>
<th>College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlton</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunni</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>EdD</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dot</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhonda</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josh</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>MA*</td>
<td>MA*</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stan</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. C (Caucasian); H (Hispanic); M (Male); F (Female). *Note. *Rhetoric

**Participant Profiles**

**Carlton**

Carlton is a 45-year-old instructor with a tremendous passion for teaching and an extensive knowledge of American literature. Before teaching at the community college level, he taught a few years at the secondary level. However, Carlton made it very clear that one of the reasons he went back to college was so he could leave the secondary level and become a college instructor. In 2009, his academic interests led him to complete a Ph.D. program in English, and his dissertation studies culminated in a focus on a lesser-known, modern American novelist.

Carlton’s office is one of the largest in the humanities building, which allows for the inclusion of several bookcases and chairs. A tiny lamp and the small amount of sunlight that
peeked through the half-drawn blinds dimly lighted the office. On his desk sat several stacks of essays, an American literature text, and an open grade book. In the corner next to the largest bookcase was an oversized, brown recliner. A few frames on the wall and several others on his desk depicted Carlton as a father, teacher, and scholar. Upon my arrival, he warmly welcomed me. Our conversation quickly led to academics, and he was eager to share words of encouragement and his newly bound dissertation with me. Carlton’s passion for the profession became evident during the interviews and class observation.

In addition to the American literature classes, he also teaches remedial English courses and English 101 and 102—two freshmen composition courses that are prerequisites to the literature survey courses. Carlton is an energetic teacher who believes that student engagement and humor are essential components of teaching and learning. Even in chastising his students for low-test scores, Carlton used humor: “Many of you guys need to read and study more. You’re in sweater weather. You know what that is? It means [your grades] are in the 30s, 40s, and 50s. Wouldn’t you much rather be in the tropics? How about some 90s and 100s on the next test?” After getting his students’ attention with this humorous analogy, Carlton further stressed the importance of working hard and earning higher scores on future tests.

During the day’s class meeting, Carlton not only revealed his knowledge of the history and works of Benjamin Franklin through a recap of the previous lesson, but he also added brief historical anecdotes about Franklin’s trips abroad and his strained and unique relationship with his son. Carlton’s delivery included interaction and dialogue with the students, and he used illustrations that made the subject matter relevant and interesting. The lecture was peppered with humor. Carlton’s review and mini-lecture served as an introduction to a documentary about Franklin’s life and works. Even with 40 students in the class, the environment was very
controlled, yet welcoming. The students freely responded to questions, laughed at the
appropriate times, and seemed to enjoy interacting with the professor.

A look at his reading list reveals that Carlton is correct when he claims that he offers a
“buffet line of American literature selections” in his survey courses. Carlton explains his goal in
providing a variety of works for students to read:

My hope always is there, is that there’s going to be something—they’re going to be
exposed to some things, some author, maybe some story, maybe some poem that makes
that student want to continue his or her own education and read more, go back to the
buffet line for a second helping.

Additionally, Carlton stated that he often supplements his lessons and assigned reading with
multi-media clips, videos, and handouts. He admitted that today’s community college students
are all “plugged in to some kind of technology,” so he has found that incorporating such
technologies into his lessons helps keep students interested.

In addition to including a detailed reading list and course calendar, Carlton’s syllabus
outlines the college’s policies and the instructor’s expectations. His primary instructional
method is the lecture, which is supplemented with the instructor’s use of Socratic questioning
and discussion. Grades are derived from an unspecified number of reading checks/ quizzes and
three major examinations; all assessments test the students’ knowledge and understanding of
course readings, lectures, and class discussions. The summative examinations are administered
electronically via blackboard and are composed of a variety of questions, including multiple
choice and essay questions. Though the college has no official attendance policy, Carlton’s
syllabus stresses the importance of attendance to success in the course.

Carlton’s passion for American literature and his concern for students’ learning the
subject are both evident in his course design and instructional practices. He is a reflective
instructor who remains abreast of current educational and technological trends. Pairing his extensive knowledge of American literature with his quick wit and humor, Carlton captures his students’ attention and challenges them to not only learn, but enjoy, the works that define our country’s literary heritage.

Gary

Gary is an enthusiastic 61-year-old instructor with over 38 years of teaching experience. Though he has spent the last 28 years in his current position at College C, his years of experience include several years as a teaching assistant and two years teaching abroad—one in Brazil and one in Portugal—as a Fulbright Scholar. He holds a Ph.D. in English, and his dissertation was written about humorist Mark Twain. Gary loves to make people laugh, and his animated personality and infectious love for storytelling presented themselves during the interviews and the class observation.

Since Gary has seniority in the department, he teaches three sections of American literature and two sections of English 102. He stated that he “hoped his days of [teaching] English 101 were behind him.” A look around Gary’s office revealed his love of storytelling and laughter. The spacious office held a desk, two file cabinets, and two full bookshelves. Across from his desk was a wicker settee with cushions containing a floral design. His décor was quite eclectic. On the wall were pictures of Mark Twain and William Faulkner. Directly behind his desks between two lengthy windows hung a small portrait of Gary’s friend, mentor, and dissertation chair. Other posters and pictures depicted scenes of the rural South. On top of the filing cabinet was a small figure of James Brown, and before the interview began, Gary pushed a button to make the figure sing a portion of Brown’s hit song “I Got You,” which contains the repetitive line “I Feel Good.” As the figure sang, Gary laughingly said, “Sometimes I get ol’
James to sing to me before class, just to convince me that I do ‘feel good.’” Other wall decorations encouraged visitors to “live, laugh, and smile.” The informal and relaxed atmosphere of the office is reflective of Gary’s not-too-serious personality, which makes him a favorite with faculty and students at College C.

On the day of my classroom observation, I arrived early and had the opportunity to have lunch with Gary at the college’s small café. As we walked across campus, numerous students greeted Gary or stopped us simply to say hello. He was eager to speak with each of them, and he was very attentive and genuinely interested in what they had to say. One student told the instructor that she had, at his recommendation, read two books by William Faulkner and that she was now reading *As I Lay Dying*. She commented that Gary had inspired her to read all of Faulkner’s works. Beaming with pride, Gary praised her efforts and encouraged her to “soak it all up like a sponge.” Even at the café, those behind the counter and others eating their lunch treated Gary as if he were a Hollywood star. Obviously, Gary had made an impact on these students’ lives, and they had a great respect and admiration for their professor.

Gary primarily uses lecture and class discussion as instructional methods. Additionally, he includes multimedia clips and audio recordings to enhance his lectures. Gary is a gifted orator, and he sees himself as a storyteller when he is in front of the classroom. In the initial interview, Gary shared his idea that we are all storytellers in some way. His belief is that the histories of the past and the stories that we continue to create—our own experiences—are important lessons that must be shared. Gary explained:

> If we can imagine what our lives would be like without our stories, it would be empty and cold and vacant. If I didn’t know the story of the first time my grandfather held my grandmother’s hand when she was a girl, if I didn’t know that once upon a time in Bethlehem of Judea, if I didn’t know the story of this or that. We had – that’s our province—the stories, and if we can – if I can somehow tie the stories in this book to
their own stories, then, yeah, I think it has a great deal of influence on them intellectually and socially and culturally and all other ways.

He is the quintessential Southern storyteller, and he pairs this gift with his knowledge of American literature to deliver captivating lectures and personal anecdotes. Discussing his methods, Gary admitted,

The way I teach class, or attempt to, I think, [is that] I think I always try to put on a program. I think it’s a show . . . I have to keep them motivated, and if I can make them laugh—I mentioned this to you before—then I think I can make them listen.

As part of “the program,” Gary mixes his oratory skill with humor to draw his students into the lecture. However, he admitted that he does not limit himself to only a few methods; instead, he indicated that he uses whatever means necessary to “kind of slip up on [students] and teach them something.”

At the time of the classroom observation, Gary was teaching a lesson focusing on excerpts from Benjamin Franklin’s autobiography. Before instruction even began, the teacher used humor; while checking attendance, he playfully asked students about their clothing, electronic “gadgets,” favorite songs, and even asked a few students what they did during their recent absence. Clearly, Gary had a great rapport with his students. In like manner, they playfully responded to his questions, followed his lead, and even provided him with a few “punch lines.”

Remarkably, Gary used a conversation that arose while he was checking attendance to segue into the day’s lesson. The reason he asked his students about their preferences and habits was to lead them into a lesson on Franklin’s list of virtues and the record keeping method Franklin used to monitor his progress in increasing his virtue and eradicating his vices. During the lesson, Gary continuously used historical anecdotes about Franklin and personal stories to
illustrate the difficulty of achieving perfection. Each anecdote led back to the analysis of some part of Franklin’s text. Gary utilized his comprehensive knowledge of Franklin’s history and works to present an entertaining and thought-provoking lecture; the instructional style also fostered a warm environment where students felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions.

To end the session, Gary reminded his students that the next class meeting would include a discussion of Jefferson’s *Declaration of Independence*. He asked his students, “Doesn’t that excite you?” The response was lackluster. He then said, “I see. You either don’t know or have forgotten the power of that document. Do you know what it did?” Again, the students were less than excited and reluctant to respond. However, what happened next was amazing. Gary shared an experience he had while teaching in Brazil. Using his oratory skills, he brought a past moment to life. Gary told of how he once mentioned to his Brazilian students that they would be discussing the *Declaration of Independence*, but none of them knew the work by that title. He then began telling the Brazilian students about the history of the document until a student who recognized the work stood to his feet. According to Gary, the standing student then turned to his classmates and, in his native language, explained that they would be discussing the famous work by Thomas Jefferson. As he told the remainder of the story, Gary said that every Brazilian student in the room stood to their feet and began reciting lines from the document. With a thunderous and strong voice, Gary recited: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” As Gary finished the story to his students at College C, the room fell silent. After a moment passed, Gary challenged his current students to read the document with “a new passion” before the next meeting. The inspiring
anecdote seemingly served its purpose, for even I swelled with emotion and had an urge to re-read the document.

Many times during the lesson, Gary had the students laughing, and at other times, the discussion became serious. However, he had the students’ attention for the entire class session. It was evident that Gary enjoyed teaching and being with students, and based on my observation, most of his students also enjoyed the class session. It is no mystery why Gary is revered by his peers and students.

A review of Gary’s American Literature I syllabus accentuated his relaxed style and flexibility. The document included a general course description and information regarding the institution’s policies on attendance, make-up work, withdrawal, and academic misconduct. Additionally, the document also included a tentative course reading list that contained authors, selections, and page numbers; however, there was no course calendar. The syllabus indicated that the instructor would notify students of examinations at least one week prior to the assessment. Gary explained that he did not list specific dates for assigned reading or examinations in the syllabus because he might take more time teaching and discussing some works while others may be skipped. He also noted that students feel a sense of obligation to attend classes more often when they are uncertain about examination dates. “They find out when the tests will be given if the attend regularly,” Gary explained. Assessments include three or four examinations and an undetermined number of pop quizzes.

Gary’s goal in teaching American literature is “to attempt to make the students love it as much as [he loves] it.” Despite the evidence to the contrary, Gary admitted with great humility and sincerity that he feels he never reaches this goal. His philosophy is that literature is important to us all because “the stories we read, the place, the poems—they’re all about us.
They are all about us.” He noted that he believes the study of literature has the capability of making lives better. According to Gary, when students realize that the themes of literature are universal and applicable to their own lives, then they can begin to see the world in a different way and make some significant changes to their own lives.

**Lucy**

Lucy is a polite, soft-spoken 30-year-old English instructor. She has 5 years of teaching experience. She holds a master’s degree in English with the required additional graduate-level, in-field hours. Lucy is a new-hire at College C, and, in her words, she is “adjusting to her new work environment.” As a new hire, Lucy’s load is composed of remedial and composition courses; she claims that she was “fortunate” to be offered a section of American literature in her first semester at the institution. Her office is in the basement of the main classroom building, and there are no windows. The room is very small, with room for a small desk, one bookcase, and an additional chair. A desk calendar almost completely covers the top of the small desk. However, Lucy’s office decorations made the office inviting. Her décor included a multi-colored rug, a Tiffany lamp, and several pictures of Lucy with family and students. She also displayed her framed college diplomas above her desk. The office was very neat; everything had its proper place. Her warm welcome made me feel more like a friend than a visiting researcher.

Lucy’s pleasant demeanor and optimism were evident during the interviews. With a bright smile, she discussed the joys of teaching, especially the rewarding moments when “the ‘light bulb’ comes on” for her students. She also stated that she enjoys working with community college students because she feels that she can build relationships with them. Lucy noted, “I feel like I have a relationship with my students that I may not necessarily have at a large university.” Lucy’s teaching philosophy includes the ideas that learning should be interactive and that the
instructor is a classroom guide. Similar to other instructors in the study, Lucy also believes that all students can learn and that it is the instructor’s duty to provide students with multiple pathways to knowledge. For example, she pointed out that she tries to use a variety of instructional methods and/or activities at each class meeting: “I can’t stand and lecture for 1 hour and 15 minutes because . . . after 20 minutes, they’re no longer listening to me. So, I just try to incorporate different things [into the lesson].” She noted that she often uses short film clips, music, and other media to supplement her lessons.

Lucy’s teaching philosophy was evident during the classroom observation. Prior to the class meeting, students were to have read Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* and a portion of *The American Crisis*. She began the session with a brief lecture on Paine’s background and life, specifically focusing on his involvement and role in the Revolutionary War. After the brief introduction, Lucy divided the students into small groups and assigned each group a question; the team members worked together to answer the questions, and Lucy monitored their progress by listening in on each group’s conversations. Later, each group shared their responses with the entire class, which led to discussion and a closer analysis of the text. Keeping the discussion under control and time in mind, Lucy kept the students on task and completed the activity with time to spare.

She used the remaining time to review the day’s lesson and to lead students into an activity that would culminate in the next session. With a few minutes remaining before dismissal, Lucy asked her students to define the word “crisis.” After a few minutes of “think time,” several students volunteered to share their definitions. Following a brief discussion about these varying definitions, Lucy used the Google search engine to find results for the word “crisis”; she shared the results with her students. The list included words such as “debt crisis,”
“obesity crisis,” and “economic crisis.” Lucy then posed a question to the students: “What do you believe to be America’s greatest crisis?” Students were to answer the question for homework as they continued reading sections of Paine’s *The American Crisis*.

As students packed up their materials and exited, they were discussing their ideas with each other. Two students stopped to share their ideas with Lucy, who listened intently and encouraged them to “do some research and think deeply” about their responses. In the class I had the opportunity to observe, Lucy spent very little time in the front of the class lecturing or giving instruction. Instead, she designed the lesson so that the students were engaged in several activities that ultimately led to the instructor’s learning goals. During a later interview, Lucy reflected on the lesson, noting, “[The students] enjoyed it, and I think they engaged in [the text] much more than if I just gleaned over it by lecturing. It’s pretty dense text."

Lucy provides students with many opportunities to prove their understanding of the material. A review of the course syllabus indicated that students must complete frequent reading checks/quizzes, three examinations, an outside writing assignment, and an oral presentation. Lucy shared with me a copy of an essay exam. The exam included specific instruction on how to format the essay and clearly defined the instructor’s expectations. Students were given two options from which to choose, and the choices included broad topics derived from the works the class had recently been studying. Lucy stated that she uses the results of the assessments not only to check her students’ progress and understanding, but also to make certain that her instructional methods are effectively meeting the students’ needs.

In addition to the information regarding assessment and grades, the syllabus provides the required institutional and departmental information, including contact information, a course description, the learning goals, required textbooks, grading rubrics, and policies on attendance,
behavior, and make-up work. Also includes in the syllabus is a course calendar with a listing of reading assignments and examination dates.

Clearly, Lucy is a student-centered instructor. She is greatly concerned about her students’ success, and she often reflects on her lessons and seeks to improve her instruction. She explains, “I want to know that my students have learned the material. I’ll go back and re-teach if we’ve completely missed a concept and if I feel like they don’t grasp it.” Aside from teaching, Lucy spends most of her time caring for her young daughter and husband. She appears to be a compassionate, kind, and reflective instructor.

Bob

Bob is an outspoken, 60-year-old instructor with 36 years of teaching experience. He holds a Ph.D. in English. He has been in his current position at College C for the last 29 years of his teaching career; prior to taking his current position, he spent the first few years of his career as a teaching assistant, a part-time instructor, and as a non-tenure-track, full-time professor at institutions located in a neighboring state. Like all of the instructors in this study, he teaches remedial English and freshman composition courses, in addition to American literature. Bob is a professional who has high expectations for his students. In the interviews and in teaching his class, Bob was very traditional and formal.

The door to his office was littered with political cartoons and recent news articles concerning the failed state of education. One article focused on the failings of community college presidents and administrators who had received their degrees from “diploma mills” rather than accredited institutions. Also posted on the door was a satire written by a college professor; in the article, the professor gave pointers to students on how to succeed in college. In short, the author claimed that students were sure to succeed if they would avoid attending class, reading
assignments, or studying. I believe the information on the door would be quite intimidating for a student who might need to speak with the professor who made his work-time residence in this office; frankly, I was a bit intimidated to enter the office for the interview.

I found his spacious office to feel somewhat empty because it included only his desk, two chairs, and a bookcase filled with a variety of books. The office was bright because of its many windows, but the light and lack of decoration seemed to make the empty cinder block walls appear massive. Centrally hanging behind the instructor’s desk was his diploma, noting that he had earned a Ph.D. in English. Bob was in the middle of composing an e-mail when he beckoned me to come in to his office to conduct the first interview; I sat patiently in silence while he completed the e-mail. After he had finished and sent the e-mail, he welcomed me and we immediately began the initial interview. His answers to the interview questions were pointed and brief; his tone was very matter-of-fact and firm. Though he remained very formal and professional during both interviews, Bob did seem a bit more relaxed as the interviews progressed.

In the initial interview, it became clear that Bob is a very traditional instructor. He believes the lecture should be the primary teaching activity and that students must learn to take notes and study. When asked about what instructional strategies he finds most effective in teaching his students, Bob bluntly indicated that the lecture is his only teaching method. Bob confessed, “I don’t put them in little groups or show them movies or anything like that. I just lecture and they take notes. I’m a dinosaur in the regard, I know. I don’t care.” Bob indicated that he does not use technology or other media to supplement his lectures. He feels that the students who are planning to transfer to four-year schools need to be exposed to the “traditional classroom setting because “most classes [at the university] will require students to be self-
disciplined” in their studies. Regarding his own expectations for his American literature students, Bob claimed that “students who don’t pass this class either are not reading or they’re not coming, and a lot of them fail because of that.” Bob’s high expectations for students and his choice of the lecture as the primary teaching method are indicative of his belief that students will face similar challenges as they further their education or as they enter the workforce.

An observation of Bob’s American Literature I class proved his statements to be true. The focus of the lesson was the works of Thomas Paine, particularly *Common Sense*. Bob has an extensive knowledge of the American Revolution, and he included several interesting anecdotes in his lecture. After providing the social and historical context of the work, Bob began his lecture on the text. During the lecture, Bob used analogies, allusions, and references to cultural icons to make the information interesting. The class seemed more like a history class than an English class, and Bob seemed more like a storyteller than an English professor.

During the lecture, Bob would often use open-ended questions to encourage students to interact with him and follow him in the textual analysis. If no one responded to his questions, he would put the students “on the spot” by randomly calling on some of them by name to provide an answer. Students were also expected to recall and use information from previous lectures and prior readings in their answers. If students did not know an answer when he called on them, he simply called on a different student until someone provided the answer he was seeking. Of the 35 students present in class, most of them appeared to be interested in the lecture.

A review of Bob’s course syllabus revealed the high expectations he has for his students. Aside from the required college and departmental information and policies, the syllabus included a course calendar and a list of the assigned readings for the semester. Additionally, Bob’s expectations for written work were clearly defined. He expects all written assignments to be
Bob has a strong belief that college students should be self-disciplined and self-directed learners. He is passionate about making certain his students are prepared to meet the challenges of the four-year college curriculum or the demands of the workforce. He has high expectations for his students and is aware of his reputation as a tough teacher, but he has no regrets or plans to change his teaching style. In addition to teaching, he is active in faculty governance and college policy reform. Bob provided little information regarding his life outside of the college.

Sunni

A self-professed optimist, Sunni definitely has a joyful disposition accompanied by a bright smile. She is a 34-year-old English instructor with 6 years of teaching experience. Sunni holds a bachelor’s degree in English with additional graduate-level, in-field hours, which enable her to teach English courses at the community college level. She mostly teaches freshman composition courses and occasionally teaches American literature. A glance around Sunni’s office revealed her love for her family, her students, and her job. The walls were decorated with snapshots of her and her family having fun at the beach, playing games at home, and hugging at the holidays. Additional décor included ornately framed pictures of beautiful landscapes and cityscapes. Her diplomas hung across from her desk. In her inviting office, the chairs were
wicker, the stained bookshelves were filled with texts held up by fancy bookends, and the other
décor in the office—even the file cabinets—fit a particular color scheme. Sunni’s office was welcom ing, and she reported that students frequently stopped by just to chat. Her office appeared to be a reflection of her warm personality and was indicative of her interests.

Sunni’s philosophy of teaching is similar to others in the study. Her instruction is student-centered, and she plans her lessons to include multiple pathways to understanding. Sunni explained that as she learns the personality of the class and the abilities of her students, she develops and often modifies existing lessons to optimize student engagement and learning. For example, Sunni discussed a past experience in teaching a unit on poetry. She noted that she began teaching the unit by using the same lesson plans she had successfully used in prior semesters, but she soon realized that one class was not really responding to the lessons and instructional methods she was employing. She claimed that the students were having difficulty reading and comprehending the poems, even when placed in groups. Rather than continue with the lessons, she asked her students what would help them better enjoy and understand poetry. After a discussion with the group, Sunni considered their suggestions and agreed to allow each student bring the lyrics and a recording of a current song. According to Sunni, students brought several songs to her, and together she and the class listened to and analyzed several of these “poems.” Now Sunni uses a modified version of this plan to teach poetry. She reported that she is open to such ideas: “Anything I can do that comes from their creative side, I try to utilize it, if possible.”

As evident in the preceding example, Sunni is a reflective instructor who changes her lesson plans to meet her students’ needs. She believes that student engagement is a key to successful learning. Though she uses lecture to introduce concepts, Sunni admitted that she
prefers to be a facilitator in the classroom, rather than a lecturer. She uses a variety of instructional methods to engage students in learning, including cooperative learning strategies, discussion, and group and/or individual research-based presentations. To Sunni, the most important aspect of a classroom is that students have the freedom to share their ideas and opinions without fear of reprisal or embarrassment. She stressed, “I try to encourage them. The more they feel encouraged, the more they’re going to participate, the more they’re going to engage in the actual literary analysis.”

She also explained that she tries to vary instructional methods a few times each class meeting. She keeps the different learning styles of her students in mind as she prepares to teach. She also believes that students should have a voice in the classroom and she values their suggestions: “If students have ideas, I’m willing to be open to [them].” Referring to her presentation methods, Sunni noted, “I just think [students] learn better if they hear it and see it.” She also confessed that her students respond better to her lessons when she takes the time to prepare. She explained, “I have discovered over the years that if I put a little extra in my planning, [then] I get a little more out of my students.”

Above all, Sunni noted that the most enjoyable part of teaching is working with students. She discussed a few lasting relationships she has made with some of her past students. As indicated by her interview responses, Sunni truly cares if her students succeed, both in her class and in their endeavors outside the classroom. Sunni’s contagious optimism is apparent in her belief that all students have the potential to “be something great.” In addition to teaching, she enjoys spending time with her family and reading “trashy novels.”

Sunni’s institution, College A, has a standard departmental syllabus for all literature courses. The document included college and departmental policies, including a course
description, state-mandated learning outcomes, a list of course topics, textbook requirements, grading and make-up information, and other information regarding classroom management.

Attached to the syllabus was a “student job description,” which listed 18 expectations for all students attending the course. Sunni’s American Literature II attachments included a reading list and detailed course calendar. Assessment of students’ progress in the course included three examinations and an undetermined number of pop quizzes. According to the document, each examination included multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions.

Sue

Sue is a 48-year-old English teacher with 12 years of experience. She has spent her entire teaching career at College A. Recently, Sue completed a doctoral program in Higher Education Administration at The University of Alabama. Sue claimed that she has always had “passion for teaching” and that she “always knew that [she] was going to teach English at a community college.” Her undergraduate degree is in journalism, and she admitted that she truly enjoys teaching composition, in part because she is an “avid reader and writer.” Because the demand for freshmen composition courses is high at College A, Sue mostly teaches English 101 and 102 courses; however, when the demand is high for literature courses, Sue occasionally teaches an American literature class.

When I arrived for both interviews, Sue had soft music playing in the background. Though somewhat plain, the office was inviting. The bookcases in her office held texts on a variety of subjects, including leadership, composition, humor, and literature. Pictures of Sue’s family were displayed throughout the office, and before the initial interview began she discussed her plans to travel to England in the summer to see “all the places [she has] studied.” To “keep her company during office hours,” she also had a fishbowl with a single goldfish. Sue’s
demeanor was pleasant and welcoming. Having a conversation with Sue was like having a chat with a favorite relative; she was an excellent hostess who seemed genuinely interested in the study and in helping me with my research.

Similar to other instructors in the study, Sue believes that students learn best when they are active, rather than passive, learners. Her philosophy includes the ideas that teaching should be student-centered and that teachers have the responsibility of making the subject matter relevant to the students’ lives. A major goal of Sue’s teaching is that students can learn to “think for themselves.” When asked about her instructional methods, Sue explained:

I like to get discussion going. When I teach a literature class, I want to give them the background information. I will share background information on the author. I will give them that historical perspective and so on. Then I will ask them to give me their input . . . so I like it to be more engaging where students are expressing their ideas . . . . We could read the same piece and all come up with different interpretations.

Often, Sue’s class activities include small or large group discussions. She uses cooperative learning activities to encourage students to see the issue at hand from “more than one side.” According to Sue, she feels that her students learn more if she makes the literature relevant to their lives. For example, Sue said that she uses themes from *Huckleberry Finn* to spark discussions about racism and immigration, both current and controversial topics.

In discussing her approach to teaching, Sue indicated that she often varies her instructional methods. She believes that she must alter her lesson plans to fit the personality of the class, stressing that “every class [dynamic] is different.” Additionally, Sue discussed her use of formative assessments to measure student learning and to evaluate her instructional practices. She explained that short assessments, like reading checks or pop quizzes, are a great “tool” to help her determine whether her teaching methods are providing students with an optimal learning experiences.
Sue used the standard syllabus for literature classes at her institution. The document provided general information, including an explanation of college and departmental policies, instructors’ expectations, a course description, learning outcomes, a list of course topics, textbook requirements, grading and make-up information, and other information regarding classroom management. Also included with the syllabus was a “student job description,” which consisted of a list of 18 student expectations for those enrolled in the course. Attached to the syllabus was Sue’s reading list and course calendar. According to the syllabus, Sue assessed students’ progress in the course by administering three examinations and an undetermined number of pop quizzes. Each examination included multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions.

Sue strives to create and maintain a learning environment that is energetic and engaging. She also works to present the content in a way that students are able to see its relevance to their own lives. As a reflective instructor, Sue is constantly seeking to improve her instructional practices and to meet the changing needs of her students. In addition to teaching, Sue enjoys reading, writing, and spending time with her family.

Dot

Dot has spent her entire teaching career as an English instructor at College A. She is a 61-year-old veteran teacher with 41 years of experience. She holds a Ph.D. in English and is the chair of the college’s Humanities Division. Because of her seniority and position as division chair, Dot mostly teaches literature courses; however, because of the demand, she often teaches freshmen English courses, as well. During the interviews and class observation, the professor dressed conservatively and spoke with a gentle authority. Dot’s office was ideally situated next to the teachers’ lounge and restrooms. The office was simply decorated and modestly furnished.
Across from her desk were two leather chairs for visitors, and next to her computer desk sat an end table and a small lamp. From the window near her desk, she had a nice view of the campus yard. The office was quaint and inviting. During the interviews, Dot discussed the changes in education over the last 40 years, noting that over time she has modified her philosophy of teaching and her approach to working with students.

When she first began her career, Dot claimed that she patterned her methods of instruction after those used by her past teachers and professors. She confessed, “I started teaching the same way I was taught.” Early in her career, she typically lectured and expected her students to “write down every word.” She also had high expectations of her students. She recalled giving her past students lengthy reading assignments and difficult examinations that covered weeks of material. However, Dot claimed that over time her teaching philosophy has changed “a great deal.” She admitted, “I have modified from strictly lecture, although I do dominate the class. [Students] are open to ask questions, if they wish.” She also had reduced the number of reading assignments and allows students to use self-created “study aides” and the course syllabus on some examinations. Additionally, Dot has embraced some aspects of available technological resources and frequently communicates with her students via e-mail. She also uses Blackboard to communicate with and post supplemental materials and study aids for her students.

Furthermore, Dot has come to understand that the student population at College A has changed with time. In the interview, she discussed how the institution “has a long history as a private institution and as a transfer institution” and that many of the students she encountered early in her career were there only to earn transfer credits. However, she admitted that in the last 25 years, the student demographics at College A have changed. Similarly, Dot noted that many
of her current students are not only full-time students, but are also full-time parents and laborers. She conceded that for most of her students, school is a priority—but not necessarily their first priority. Therefore, Dot has come to realize that for many of her students, school is “another job.” In an effort to help them be organized and successful, she provides a detailed course schedule and expects her students to be self-disciplined enough to attend class regularly, meet the course requirements, and follow instructions for class assignments. She explained how her students can succeed in her American literature classes: “If the students will discipline themselves, follow the [course] outline, [and] stay current with the deadlines, they’re going to do alright.” Dot described her classroom environment as being “ordered, structured, and teacher-centered.”

During an observation of an American Literature I class, Dot proved to be very traditional in her instructional approach with her students. To begin class, Dot distributed graded papers she had reviewed since the previous meeting. She indicated her displeasure in the fact that many of her students failed to follow the instructions and that others turned in partial work or failed to turn in work at all. After several minutes discussing what is and is not acceptable, Dot told the students that they might resubmit a revision of the assignment at the next class meeting. Next, she provided students with detailed instructions for a group assignment. The students were to develop and present a slide presentation on selected topics related to American literature. Though she did not read the instructions aloud, she did encourage students to read and note her expectations for completion and submission. Since the project was collaborative, Dot allowed her students to choose their own groups and asked them to choose a leader, whose responsibility would include e-mailing a list of group members’ names to her before the next session. It was clear that Dot expected these presentations to be exemplary. Students seemed
concerned about the project; I saw many of them discussing the details of the project and exchanging contact information. After a short time for questions concerning the project, Dot moved into the day’s lesson.

During instruction, Dot exhibited a deep knowledge of the discipline. The focus of the lesson was early African-American literature, and the selections for discussion included the slave narratives of Olaudah Equiano and the poetry of the Phillis Wheatley. Students were to have read these selections prior the class meeting. Dot delivered a lecture on the biographies of both writers, beginning with Equiano. Next, the instructor asked students to join her in reading and analyzing several passages from the text. As Dot lectured, most of the 40 students present took notes and followed along in their texts. Occasionally, Dot would ask a question, to check for understanding or make a connection between the text and current issues; however, mostly she lectured and offered analysis while the students listened and took notes. There was little student interaction. Dot did reference information from previous lectures and attempted to make the subject matter relevant by making connections to current issues of immigration and race. Her stated goal for the lesson was for the students “to see the world from another’s perspective” as they discussed and analyzed the text. However, the students were provided few opportunities to speak.

To end the class session, Dot provided students with an oral test review. Because the students would be taking a unit test at the next meeting, the instructor reviewed with them what they should study for the test. Most students were very attentive during this part of the class, and many of them asked questions, mostly about test format and content. Dot even provided them with several sample discussion questions that were “likely to appear on the test.” Despite the hint that these questions would likely be asked on the test, a few students were already packed
and ready to exit the classroom. These students did not seem concerned about the upcoming test, and they wrote down nothing from the review. After less than ten minutes of review, Dot asked for final questions. No students responded, so the class ended ten minutes early. Afterwards, Dot remained in the classroom to answer students’ questions about grades, the group assignment, and the upcoming test. Another student stayed to visit with Dot for a few minutes, discussing her interest in a recent classroom discussion topic. Dot was very amicable and stayed until the room the last student had cleared the classroom. Certainly, Dot made herself available for students and warmly received their questions or concerns.

Dot’s syllabus indicated that the order and structure that she believes aides the students in succeeding. The document provided the required college and division information, including a course description, a list of learning outcomes, topics, textbook requirements, grading and make-up policies, and other information regarding classroom management and procedures. Additionally, the syllabus included a detailed list of assigned readings, which included the particular authors, selections, and pages to be read. Furthermore, the list included instructions for accessing Blackboard assignments and daily questions, which were only assigned for certain selections. The instructor assessed students’ learning using four major tests, several essays, daily assignments, and Blackboard discussions and/or assignments. The syllabus stressed the instructor’s expectation that students would check Blackboard daily for messages and/or changes in assignments. A review of one of Dot’s major tests indicated that the students are not only required to have a strong foundational knowledge, but must also be able to think critically and write well. The tests are composed of short answer, spot passages, matching, and essay questions.
Rhonda

Rhonda began teaching English at College B in 1979, after a short period as an instructor at Florida State University. She is a 61-year-old Hispanic instructor with 29 years of full-time teaching experience at the community college level. She has a Ph.D. in English. Like other instructors in this study, Rhonda’s teaching load included freshmen composition courses and sophomore literature survey classes. The décor of Rhonda’s small office was quite eclectic and indicative of her interests. Adorning the walls were a number of photographs and magazine cut outs of Asian and Mexican landscapes and landmarks. In addition to books, she also had eccentric art in small frames resting on the shelves of her bookcases. Taped to her bookshelves, walls, and door were self-help and affirmative-living quotations. She had a single picture of her daughter sitting on her desktop. The interviews and class observation revealed Rhonda’s easy-going personality and her relaxed approach to instruction.

In describing her approach to teaching, Rhonda stated that she believes her classroom environment is “loose and comfortable.” An observation of Rhonda’s literature class confirmed her statements and showed her to be a fun-loving jokester who has a good rapport with her students. Rhonda began class late, and she took more than ten minutes to connect her laptop computer to the Internet and the projector before beginning her instruction. Once class began, Rhonda took her seat at the computer desk and began a lecture that incorporated class discussion. Only 5 students were in attendance, and after a few minutes passed with little discussion, Rhonda asked the students if they had read the assignment. Of the five students present, three admitted that they had read the assigned poems prior to coming to class; all of the students admitted they had difficulty understanding the poetry.
Upon learning this news, Rhonda changed her instructional approach and began reading through the poems with the students. Together, she and the students completed the reading and analysis of the poems. The students seemed relieved, and the discussion became lively as the students engaged in the text. What began as Rhonda’s lecture turned into a continuous dialogue between teacher and students. Rather than reprimand the students for not reading the assigned material, she was compassionate and changed her approach to ensure that they met her intended learning goals. In the follow-up interview, Rhonda explained, “I changed some of my teaching techniques . . . based on what the students said they needed.”

This student-centered approach to instruction is indicative of Rhonda’s teaching philosophy. In a later interview, Rhonda discussed the changes to her instructional approach during the observation: “I would rather go in and remain loose and comfortable—as in sit and talk with them, not as [my] subordinates, but in the fact that we’re all trying to learn.” It became evident during the interviews and class observation that Rhonda enjoys working with students and that she believes it is her duty to make the class “engaging and fun.” She enjoys telling jokes and making her students laugh, and she tries to maintain a positive and welcoming classroom environment where students feel free to share their opinions. A learning goal for her students is that they “take the essays and take the literature and apply [them] to [their lives] today.”

She described herself as being “funny and sarcastic” and claimed that she feels compelled to try and “make [class] fun” for her students; however, she noted her belief that today’s students are not as intelligent or as interested in earning an education as those she encountered in her prior years of teaching. Rhonda also confessed that she chooses the selections for her literature courses that she “thinks will apply” to her students’ lives. She discussed that “[today’s students]
are media-driven. They don’t sit and actually open a book, so [teachers] have to make the literature [appear as] if it were media.” To achieve this goal, Rhonda utilizes all types of media and current technological advancements, such as iPads and iPod applications, in her course design and delivery practices. She also posts her class handouts and some PowerPoint presentations online for her students to access; she asks her students to print, read, and bring these handouts to the appropriate class sessions. Rhonda noted that even her assessments require students to use the information gained from readings, lectures, handouts, and discussions and apply it to their lives. For example, when students write term papers or essay responses, she uses the assessments to measure “how well [students] understand [the course material] and apply it to the world today, not whether [they] answer or focus on whatever ‘the answer’ is.”

Rhonda’s American Literature I course syllabus included the required college and departmental information regarding policies, procedures, course descriptions, and learning outcomes. Additionally, the syllabus provided detailed explanation of the grading and attendance policies. During the term, students were required to take four examinations, each consisting of an objective test and an out-of-class essay assignment. Students were expected to turn in their essays when they arrived to take the objective portion of the test. The guidelines for the essays were very detailed and specific. The syllabus also included a course calendar and assigned reading list. Next to the date of each class meeting was a list of the authors that would be discussed during that particular session. In addition to the syllabus, I reviewed several of the handouts Rhonda had posted online for her students. These handouts were basically lecture notes and summaries of the works listed on the syllabus. The instructor indicated that she uses these handouts and notes as a basis for her instruction and class discussions. Rhonda believes
that posting these handouts online is an additional way that she can help her students succeed in
the course.

**Josh**

Josh is an energetic and passionate 36-year-old instructor with eight years of college
teaching experience, with the last three being at College B. Prior to taking his current position,
Josh worked at a teaching assistant at the University of Alabama in Birmingham, and he later
taught at a community college in Texas. He possesses a master’s degree in rhetoric, and like the
other participants in the study, he mostly teaches freshmen composition and American literature
courses. Josh claims to be a “townie” and a “liberal” who enjoys the shock value that comes
from exposing his students to new ideas.

When I first met Josh, his youth disguised him as a student. He was dressed very
casually, wearing dark, faded jeans, a black shirt with vertical white stripes, and a pair of “skater-
style” sneakers. His unshaven face, spiked hair, and pair of retro horn-rimmed glasses accented
his youthful appearance. Josh’s office reflected his unique personality. Covering the walls were
odd, post-modern pieces of art depicting bizarre figures and unusual designs. Additionally, taped
to the walls and bookcases were flyers and advertisements for “grunge” rock bands. His
computer screen-saver scrolled throughout the initial interview, providing a variety of snapshots
depicting the instructor interacting with his family. The office was the most interesting I visited
during data collection at the three schools. At times it became difficult to focus on the task at
hand because I was so captivated by the décor of his office. Conversing with Josh was a
pleasure, and both interviews and the class observation proved him to be a passionate and
knowledgeable American literature instructor who has a good rapport with his students.
Josh is very enthusiastic about classroom instruction, and he encourages his students to be critical thinkers by centering class discussion on philosophical ideologies related to the literature. Through engaging classroom discussion, Josh encourages his students to be active learners, to voice their opinions, and to utilize the text to support their ideas. He enjoys reading philosophy, deep discussions, and learning from others. Josh views his American literature course as a “patchwork of the evolution of certain ideologies,” and he considers himself a storyteller who is sharing a “grand narrative” with his students.

Josh’s primary instructional method is lecture, supplemented by questioning and discussion. He encourages his students to freely share their opinions and challenges them to look at all sides of an issue by playing the “devil’s advocate.” When asked to discuss his course planning and delivery, Josh admitted:

I literally go into every classroom and say, “Where do we start?” [Students] begin the discussion. They will point to a quote or to a passage and we’ll start from there, and, uh, I think it’s fun for me because I never know where we’re going to begin, so I get to—it makes my mind roll really quickly.

Additionally, Josh works to create a “safe” classroom environment where students might feel comfortable sharing their opinions without fear of embarrassment, and he expects all students to participate. Before we entered the classroom for the observation, Josh told me that he likes arrange the classroom tables in the shape of a “horseshoe” because he has found that students are more apt to contribute to the discussion if they are able to see each other’s faces. Interestingly, he believes that students’ body language and facial expressions provide meaning that is lost when students are seated in rows. He adamantly believes that literature courses should include the “sharing of ideas and perspectives.”
An observation of Josh’s American Literature I class revealed his enthusiasm for teaching. Josh began class by immediately challenging his students with a philosophical question derived from their assigned reading of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s *Nature*. Students seemed to expect this behavior, and most seemed to feel very comfortable responding to the questions posed throughout the lesson. At the beginning of the lesson, few students were verbal; however, most of the 12 students attending class had provided vocal responses by the end of the lesson. During the lecture, Josh was very animated. He paced across the front of the room, moving his hands to accentuate the main points of the lecture. He used personal anecdotes—many of them humorous—to lead into a discussion of the passages. He had a knack for making the passages relevant to the students’ lives.

Additionally, Josh referenced authors and works from earlier in the term, noting the connection between the ideas and themes found in the works of other American writers they had recently studied with those in Emerson’s text. Through discussion, Josh also led students to see how Emerson’s writings and ideas are similar to modern ideas. For example, he illustrated how some of Emerson’s passages contain ideas found in ecology, economics, psychology, anatomy, and sociology. During the lecture, the students were asked to think of other ways that Emerson’s texts connected to the modern world; such questions encouraged students to use higher-order thinking skills. As Josh interacted with the students, he became more and more excited. The mood in the room was vibrant, and the students responded and contributed to Josh’s energy. The lecture was quite engaging.

Josh’s course syllabus included general information about the college and departmental policies. The document provided the instructor’s contact information, a course description, a list of course objectives, textbook and other requirements, and a definition of and warning against
plagiarism. Additionally, the document explained the instructor’s expectations regarding
students’ attendance and behavior. In addition to this general information, Josh discussed how
students earn grades in the class. Students in his American Literature I class are required to take
two short-answer exams and a cumulative final exam; additionally, students must write three
essays. The point values are higher for the writing assignments than for the short-answer
examinations. Josh also provides the expectations and grading criteria for the three essays.
Attached to the syllabus is a detailed course calendar, which notes the dates for all tests, essay
submissions, and reading assignments. The syllabus indicated that Josh is a very organized
instructor who has high expectations for his students; he believes that students should be able to
develop and support their own assertions about the topics covered in the American literature
course.

Stan

Stan is a 43-year-old teacher with 15 years of teaching experience, all at College B. Stan
is a former student who later returned as an adjunct instructor before receiving a full-time
appointment as an English instructor. He holds a master’s degree in English and is currently a
doctoral candidate at Auburn University, seeking a Ph.D. in English. Stan’s current teaching
assignments include freshmen composition courses and American literature survey classes. A
look around Stan’s small office reveals his interest in pop-culture and academics. A few pieces
of eclectic art adorned the only available wall space, and the bookshelves were over-crowded
with textbooks, novels, notebooks, file folders, pictures, and collectibles. In the corner next to
the bookshelves stood two four-drawer file cabinets, and piles of books rested atop them. Stacks
of papers littered his desk and computer station. Next to the door was one chair, which was
awkwardly close to the teacher’s desk. Though the office was cramped, Stan’s pleasant
demeanor and character proved welcoming. That analysis of the data collected during the interviews and classroom observation reveal Stan to be a flexible instructor who has a passion for teaching and helping students succeed.

In the initial interview, Stan shared his philosophy of teaching and discussed instructional methods that have proven successful in his classrooms over the years. According to Stan, he has a responsibility to help students learn, and he believes that the best way to ensure that they learn is by making the class “jumpy and funny.” Stan explained that by “jumpy” he means that he allows his students “to sometimes choose an order . . . [of] what we’re going to cover within an assignment . . . .” He feels that students often take the class more seriously when they feel a sense of ownership in the course; that feeling of ownership can often come from something as simple as allowing them to make decisions, such as determining the order of the learning objectives or what format an assessment might take. Additionally, Stan attempts to keep the students interested by making the class “fun.” Simply stated, Stan claimed, “I just like to have fun with them.” Stan also understands that he must be a “flexible” instructor who remains mindful of his students’ struggles and needs. He characterized himself as a “redemptive” instructor, suggesting that he gives students multiple chances to succeed.

Concerning instructional methods, Stan claimed to be “very traditional.” His primary method of instruction is the lecture. Stan boasted, “I think that the straight-up lecture, if it’s done properly, is superior.” During my observation of Stan’s American Literature I class, he delivered a lecture on Nathaniel Hawthorne’s life and discussed two of the anti-transcendentalist’s short stories. To put the author in the appropriate historical context, Stan used a multi-media slide presentation to supplement his lecture. The well-researched and entertaining slide show included portraits of the author, pictures of Hawthorne’s homes, a photo of the famed House of Seven
Gables, and other clip-art and photographs relevant to the short stories being studied. As the instructor led the students through the presentation, nearly all of the 30 students diligently took notes. Stan has an interest in pop-culture, and he combines this interest with his knowledge of American literature to make his classes engaging and entertaining. For example, during the presentation, Stan included images of comic book covers and discussed the connection between Beatrice’ from "Rappuccini’s Daughter” and the Poison Ivy character from the *Batman* comic book series.

Stan had the students’ attention as he discussed Hawthorne’s influence on pop-culture, and students eagerly engaged in a dialogue with the instructor about other archetypes found in literature and/or modern movies. Throughout the class, the instructor interjected jokes, anecdotes, and observations that kept the students interested in the lesson. At one point in the lecture, Stan took on the role of a “mad scientist,” complete with an altered, bizarre voice and a maniacal laugh. The students responded with great laughter and played along with their instructor as he continued the presentation, all while acting the part. The instructor used the presentation as a springboard into textual analysis, and through questioning and dialogue, he and the students discussed elements of the short stories and the relevancy of Hawthorne’s works to their own lives. The students seemed to feel at ease interacting with their professor, and they asked questions and interjected comments throughout the lesson.

The observation certainly provided evidence to support Stan’s claim that his classes are “jumpy and fun.” In the second interview, Stand reflected on the lesson and noted that he is “generally very lecture-based” but he encourages “a constant dialogue.” Stan confessed that he has embraced technology and believes it greatly enhances his lectures. He claimed to spend countless hours developing the presentations and acknowledged that he constantly changes or
adds to them. With a smile, Stan admitted that the “[lecture] is an art form and it requires some practice . . . there’s a performa[nce] aspect to it, as well. Stan is also aware of other media resources that are available, and he often uses audio and video clips to supplement his lectures and/or presentations.

Noting that today’s students are technologically savvy, Stan encourages students to conduct their own research to complete five “College Life Assignments.” These assignments require students to “read something or go to some event—in other words, experience ‘College Life’—and write a response to the experience.” According to the instructions, the students may choose their “experiences” from a list that includes: certain movies, magazine articles, performances, books, festivals, and other cultural events. Students must provide a written response via a first-person account consisting of 250 or more words. Their responses must include a detailed description or summary of the event and the students’ reaction to the “experience.” Proudly, Stan noted that the students generally enjoy the assignments and that he utilizes this assignment as an “alternative to the term paper.” Not only does this assignment encourage students to utilize available technology and media, but it also gives students a make a choice and research modern “literature” that they find relevant and interesting.

The instructor’s American Literature I syllabus includes the required information regarding the course and college policies, including attendance, make-up work, sexual harassment, complaint resolution, and the use of electronic devices. Additionally, the document also included a very detailed course calendar, which listed the assigned readings for each class meeting by author, work(s), and page numbers. The syllabus also included a section on evaluation and assessment, which listed the examination dates and additional assignments. The exams consisted of a combination of short answer and essay questions. Additionally, daily
grades, pop quizzes, and the “College Life Assignments” were additional opportunities for students to earn points toward their final grade. According to the syllabus, students were given multiple opportunities to succeed in the course. As the interviews, course observation, and syllabus indicated, Stan uses his personal interests and knowledge of American literature to provide his students with an engaging and entertaining classroom environment where students are challenged to learn.

**Emerging Themes Derived from the Qualitative Data**

The researcher asked the participants of this study to share personal thoughts and perceptions about their course design decisions and pedagogical practices as rural North Alabama community college American literature instructors. During the fall semester of 2011, the researcher collected, reviewed, analyzed, and coded personal interview transcriptions, field notes taken during classroom observations, and documents germane to the participants’ course content and/or instruction. As noted in Chapter III, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis of the data, which enabled him to analyze and organize the large amount of qualitative data into smaller and more manageable strands. Additionally, by using the study’s theoretical framework as a basis for coding and organizing the data, the researcher was able to establish connections between the collected data and the research questions, which are anchored by Fink’s Integrated Course Design Model and Taxonomy of Significant Learning. From the analysis of the research data, the researcher identified four emerging themes: (a) Situational Factors Affect Course Design and Instructional Decisions; (b) Academically Unprepared Students Affect Course Design and Instructional Decisions; (c) Instruction Should Be Engaging and the Subject Matter Should Be Relevant to Students’ Lives; and (d) American Literature Instructors Should Be Reflective Practitioners.
Theme 1: Situational Factors Affect Course Design and Instructional Decisions

Participants in the study agreed that they take into account certain situational factors and disregard others as they plan, design, and deliver their American literature courses. The instructors indicated that teaching at the community college level not only requires a strong knowledge of the subject matter, but it also requires patience, understanding, and flexibility. The instructors reported that they consider such factors as class size, demographics, characteristics of the learner, personal preferences and experiences, content knowledge, and instructional skill level as they design their course calendars and syllabi. The participants also discussed the importance of planning, yet also cautioned that flexibility is necessary so that needed adjustments may be made during the term.

Class size, changing demographics, and learners’ characteristics. The instructors interviewed for this study claimed that class size and demographics often affect their course design and instructional decisions. Though all instructors prepared a course syllabus and reading list prior to meeting with their classes, most of them indicated that they later made changes to the documents based on the number of students enrolled in the course, the work ethic of the students, and dynamics of the class. Instructors indicated that in the past they have also altered their instructional practices based on the students’ completion of assigned reading and their willingness to engage in classroom activities.

When preparing to teach an American literature course, the instructors noted that the number of students enrolled in the course sections impacted their planning and instructional decisions. At all three of the colleges included in this study, the maximum number of students allowed to enroll in an American literature has increased over the last three years. These
Carlton, a professor at College C, noted how this change affected his instructional decisions:

> When I came here in ’98, our literature classes, I think, were capped at 32. This semester in my American lit., I think, in the first day I had 44 people in a survey course, so it absolutely changed the way I approached this class. The first thing that I did—I mean, [the class has] got to be more of a lecture-based class. When [the number] is smaller, I can incorporate more discussion and more interaction between students. And again, that [changes] from semester to semester and it varies on what kind of group I have . . . But when -- in this current semester, I mean, when I saw that they were upping our limits and had put 44 students in there, the first thing I did was I removed the requirement for a paper. I just took that right out, just to save my own skin.

Carlton’s comments reflect the sentiments of other instructors included in this study. For example, Lucy agreed with Carlton, noting that class size affects instructional practice: “I think that [I] can do fewer activities in a larger group than maybe I can do in a smaller group, especially with the literature class.” Class size is only one factor that affected these instructors’ course design decisions and pedagogical practices.

As class sizes in American literature sections have increased in recent years, the instructors of these courses have noted that student demographics have also changed. The colleges included in this study are open-admissions community colleges, and a few of the veteran educators interviewed in this study indicated that the demographics of the American literature classes have changed over time. Several instructors noted that they have altered their course designs and their methods of teaching based on the changing characteristics of the learners. For example, Dot, an instructor at College A with over 40 years experience, claimed that students in the American literature classes are no longer composed of local students who are there to earn the credits necessary for transfer to a four-year school. Instead, Dot stated that in recent years she has seen more non-traditional students enroll in her American literature courses, noting that this change is likely because of the economic downturn and existing expectation that
everyone should attend college. With a sense of urgency in her voice, Dot noted that the education system has “somehow failed” students: “We’ve gone too far with the—trying to tailor every course to fit every student’s needs.” She was adamant that today’s students are too dependent on technology and have difficulty thinking for themselves.

Josh from College B claimed to differentiate his instruction based on the demographic make-up of his class. Josh, who is a self-professed “flaming liberal,” noted that sometimes he has a “disconnect” with his students because of “the fact that [his] students are rural” and, therefore, “they have a perspective that is outside the urban belt.” Josh asserts, “In some ways, I don’t want to say [they are] anti-intellectual, but a lot of them are wondering why they are in this course, frankly.” However, Josh believed that his understanding of this “disconnect” with his students empowered him to bridge the divide and create a welcoming classroom environment that would “obviously welcome lots of different opinions.” Carlton noted that there is a “pattern” among his students at College C. He asserted that the non-traditional, older attendees tend to be good students:

The pattern that I’ve identified is that typically my returning students, my more mature students, if you will—and I say that with the caveat that our average student here is 29-years old, female, single, and a mother—but even beyond that, some of the finest students I’ve had have been returning students who looked to be—I don’t know their ages—but they looked probably in their 40s, in their 50s even, sometimes even in their 60s.

These instructors noted their challenges in meeting the needs of these students; however, several of the instructors indicated that they remain aware that their students face their own set of challenges in and beyond the classroom.

Gary, a veteran teacher at College C, discussed his realization that, in general, community college students are quite different than traditional students who might attend a four-
year university. When discussing the characteristics of his learners, Gary compassionately depicted some of the problems his students encounter:

We have so many students who work. We have a lot of students who have children, and sometimes even good students are not always able to attend class as they would like. They have sick children; they work over. Their jobs are going to make them work over that day [and] they didn’t have any choice. I see that sometimes. And also, it’s interesting, because I don’t remember ever having this when I was a student in college. It may have gone on or I may have lived in sort of rarefied sphere over here. But because people are married and have children, we have a good bit of absences with people having to go to court, and that was something strange to me when I first started [at College C]. That’s not everyday, but I think it gets into child custody and divorces-- because these are young people married. So sometimes that plays a role [in course design and instructional decisions].

Similarly, Stan, a veteran educator at College B who attended a community college, understands that most of his students must overcome a variety of obstacles to succeed in college. Stan reflected:

I have found that it helps to be very forgiving with our students because they have a, a quite a variety of life experiences and things they have to do. . . A lot of our students, you know, they’re raising a family—something like that. They’re, you know, just barely affording the gas money to get [to class]. So when I designed [the course], I tried to make it as flexible as possible . . . [and] make it as easy as possible for them to succeed.

Stan’s comments are reflective of the obvious concern he has for his students. As a former community college student himself, Stan remembered his own struggles and claimed that he easily identified with his students. In the interview and during the classroom observation, it was clear to the researcher that Stan was sympathetic and compassionate toward his students; he cares for them and wants to ensure that they succeed.

Furthermore, the instructors were aware that the greatest majority of students who enroll in and take American literature classes are not English majors; therefore, the instructors discussed the importance of remembering that they are teaching a survey course, not a graduate-level English course in American literature. Carlton from College C surmised,
The reality is that [these students] are going to become nurses, they’re going to become engineers, they’re going to become “fill-in-the-blank,” so if they can find something in the class that they can call their own at the end of it . . . I think it’s a worthwhile endeavor and all is not lost.

Similarly, Gary stresses the importance of remembering the characteristics of the learners when planning for a course: “I try to keep in mind who my students are . . . so that’s how I gear my syllabus, with a goal in mind: Let’s not keep them hating English.” In addition to class size and demographics, instructors in this study noted that classes seem to have their own personalities, and they discussed how the dynamics of each class often affected course design and instructional decisions.

**Class dynamics.** Based on their prior experiences in teaching the course, several instructors indicated that class personality, or dynamics, is a determining factor in how they present the course content. Sunni explained that the class’ personality affects her planning:

> Even though I would plan ahead of time, after I meet my class, I may tweak [the plan] because, to me, the personality of the class makes a big difference as to what I’m going to be able to incorporate into the course—the activities, you know, the assignments, all of that.

Likewise, Carlton claimed that flexibility in scheduling is important because “it takes a while to kind of get a sense of what the class’ personality is going to be like . . . and what you might expect to have from the class on any given day.” Josh, an instructor at College B, claimed that his instructional planning and decisions are also affected by the class’ dynamics:

> Generally, it all depends on how vocal they are going to be. If they’re vocal, we’ll just sit there and Q and A all day. But if they’re not going to talk, I certainly don’t want to do all the talking. It’s hard, and I run out of things to say very quickly, so I’ll do something to take up their time and get them thinking and discussing things.

Similarly, Lucy, a new instructor at College C, also stated that she has altered her instructional decisions based on the class’ dynamics: “I feel like I never know the dynamics of the class until
Rhonda, a veteran teacher at College B, also stated that the dynamics of the class determines how she teaches. Rhonda commented, “The class determines how I teach . . . I’ve changed some of my teaching techniques and handouts based on what the students said they needed.” Sue from College A pointed out, “Every class is different, so my approach must change to match the students’ needs.” Generally, the instructors agreed that teaching the course is much more enjoyable when the students are amiable, self-disciplined, and eager. However, the consensus was that the number of classes with these characteristics is few.

**Instructors’ preferences.** During the interviews, it became apparent that these instructors often designed their course reading assignments based on their personal preferences. Several participants claimed that they tend to do a better job presenting the subject matter that they most enjoy reading and discussing. Most of them discussed their own personal passion for reading and their love for literature; others mentioned specifically that they enjoy certain genres, authors, or works more than others. Additionally, some of the participants noted that they prefer to teach works with which they are familiar; they indicated that teaching familiar works requires less preparation, makes them feel more comfortable when teaching the text and leading discussion, and allows them to gain a greater understanding of the work. Likewise, it became evident during the classroom observations whether or not the instructors enjoyed the particular selection that was the focus of the lesson. Most instructors seemed aware that their passion for the literature was “contagious” and could easily affect the students’ energy and engagement.

The personality of the instructor invariably spills into the classroom (Eble, 1988; McKeachie, 2002; Showalter, 2003). According to the interviewees, it is quite difficult to
disregard personal preferences and to teach from a strictly objective point of view. Josh, the urban instructor from College B, confessed, “I’m a flaming liberal, [and] I can’t help but let that color the way I teach.” Similarly, Sunni from College A claimed that her personality affects her course planning decisions:

My personality, I think, has a huge influence on the stories that I select when I’m planning a course . . . It may have an influence on the stories that I choose to share because I may have a genuine passion about something in life that will make me teach that story better.

Lucy also mentioned that personal preference often affects her course planning decisions:

“Honestly, I probably choose what I like the most, what I’ll know the most about, and, yeah, [I] probably go with that more than anything else.”

During the class observation, Stan discussed the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, and he provided a short, informative PowerPoint presentation to present some facts about the author’s life and the influences that affected the author’s works. Though the students seemed bored with the initial slides, they became interested when Stan explained Hawthorne’s connection to Puritanism and witchcraft; furthermore, when Stan began discussing how Hawthorne’s works influenced the creation of comic book heroes and villains and showed them the slides of old comic book covers depicting these characters, the students seemed more interested. In an interview where the researcher discussed his observations of the class meeting with the instructor, Stan humbly downplayed the success of his lesson and discussed what influences his decisions about reading assignments:

I think you could tell from watching that [lesson] that I don’t take this too, too very seriously. I do have quite an interest in pop culture, folklore, things like that, and I perhaps choose stories sometimes that have a pop culture or, or a folkloric aspect to them. I am—I specialize in poetry and I am, I am very apt to give them more poetry than anything else, you know. But that’s just, you know, the nature of the business.
Stan also mentioned that his past experiences teaching American literature have led him to develop a “mental list” of literary selections students seem to enjoy reading and discussing. He admitted that the list had changed over time and is now less extensive and demanding than in the past.

Though Sue does not teach American literature often, she stated that she greatly enjoys teaching the course because of her affinity for the literature. Sue confessed that she has always been an avid reader and that she knew early in her academic career that she “had a passion for teaching.” She credited her “good instructors over the years” with instilling within her an appreciation for American literature. In planning to teach American literature courses, Sue claimed that she attempts to choose some of the lesser known works from the literary canon and that she tends to focus more on works by writers of the Twentieth Century. She confided that she chooses and spends a great deal of time on these works “because [she] like[s] reading Hemingway, Faulkner, and . . . novelists of the times.” A review of Sue’s course-related documents indicated that, in addition to her personal preferences, she has provided students with a sampling of writings from the time periods relevant to American literature studies.

Similarly, in the initial interview Carlton emphasized, “American literature was always my passion and [is] my area of specialization.” He noted that he considered teaching American literature a “treat,” because he spends most of his day teaching general composition courses. When discussing how he chooses the reading assignments for his literature courses, Carlton explained, “Most of us, and I, we kind of choose those authors that we think might best represent those periods and the themes that are associated with whichever course it is we’re teaching.” Additionally, he indicated that within each time period are many authors and works, and when he is making selections, he often chooses from those that are familiar to him and the students.
Similarly, Sunni from College A believes that she can best teach literature using the literary works that she finds interesting. She tells her students:

All the poems, all the short stories—they’re my preferences. They’re the stories that I enjoy teaching, but that doesn’t mean, you know, you have to like this story. But you do have to learn to approach literature using this story.

For many of the participants in the study, personal preferences affected their course planning and instructional decisions.

**Expectations of external groups.** Though the general learning goals and assessment requirements are prescribed by the Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education, the participants in this study indicated that they value their autonomy in selecting course content, methods of instruction, and additional assessments. Despite their awareness of regional, state, and local requirements and expectations, some instructors claimed that these factors rarely impact their course design and instructional decisions. Stan stated that he is aware of such requirements and—though he does not specifically think about them as he designs his course—he has no difficulty including them in his course plans and instructional decisions because they “just sort of naturally flow from [the course design].” A few instructors indicated that they do not consider these factors at all. When asked about the expectations of external groups, Bob, a veteran instructor at College C with 37 years experience, scoffed, “I don’t pay attention to [those] . . . The only thing I really pay attention to is . . . what were our writers doing that will be remembered in terms of poetry, short stories, novels, or sayings?” Similarly, Gary, when discussing the expectations and requirements of external groups, explained:

I don’t really pay much attention to any of that . . . I think the way that I gear my classes is in-line, you know, with state policies and college policies, but I’m not always conscious of it. But I’m sure in the back of my mind I know I’m supposed to do this, this, or this, and I try to play by the rules, but they certainly are not at least conscious factors in planning my courses.
Though these instructors were aware of regional, state, local and/or departmental expectations and requirements, the common response was that they gave little thought to these factors as they planned for and taught their courses. Instead, the instructors indicated that they use their past experiences and personal preferences to design their courses and make instructional decisions.

The participants in this study indicated that they consider certain situational factors as they plan for and teach their American literature courses. First, the instructors took into account the number of students enrolled in their courses. The consensus was that a higher number of students in the course caused instructors to alter and, in some cases, limit their instructional practices to certain activities and assessments. Second, instructors noted that over time the changing demographics of the student population have affected their course design and delivery decisions. In general, the instructors understood that today’s average community college student faces a number of obstacles while attending college; therefore, the instructors believed that although they must maintain a set of expectations for their students, teachers should also be flexible and should maintain a balance of common sense and compassion.

Third, the participants noted that the classroom dynamic is an important factor in determining instructional approach. The instructors repeatedly discussed the importance of class personality to their instructional decisions. The interviewees claimed to feel more comfortable teaching classes composed of students who complete the assigned readings and who engage in classroom activities. On the other hand, the instructors lamented that classes composed of students who do not complete their assignments or who do not engage in activities are difficult to teach; generally, the instructors turned to lecture as the primary instructional strategy in such courses. Fourth, the instructors confessed that their own personalities often affect their course
design decisions and instructional practices. The instructors claimed to be more comfortable when teaching works that are their favorites or selections that they have taught in previous classes. Additionally, the teachers indicated that they intentionally choose selections that they believe the students will be able to read easily, understand, and enjoy.

Finally, the instructors were aware of regional, state, local and/or departmental expectations and requirements; however, the common response among instructors was that they gave little consideration to these factors as they design or teach their courses. Instead, the instructors indicated that they use their past experiences and personal preferences to design their courses and make instructional decisions. Additionally, the instructors claimed to focus more on what they thought the students needed to learn rather than on the expectations of external groups.

**Theme 2: Academically Unprepared Students Affect Course Design and Instructional Decisions**

The belief that today’s community college students are academically unprepared and often lack the necessary work ethic to succeed in a college literature course emerged as a major theme in data analysis. Participants in this study held certain perceptions about the average community college students’ academic preparedness and apathy. Interview responses, especially those from veteran instructors, indicated that the participants believe a majority of community college students are not adequately prepared to meet the academic challenges of college coursework; they also expressed their belief that a large number of community college students lack the self-discipline and work ethic necessary to succeed in college. Similarly, several participants pointed out that in recent years students have come to need more remediation because they are less prepared for college when compared to students who attended college more than a decade ago. The instructors’ claims echo those of Cohen and Brawer, who noted that
there appears to be “an increasing number of lower-ability students among community college entrants” (2008, p. 50). According to the interviewees, these factors have an effect on course design and instructional decisions.

Lack of reading and comprehension skills. The majority of instructors interviewed for this study reported that they feel community college students’ reading and comprehension skills are often inadequate for the level of reading required in an American literature course. All participants indicated that their students struggle to read and understand the assigned literary selections. Rhonda, a veteran teacher, claimed the major challenges her students face in meeting the course learning goals are “understanding the language and being able to read.” However, she explained that students often give up if the text contains challenging vocabulary or difficult syntax. She concluded that students appear to be dependent on technology and have little need or desire to read. Similarly, Josh confessed that when he plans for a course, he takes into account that “a lot of [his] students don’t like to read” and that the greatest challenge his students face is “reading and understanding the material.” He admitted that he tries to choose selections that are challenging for students, but he is careful not to choose works that are so difficult that students give up on reading the texts.

Bob was more frank with his assessment of his students’ skill levels. He declared, “Some of them simply don’t read and write very well, and that affects their performance in the course.” Similarly, Dot, a veteran instructor with 40 years experience, claimed she uses visual and auditory aides to help her students “see and understand” the text because, as she acknowledged, “many of our students cannot read—or are basically very poor readers.” By providing students additional pathways to understanding, Dot believes she can help her students learn to “love
reading again.” Both instructors admitted that they have reduced the amount of reading or altered their reading lists because of students’ inability to read and comprehend the selections.

Similarly, Carlton expressed his frustration with the skill levels of some of the students he encounters in his American literature classes. He explained that in any given class, he faces the challenge of teaching a group of students with a variety of skill levels:

[Skill level is] a bag of mixed ability, really, across the spectrum. I have some students who are extraordinarily well prepared not only in reading and reading comprehension, but also on their written expression. I’ve had very, very strong students, but I’ve had extraordinarily weak students, too. Again, that’s disconcerting . . . I think there’s a—and this might be too strong of a statement, I don’t know—but among the younger kids—that would be considered traditional students right out of high school—I find that they don’t really have the attention span to engage in a text of any substantial length. Many of them don’t.

The professor added that his students want “an instant gratification” from reading, so if they struggle with the vocabulary or fail to grasp the plot, they will quit the text, rather than persevere.

Like other instructors in the study, Carlton also lamented the fact that many of the students in his American literature classes had passed English 101 and English 102, both pre-requisite courses, but did not seem to possess the reading or comprehension skills necessary to succeed in a literature survey course. He attributed his students’ academic shortcomings to a flawed education system where college administrators “seem more interested with numbers than they do with the quality of education or [with] true student success.” Furthermore, Carlton added that he believes an existing disconnect between K-12 schools and post-secondary institutions contributes to the students’ lack of reading and comprehension skills. Carlton suggested that the lack of communication and planning between the two entities directly contributes to students’ lack of academic preparedness; he noted that public K-12 schools have little idea about what students need to learn in order to be successful college students.
Lucy, sharing the sentiment of her peers, also expressed concern that her literature students are academically unprepared and struggle to read and comprehend assigned selections. With frustration, she described her students’ lack of reading skills as her greatest challenge in teaching them: “I still feel like sometimes they read [the selection] and have no idea of what the text is talking about until I really explain it.” She added that trying to have a discussion with students about a text that they did not understand or only partially read is “nearly impossible.” To encourage her students to read, she selects texts that she believes are particularly relevant to the students’ lives. For lengthy selections, Lucy admitted to assigning excerpts, rather than whole selections.

The participants agreed that the biggest challenge that they face in teaching American literature is a growing number of students who are unable to read and comprehend the assigned reading selections. Additionally, they noted that many students are deficient in close-reading and analytical skills. Students also have limited vocabularies, which impedes their ability to read and understand texts. The class observations provided evidence to support such claims. For example, Rhonda, after encouraging her students to discuss the assigned readings without success, bluntly asked the students if anyone had read the selections. Though a few had made an effort to read the works, all of the students admitted that they had trouble reading and understanding the selections. Therefore, Rhonda modified her lesson to include a teacher-led analysis and discussion of the works. Likewise, before Josh formally began class, one of his students asked the instructor to help him understand “what was going on” in the text. Josh used this question as a springboard for his lesson, but it became evident that the philosophical writings of Emerson proved a challenge for Josh’s students. In other observations, students admitted their difficulties in reading and understanding the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Thomas Paine,
Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson. In each case, the instructors modified their lessons and provided instruction to help the students attain a greater understanding of the texts. Discussing their difficulty in getting students to read the texts, the instructors also admitted that, over time, they have altered or reduced their assigned reading lists, removing texts that they have deemed too challenging or too lengthy for their students.

Lack of writing skills. Several of the interviewees believed that community college students lack adequate composition skills. Passing both freshmen English composition courses—English 101 and 102—is a prerequisite for student enrollment in a community college literature course; however, several of the instructors expressed their concern that students in their American literature classes, despite passing the composition courses, are not adequately prepared to write satisfactory analytical and argumentative essays. The instructors mentioned that their students often have difficulty understanding the writing prompts or questions, organizing their thoughts, developing thesis statements, and writing well-developed paragraphs. Lucy, for example, explained that she has to use valuable class time to teach basic outlining and composition skills to her students. Frustrated, she explained:

It’s still a struggle. I feel like I still have to go over . . . how to [develop] an outline when I feel like I should not, at that level, have to incorporate that into my schedule, but those are the challenges that I face.

Similarly, Sunni from College A claimed that her American literature students’ writing skills often fail to meet her expectations. She noted that “getting [students] to write a good analysis” is a challenge because “sometimes their wording isn’t up to par for a literature class.” Carlton agreed, noting that he often encounters American literature students who are not prepared to write an acceptable essay:
I’m faced with the reality that [students] don’t know how to write, you know. And then I’m going to be irritated and frustrated that I can’t teach them how to write in an American literature class because I’m expecting them to already have learned how to write an essay, to take a question, to frame a response, to support it, to develop it, and that kind of thing . . . . These are the demons that I wrestle with at night.

These three instructors expressed their disappointment in altering their lesson plans to teach or re-teach basic composition skills because of poor student performance on writing assignments.

Study participants also expressed their concern that many of their American literature students have been unable to adequately use and properly document primary texts and/or research articles. A common complaint was that students often fail to use evidence to support their claims in their essays. Lucy expressed her displeasure with her students’ lack of skill in this area: “Some of [the students] are not able to write essays or still not able to put documentation within those essays.” Likewise, Josh claims that when students write, they often fail to support their claims because they do not understand what they have read and/or they have difficulty synthesizing the common ideas from the collective works they have read. Josh explained:

The biggest problem [students] have when they write a paper for me . . . is either fully grasping the material . . . [or] being able to point to the specific elements of the texts, saying, “Here’s an example of this generality that I’m making a point with.”

Like Josh, other instructors also discussed their students’ difficulty in making connections between ideas, themes, or motifs found by authors and within multiple selections of a literary period. The interviewees’ responses indicate that many community college literature students fail to move beyond a surface-level reading of the text and have difficulty in applying or using foundational knowledge to complete tasks that require higher-order thinking, such as essay writing.

Sunni explained that many of her students also struggle to use textual support sparingly and correctly. When discussing her students’ problems in writing essays, Sunni reported that she
encourages them to “find something—an action, an illustration—that takes place in the story as [their] evidence,” but she admitted that her students “struggle with [the task]” because many of them simply believe that using support means providing a summary, rather than an analysis, of the text. Rhonda and Josh claimed that few of their students write essays that illustrate use of higher order thinking skills; rather, the instructors reported that a majority of their students simply restate the notes or ideas generated in class discussion with “little evidence of understanding or original thought.”

A general consensus among participants in the study is that many community college American literature students are not only deficient in reading and comprehension skills, but they also lack the sufficient training or skills to write an average and acceptable literary analysis essay. According to their responses, most of the participants in the study have altered their course design and instructional plans as a result of these recurring deficiencies. Most instructors confessed that their American literature classes are now less rigorous than those in past years, in part because students today appear more apathetic about their academic endeavors than previous students.

**Lack of work ethic.** All of the participants also identified the lack of student work ethic as a great challenge to their course planning and instructional practices. The instructors acknowledged and discussed several recurring issues related to students’ work ethic that inhibit satisfactory progress in the course. Several teachers commented on their students’ lack of self-discipline. Dot, a veteran instructor from College A, explained that many of her students tell her that they stopped reading an assignment because it was boring. However, she responded to these complaints by explaining to her students that there are times in life when they must persevere
and complete necessary tasks, regardless of how entertaining or boring they believe them to be.

Ardently, Dot recalled her advice for these bored students:

> There are going to be days you're bored. There are going to be days you don’t like [to complete a task], or you won’t like it much. And here's what world's going to say back to you: “So what?” So the world's going to say that to you for the most part—“so what?”—about everything. You know, you don’t just get to do what you like to do. I don’t [always] get to do what I like to do. So, we just do it.

She further explained why she is very direct with her students: “I want them to develop a discipline.” Dot explained that self-discipline is key for students to earn above-average grades in her class. Those who regularly attend class meetings, follow the course calendar, and complete their assignments on time achieve success. However, she also acknowledged that there are occasions where common sense and compassion lead her to be flexible with her students because “some situations” are out of the students’ control. Also expressing his disappointment with his literature students’ poor work ethic, Bob indicated that many of them fail the course because they lack the self-discipline necessary to succeed:

> Students who don’t pass [American literature] either are not reading or they’re not coming, and a lot of them fail because of that . . . [It is] self-discipline. I think the way to be successful in life is to be where you’re supposed to be, on time and prepared. That’s certainly true in the classroom, and those who don’t do that are going to fail.

According to both of these instructors, success in their classes is attainable if students will attend class, complete assignments, and participate in class activities. However, these teachers also indicated that students who miss courses or fall behind schedule with their readings invariably stop attending class and/or fail the course. According to Dot and Bob, self-discipline is a contributing factor to students’ success or failure.

> Additionally, students who fail to attend class regularly prove problematic for American literature instructors. Though none of the colleges chosen for this study have a formal
attendance policy, each participant’s syllabus addressed the issue, mostly by noting the relationship between regular attendance and success in the course. In the interviews, several participants discussed their disappointment in their college administrators for not implementing and enforcing an attendance policy. For example, Bob, who at the time of the interviews was a member of a college-wide committee addressing the issue of an attendance policy, quipped, “I don’t have [an attendance policy] of my own because I’m not allowed to.” Some professors were stricter with their personal policies, but all indicated that regular attendance is necessary for students to earn a passing grade in their courses. Several syllabi analyzed for this study not only clearly outlined the importance of regular and prompt attendance, but also explained the impending consequences for failing to be present.

Generally, the instructors felt that college students should be responsible enough to attend class regularly by their own volition. They shared how a lack of attendance often causes them to change their lesson plans, noting that often it is easier to amend the course calendar than it is to re-teach specific concepts or selections or to schedule students to make-up work or assessments. Additionally, a few instructors discussed their frustrations about students’ feeling entitled to a passing grade because they have enrolled in the course and paid tuition; for some reason, these students falsely believe that they do not have to come to class and earn their grades because they have “paid for them” in advance. Despite their annoyance with attendance issues, the instructors admitted that facing such challenges has caused them to become more understanding and flexible, especially in their dealings with conscientious students.

The participants also claimed that students who do attend class regularly benefit from their diligence. For example, Lucy from College C explained that “attendance is not really a problem . . . because [students] need the information [from class sessions]” in order to pass the
exams. Likewise, Dot indicated that she develops her tests from class notes and discussions, so most students who expect to score well on assessments benefit from attending class. Dot explained why she has so few students miss her classes:

We have no attendance policy, so students do not have to come to class, but I don’t have problems with absences. They have figured out that if they hear it said, if it’s pointed out to them, [then] it’s going to be an easier situation for them. So, I don’t have a lot of cuts in my classes.

Nearly all instructors indicated that they give daily formative assessments to encourage attendance. Sue gives her students some type of daily or quiz grade at each class session, and students who are absent and miss these opportunities are not allowed to make up the work or recoup those points. She sees these small grades as a chance for diligent students to “bring up their grades” and improve their chances for success. Likewise, Carlton and Gary administer unannounced reading checks to encourage students to read the assigned works and regularly attend classes. Like Sue, neither Carlton nor Gary allows students to make-up these quizzes.

Several instructors called a failing grade resulting from excessive absences a “difficult” or “expensive” lesson for students. Sunni pointed out that a failing grade due to absences “costs [students] 700 dollars, but it’s just a lesson they have to learn.” Similarly, Josh compared students attending class to laborers attending a job; the teacher expects regular attendance just as much as an employer expects his employees to show up for work. Josh explained this philosophy:

They’re adults, technically speaking, and my analogy to them is: “Treat this like you would a job, but feel free to fail yourself, if you want to. I’m not your mom. I’m not your dad. I’m not going to beg you to come to class.” In some ways, maybe that’s purely selfish . . . [because] the ones who are ready to be treated like adults, I’m happy to have them in there. If they don’t fell the need and they don’t feel stimulated enough [to attend class], good riddance, hands off.
The general belief held by the participants was that regular attendance is necessary if students expect to be successful in their educational endeavors. Though the community colleges in this study have no written attendance policy, the instructors clearly expect their students to attend class on a regular basis.

The participants in this study indicated that many of their community college students are academically unprepared and lack a strong work ethic. The instructors declared that such factors affect their course design and instructional decisions. Because a great number of their students have difficulty reading and understanding texts, most of these American literature instructors admitted to revising their course syllabi to include fewer and less difficult readings.

Additionally, the instructors noted that class discussions were often lacking because of many students’ inadequate reading and comprehension skills. Furthermore, the participants in the study claimed that despite passing the pre-requisite English 101 and 102 composition courses, many of their students lacked the analytical and writing skills necessary to compose an acceptable literary analysis or argumentative essay. Finally, the instructors noted that, generally, their students’ work ethic was lacking. According to the professors, many students lack self-discipline and fail to read, complete class work and other assignments, and attend class regularly—all of which impede their success in the course. The instructors admitted that, over time, such factors have caused them to reduce the rigor of their American literature courses.

**Theme 3: Instruction Should Be Engaging and Subject Matter Should Be Relevant**

The American literature teachers interviewed for this study agreed that it is important to provide engaging instruction that encourages students to take an active role in the learning process. Additionally, the interviewees indicated that they not only strive to make the subject matter interesting, but also work to make the content relevant to their students’ lives. Simply
put, the instructors feel that their students learn more when they are active classroom participants. Likewise, the teachers suggested that students seem to show more interest in learning when the subject matter appears applicable or useful to them.

During the interviews, the participants discussed the importance of meaningful and engaging instruction. The respondents agreed that having a thorough knowledge of the subject matter is necessary to teach students, but they also acknowledged the importance of knowing how to effectively communicate the course content to others. As indicated by their interview responses, these instructors believe teaching to be much more than an imparting of content knowledge from teacher to students. To the participants of this study, teaching means caring about students and their learning, connecting with learners on multiple levels, exceeding students’ expectations, and providing them with optimal learning experiences and lessons that extend beyond the classroom.

**Instructor’s role in engaging students.** A standing goal of several of the instructors is to share their own passion for literature in hopes of having their students develop a greater appreciation for the subject matter. For example, Sue stated that she attempts to craft her lessons so that they “give [students] a sense of wanting to learn more about [the writers], to dig deeper into their lives and their beliefs and their writings.” Similarly, Carlton shared that he designs his lessons “in such as way that [students will] find something that they can kind of ‘sink their teeth into’ and think about.” These instructors wish for their students to develop a lasting appreciation for and curiosity about the authors and writings of American literature. Based on the interview responses and classroom observations, the participants in this study realize that in order for their students to develop such an appreciation, classroom instruction must consist of more than a routine “chalk and talk” lecture.
The instructors are aware that their primary task is to make certain students understand and learn the course content; however, their interview responses indicated that they feel an obligation to present the course content in a way that is appealing to their students. These participants see themselves as entertainers, storytellers, comedians, guides, and facilitators. Seeing themselves in a performance role, several of the participants used words such as “enthusiastic” and “humorous” to describe their classroom presentations. For example, Sue noted that she believes her enthusiasm is contagious: “Because I am that way, I can get my students to be enthusiastic.” According to Sue, the converse is true. She also believes that students can discern whether their instructors like or dislike a particular author or literary work by the way the information is presented; if the instructors lack enthusiasm, then learners may have a similar response. In addition to having enthusiasm, some instructors mentioned using humor in their presentations.

To keep his students interested, Gary utilizes humor and shares personal anecdotes. Gary confessed that he sees himself as “putting on a show” when he teaches, and, like a true entertainer, he attempts to keep the attention of his audience. Gary explained his reason for using humor: “If I can make them laugh, then I think I can make them listen.” Stan also views himself as a performer in the classroom, and he also blends humor into the seriousness of the subject matter in an effort to keep his students interested. Stan labeled his presentation style as “jumpy” and “funny.” He confessed that he tries to entertain students with his lectures, noting that he sometimes tries to lighten the mood of the presentation by not being so serious about the subject matter. His belief is that being too serious will make his students feel inferior and less likely to participate in class discussions. Like Gary and Stan, Josh also views himself as a performer when he is in front of the class lecturing. During the class observation, Josh seemed
very comfortable delivering the lecture, leading the guided discussion, and interacting with students. Later, while reflecting on his technique, Josh admitted, “Sometimes I just kind of think of myself, frankly, as a storyteller.” He explained that he looks at every class period as an opportunity to “put the course together as a grand narrative” and that he views American literature as “one story told by different voices over the course of . . . 200, 250 years, or so.” These instructors shared a common belief: When they provide an entertaining presentation, the students are often more engaged and attentive.

**Classroom environment.** When asked to describe their classroom environments, several instructors used the words “fun” and “exciting.” Some instructors noted that they not only desire to teach their students, but, at times, they also intend to entertain them. For example, Sunni explained that at the beginning of the term she combats student apathy with encouragement: “Many students will enter [my] American literature class with dread or—just a negative attitude for some reason, and I will tell them, ‘We are going to make this fun.’” She also acknowledged that she feels a personal responsibility “to keep [students’] attention, to keep them interested [and] coming to class.” Gary shared a similar opinion: “If I will have a classroom environment that is kind of fun—[one where] we can have a good time and we can study things, too—[then I] can kind of slip up on them and teach them something.” Similarly, Rhonda described her classroom environment as being “sarcastic and funny,” noting that she does “whatever it takes” to gain and maintain the students’ interests.

Other instructors described their classrooms as being “relaxed” and “safe.” Over half of the instructors interviewed for this study stressed the importance of providing students with a welcoming classroom environment where they feel freedom to share their opinions openly. Additionally, these instructors discussed their sense of obligation for making certain to the best
of their abilities that all students feel “safe”—a word that occurred multiple times in the interview responses. The word “safe” was used to describe a classroom environment where students could freely share their ideas or opinions without fear of ridicule or reprisal by the instructor or other students. Because discussion is a primary teaching method for Sunni, she claimed to take on the role of an encourager and protector for her students. She sees protecting freedom of discussion as her responsibility:

It’s very important to me, in a literature class, that no student ever feels like what they have to say about a story is silly . . . Once students realize I’m on their side, when they realize that they don’t have to be intimidated by me and by what my thoughts are for the story, then they become much more willing to speak up, discuss, talk—and then we learn. We all learn more.

Sunni also sees herself as a classroom facilitator—one who initiates and moderates the discussion.

Similarly, Dot discussed her effort to maintain a positive and welcoming classroom environment where students’ comments are welcomed and protected. Recalling her own experiences as a student, Dot stated that she never calls on any of her students to answer a question; instead, she waits on them to voluntarily offer their responses. She shared that when she was a student, she became “mortified” when her professors would randomly call on students for an answer. Therefore, she has vowed never to intimidate her students in such a manner. Additionally, Dot lamented the loss of civility in society and explained that she wants her classroom to be a place where ideas can be shared and debated openly in an atmosphere governed by mutual respect:

The main thing I would like for [students] to know is that they don’t know it all—that there are other thoughts out there, and there are other possibilities—and [they should] just respect someone else’s view—be able to see that there is another side. I think today in America, oh my goodness, we’ve lost that. We watch one t.v. station only; we get one side. We’re screaming at each other. We’re not civil. So, the main thing I would like for
them to take out of this literature class is just, maybe, [to have] an openness to other people, have an understanding that everyone is not the same, and to critically think and see all sides.

These instructors were aware of the importance of creating and maintaining a classroom atmosphere that is welcoming, comfortable, and conducive to open discussion and civil debate. Their belief is that such an environment not only encourages student interaction, but it also promotes discourse, creativity, and critical thinking.

**Relationship with students.** Developing and maintaining a professional relationship with students is an additional way instructors may encourage student engagement and create a warm classroom environment. The participants explained that connecting with their students requires strong interpersonal skills. According to several interviewees, small efforts—such as learning students’ names, showing genuine concern about their progress, being understanding of their circumstances, or interacting with them before or after class—can make a difference in class dynamics and student involvement. Several instructors discussed their personal interactions with their students, noting that over the years they have developed some lasting friendships with a few of their now-former students who have chosen to keep in touch. However, these participants also reiterated that instructors must be careful and keep their interactions with students on a professional level, especially while the students remain enrolled at the college. They discussed a “fine line” that exists between professionalism and friendship and stressed that instructors must be cautious when they interact with students, both in and out of the classroom.

Several instructors also mentioned their belief that students seem to respect a professor who is easily accessible and willing to help them. A review of the participants’ course syllabi revealed that all instructors provided their students with multiple ways to contact them or make
an appointment to meet and address questions or concerns. All instructors encouraged their students to contact them and promised a response within a reasonable amount of time.

During the class observations, it was evident to the observer if the instructors had a good rapport with their students. For example, in Carlton’s classroom, students were eager to engage their professor in conversation before class began. At the beginning of class, Carlton took the time to greet his students and ask about their weekend, and without hesitation, the students provided responses and engaged in friendly conversation. They joked, laughed, and discussed personal issues freely with him. Similarly, Gary’s students seemed excited to see their professor when he entered the room, and as he made his way to the lectern, the professor commented on how nice the group looked, how attentive they appeared, and how he was certain that today’s class meeting would be a good one. The situations were similar in other classrooms, as well. When the professors were energetic and genial, most of their students responded in a similar fashion. In these classrooms, students also seemed eager to participate in class discussions and activities.

Instructional variety. A common belief held by the study’s participants is that students learn more when they are interested in the subject and engaged in the learning process. To describe their teaching, many instructors used the term “student-centered.” Nearly all of the interviewees mentioned their continuous efforts to vary their teaching methods and provide students with multiple pathways to learning. Though all of the participants in the study indicated that the lecture is their primary mode of instruction, most of them discussed supplementing their lectures with small group or whole class discussions, visual images, audio and video clips, debates, or other tools meant to engage students and maintain their attention. The instructors admitted that lectures can be and often are boring and that students typically are
less responsive to lectures than other types of instruction. The only participant in the study who claimed to solely use the lecture was Bob, and he also professed to use only the textbook and his knowledge as supplemental materials to his presentation. He acknowledged that his is a very “traditional” method of instruction, even calling himself a “dinosaur” in regards to teaching methods. Interestingly, Rhonda claimed that she threatens her students with a lecture if they do not read the assigned texts and participate in class discussions. She professed, “If I have to lecture, I literally will read my discussion notes to them.”

On the other hand, most of the instructors felt that the lecture, despite its reputation, has its place in their instructional arsenals. Many of the instructors mentioned that they use the lecture to introduce topics and to lead the class into discussion. Lucy claimed to use the lecture sparingly, mostly as a springboard for the session’s activities. To keep her students’ interest, she uses a variety of teaching methods for each class session. Lucy explained her rationale:

I can’t stand and lecture for 1 hour and 15 minutes because [students] don’t listen. There are 40 [enrolled] in the class, and there are probably at least 35 there every class period. They come to class, but after 20 minutes, they’re no longer listening to me. So, I just try to incorporate different things. We—I always have a PowerPoint. It’s always linked to Blackboard. I try to have a movie clip or something entertaining that focuses on—they watch something about the American Revolution, the witchcraft trials. We do interactive things on the Internet. They might [play] a game, they might work in a group, [or] they might present a topic, but we try to do a lot of activities. They do student presentations also—just to do other things than [listen to a] lecture.

She noted that there are times when a longer lecture is needed, but she attempts to limit her presentation to 20 minutes or less so that she can incorporate additional activities.

Like Lucy, Stan claimed to use lectures for a portion of each class session because it is his belief that students will only give their attention to one activity for a short amount of time. Stan noted that the lecture is “superior” to other teaching methods, but only if “it’s done properly.” Defending his statement, Stan claimed that most of today’s students are familiar with
technology and respond well to auditory and visual stimulation; therefore, he incorporates audio segments and video images into his lectures to keep the students interested and to help them better understand and remember information from the lecture.

In addition to the lecture, discussion was a favorite instructional method used by the participants. Repeatedly, participants mentioned the importance of class discussion to the learning goals of their literature courses. According to several instructors, the success of a lesson in a literature course often depends upon the class’ willingness to participate in discussion. Carlton explained that a literature class must be a place where the “exchange of ideas” occurs. Expressing his opinion about the need for discussion, Carlton professed: “I think one of the things that a literature class can do, especially if the size allows and there’s good conversation and good exchange, [is that] it requires people to listen to ideas that are different from their own.” Like Carlton, Josh believes that the open discussion of literature is an “empowering tool” that allows his students to share and evaluate opinions that are quite different from their own.

During the class observations, most instructors provided multiple opportunities for student input, and some students felt free to offer their thoughts at any time during the class session. Often, when one student spoke, others would follow, and discussion ensued. From these discussions arose “teachable moments,” or opportune times for teachers to capitalize on the conversation and use points from the discussion to reiterate the main ideas of the lesson. During the interviews, several instructors stressed the fact that class discussion affords all students, not just a select few, with opportunities to offer their input on course topics and assigned readings. The teachers noted that students often feel a sense of ownership in their learning when they feel like their voices matter, and discussion provides a possibility for them to share their opinions.
Additionally, the instructors noted that when students are involved in class discussion, they are active, not passive, learners.

Though the instructors cited lecture and discussion as their primary instructional methods, they also noted their use of a variety of other methods to encourage student participation. Many of the participants mentioned using group work as a way to cover a large amount of content, generate discussion, and/or to have their students complete a close reading—an in-depth analysis of style and structure that requires multiple reading of a text. For example, Sunni, Dot, Lucy, and Carlton each discussed placing students in small groups to answer questions about a course topic or assigned reading. They noted that these small group activities often lead to class discussions where each group shares its findings with the entire class. Similarly, Dot and Lucy assign out-of-class projects requiring collaboration among their students. To complete these projects, students must work together to research a topic and create a slide presentation, which will later be shared with the professor and the class. Though the teachers admitted that allowing students to work in groups requires additional preparation and often presents challenges, the general belief among those instructors was that group work was beneficial to students. When working in groups, students have the opportunity to think, consider multiple perspectives, share their opinions, and learn to respect others’ viewpoints. Likewise, by working together to solve problems, students could be simulating experiences they may encounter as working professionals or laborers.

Another way that instructors claimed to keep their students’ interest was by incorporating brief and random activities into their lessons. For example, Sunni noted that in the middle of a lecture she might pose a question to the class and then instruct her students to turn to a partner and discuss possible answers. After allowing a brief time for discussion, she then asks for
responses, which may generate further discussion. Similarly, other instructors discussed using simple formative assessments to gauge their students learning. For example, during the class observation, Rhonda, noticing her students were not participating in discussion, asked them to raise their hands if they had trouble reading and understanding the assignments. Their responses immediately indicated that she needed to change her plans and use a different instructional approach for the lesson. Carlton discussed having his students role play by taking on the persona of characters from their readings and responding to questions, either orally or in writing. These sporadic and informal activities are often the instructors’ efforts to motivate students and measure student learning and progress.

**Relevance.** During the interviews, each instructor mentioned the importance of making the subject matter relevant to students. Nearly all participants considered the task challenging, noting that each class of students has its own unique personality. Several of the interviewees also mentioned that students often question the need to study literature, especially when they plan to major in an unrelated field. The teachers pointed out that many of their students lack the motivation to read, study, or discuss literature; therefore, the mission to convince students that American literature has value and can be relevant to them remains a challenging goal for literature instructors.

Carlton, who admitted that he has a passion for American literature, explained his efforts to “engage [students] in such as way that . . . [they understand] there are still those very human qualities and the human characteristics that transcend . . . time and place.” He claimed his goal for students is that they not only read and understand the literature, but that they are able to “connect” with the text and its writers in some way: “Imaginatively and emotionally and intellectually, what I always hope for students to do is to look for that connection.” Like Carlton,
Bob wants his students to “be able to read something and see . . . the importance of what that piece of writing says and how it relates to today’s world.” In the same way, Josh noted that literature has the power to “stimulate” and “comfort” its readers. Gary and Josh both noted that literature allows the readers to have shared experiences with the authors or characters. Gary stated that students often fail to realize that they are “in the presence of great minds” when they are reading literature from America’s past. Likewise, Josh noted that literature is “didactic in a sense that [the reader] can go through something, or experience something, without going through it specifically.” Rhonda echoed the sentiments of these instructors, espousing, “Literature is the basis for life.” These instructors noted that many of the lessons gained from literature are directly applicable to the lives of the readers.

Dot also expressed her desire for students to understand that the writers of American literature wrote about the human condition and universal truths that are still relevant today. She claimed that her students often do not seem to understand that they can learn from the past:

I often say to students, “You’re a 2011 person, but your reading something from 1890. Put yourself in 1890. What was the situation then? Why would those people have reacted the way they did?” [In] 1890 and 2011, people were in love, and they were jealous, and they were ambitious, and they were rude, and they loved their children—just like now. So, it’s those characteristics of great literature that are universal . . . [The authors] come to us with something to offer about what it’s like to be a human being and the human condition.

In the same way, Sunni wants her students to gain insight into how to make better choices through reading and understanding literature. Sunni hopes that as her students study literature, they will come to understand that “people aren’t perfect.” Her goal is for her students “to take fictional scenarios and apply those conflicts and character traits to real life and make better choices.” When asked what her students might learn from a literary work, Sunni speculated that they could come to understand that there “is potential deep within them, [and] if they could just
tap into it and maximize it, they could be phenomenal.” Similarly, Gary claimed that he tries to explain to his students that the value of literature “has nothing to do with [a] job, [but] it has to do with your life and your soul and your spirit.” The belief of these instructors is that literature is one key to understanding the universal challenges and experiences of humanity. The ever-present challenge for literature instructors remains leading students to a realization that literature has the power to encourage thought, stimulate emotions, and, in some cases, inspire change.

According to the participants, many of their students believe that literature is irrelevant and outdated, so they choose not to read and study the works. Lucy discussed her students’ lack of interest and explained how she attempts to combat their apathy: “They don’t know why they’re taking [American literature], and so what I try to do is relate some of the things that we do read in class to things that they face today, so that they do see the relevance.” In discussing the goals for the literature class, Lucy shared a part of her class introduction with the researcher: “Our goal here is that [students] do learn something and that [they] do use this [information] to learn in your work, in your home, in your job.” She also noted that relating the literature to a current event or using some other “hook” to gain students’ attention sometimes motivates them to read and take part in the class activities.

Similarly, Sue from College A reported that she purposefully chooses to teach some selections from American literature because those works contain topics or themes that are directly related to current events. She explained, “I try to choose those [works] that I think will relate to the students or [that] they would be able to relate to in terms of their own experiences and life, in general.” When she teaches and facilitates class discussions, Sue points out the relationships between the past and the present. For example, Sue explained how she was able to relate the racial unrest present in *Huckleberry Finn* to the existing racial tensions in Alabama and
New Mexico regarding the recent changes in immigration laws. Sue claimed to have greater student engagement when she intentionally designed her lessons to include discussions about current events and their relationship to the assigned readings. Though Sue admitted that she does not use this strategy with every selection she teaches, she does make a special effort to discuss a current event “if it’s something that the students can relate to.” Similarly, Rhonda mentioned that she asks her students to make associations between authors or characters in a text and modern cultural icons. She suggested, “I might ask them which movie star they would choose to play John Smith in a modern movie adaptation of his writings.” By helping students make connections between the texts and the students’ lives, these instructors believe that they are helping their learners better understand what they are reading and studying.

Students’ affinity for and dependence on technology was also a recurring topic among the participants of this study. Several instructors noted that their students have relatively short attention spans, so they believe that changing teaching methods or activities multiple times in a class period is necessary to keep the learners’ interest. Carlton shared his distress over his students’ lack of perseverance and short attention spans:

“It’s apparent that there’s -- this whole generation of learners that’s coming up that expects instant gratification, expects constant stimulation, and to be entertained. I think that’s an obstacle for some students and to their learning, too, because if they’re not instantly gratified or instantly entertained, then they just shutdown.

Discussing her students’ declining attention spans and fascination with technological gadgets, such as cellular phones, iPads, and e-readers, Rhonda noted that students today are reading “new kinds of texts.” To appeal to her students’ interests, Rhonda claimed to keep up with the latest technological advancements and utilize them in her class presentations. She mentioned that at
times she even allows her students to use their computers and devices to search the Internet or answers questions in class.

As previously noted, other instructors are also using technology to supplement their lessons in an effort to appeal to their students’ interests. For example, during the class observations, two of the instructors showed films related to the author they were currently studying. At the conclusions of the films, both instructors led brief discussions to help their students understand the significance of the film and its relationship to their studies. Carlton, one of the instructors who showed a film, explained that “[students] are visual—they do respond to things that move and make noise.” According to Carlton, his students reacted better to the film than they would have to his lecturing on the topic. When asked if he uses films or other media often, Carlton explained, “When it's appropriate and when I think it’s useful, I'll use those in a classroom.”

Like Carlton, most instructors indicated that they rarely show entire films to their students, but most participants did admit to using short video and audio clips from the Internet often, especially to introduce authors, topics, or texts. For example, Sunni discussed making the connection between poetry and modern music by using current songs to supplement a unit on poetry. Similarly, Gary discussed his use of a Loretta Lynn country song, “When the Tingle Becomes a Chill,” as a springboard for a discussion about similar themes in Robert Frost’s poem “Fire and Ice.” Carlton, who is a musician, occasionally brings in his guitar to serenade or accompany students as they study American music and poetry. Sue uses a variety of media to introduce current events into her students’ study and discussion of American literature. In addition to the in-class use of technology, nearly all of the instructors in the study utilized Blackboard and other online resources to host documents, lesson plans, multi-media
presentations, and other learning tools for their students. According to the participants, it is important to make the study of literature relevant to students, and meeting this goal often means the instructors have to alter their teaching methods or styles and remain open to new ideas.

The instructors interviewed in this study shared their beliefs that instruction should be engaging and that the course content should be relevant. To actively engage their students in the learning process, the instructors work to share their enthusiasm for the content and to make their presentations interesting and entertaining. Furthermore, when teaching their classes most of the professors add variety to their lessons by planning for multiple activities and using a number of teaching strategies. Additionally, they strive to develop a strong rapport with their students and to create a classroom environment where all participants feel comfortable sharing their opinions and taking part in activities. Finally, the interviewees agreed that helping the students understand the relevance of the subject matter to their lives was a challenging, but important, goal of teaching American literature.

**Theme 4: American Literature Instructors Should Be Reflective Practitioners**

The idea that American literature instructors should be reflective practitioners also emerged from data analysis. In their interview responses, the participants in the study discussed the importance of conducting frequent self-evaluations to determine the effectiveness of their instruction. They also mentioned their use of indicators such as students’ end-of-course evaluations, attendance records, and grades as evidence to judge their instructional effectiveness. Conversations with their peers about teaching methods and/or participation in professional development activities had also encouraged some interviewees to reflect on their instructional performances. Several of the professors indicated that because of their self-assessments, they had changed their instructional practices. Nearly all of the instructors admitted that over time
they have altered their teaching practices because they have developed a pedagogical content knowledge that helped them to improve their presentation and delivery of course material; moreover, most admitted to learning from their own pedagogical successes and failures. Several veteran instructors surmised that reflection about their instructional practices often evolved out of necessity. For example, some instructors discussed feeling a need—or, in some cases, a pressure—to modify their instructional approaches because of the changes in students’ characteristics, the trends affecting higher education, and the advancement of technology as a teaching tool. The general belief among the participants of the study was that self-reflection often yields self-improvement.

**Paradigm shift in instructional approach.** In the 1990s, the paradigm shift from a teacher-centered to a student-centered approach to instruction was underway. The student-centered approach encouraged new methods of instruction and evaluation, a renewed focus on workforce training and employment skills, and flexibility in course delivery and scheduling (Barr and Tagg, 1995; Cross, 1993). These educational trends challenged and encouraged community college instructors to modify their instructional approaches not only to meet the needs of their students, but also to meet the needs other stakeholders, such as local employers. A few of the veteran instructors in the study mentioned that throughout their careers their teaching styles underwent similar changes.

Dot mentioned that when she first began teaching, she “taught like [she] was taught,” meaning that the she lectured and her students were expected to take notes. However, she admitted that over time she has “modified from strictly lecture” to a blended and more engaging style of instruction. She explained that in the 1990s she really began to see a decline in her students’ abilities. During the same period, the trends in education associated with the “learning
college” encouraged student engagement, active learning, and diversified instruction. As she attended professional development sessions about these topics and reflected on her own instructional practice, Dot realized that she needed to modify her instructional approach and “evolve” with the times. Though she still primarily uses lectures and still claims to be “teacher-centered,” Dot stated that her approach to instruction is now more engaging because she utilizes technology in her presentations, encourages discussion, periodically has her students work collaboratively, and provides them with online study aids and graphic organizers. Dot mentioned that she often takes time to reflect on her teaching because she is “always trying to think of possibilities” to improve instruction.

Similarly, Stan, another veteran educator who still claims to be a “traditional” teacher, reported that he strictly used the lecture for the first few years of his career. However, like Dot, Stan’s approach to instruction changed with the times, and Stan now utilizes technology to supplement his lectures. Stan confessed,

The biggest change to my teaching method over the years is actually more of an evolution than anything . . . My boss just came up here one afternoon and said, “You’re going to start using PowerPoint in your lectures. And I’m like, “Okay?” And he showed me how to use it in 15 minutes, and I’ve been fiddling with it ever since. You know, I do actually spend a lot of time now [preparing] PowerPoints, if that makes any sense.

Though Stan confessed that he is “pretty comfortable” with his current teaching style, he added that he continually thinks about his teaching methods and keeps a list of new ideas and activities he hopes to implement in the future. Likewise, Stan discussed how he believes re-reading and studying the texts as he prepares to teach his classes cause him to be a better teacher. He stressed that the graduate-level literature courses he has taken in recent years have led him to view some aspects of American literature differently and, therefore, have also made him a better scholar and teacher.
Past experiences with students have led some instructors to re-evaluate their enforcement of classroom policies and procedures; as a result, these instructors claimed that they now seem to be more understanding, compassionate and flexible than they were earlier in their careers. Dot and Stan both discussed the struggles their students must overcome to attend classes: full-time jobs, parental responsibilities, financial constraints, and a lack of academic skills. Likewise, Gary mentioned that some of his students occasionally miss class because they have to work overtime or attend court because of domestic disputes or custody battles. These instructors explained that they use common sense and discernment when dealing with struggling students. For example, they might allow a student who has a sick child to turn in an assignment late or make-up a missed assessment. Explaining his use of discretion concerning students’ absences, Carlton pointed out that the average student at College C is “29 years old, female, single, and a mother,” so he declared that leniency and compassion are often necessary. In part, self-reflection about their past experiences with students led these participants to become more understanding, compassionate, and flexible. Their actions are evidence that they have become less concerned with rigid classroom management practices and more concerned about student learning.

**Causes of reflection.** What causes instructors to reflect on their pedagogical practices? For several instructors, the results of their students’ end-of-course instructor evaluations cause them to think about their instructional methods. Though a few participants claimed to dismiss the results, viewing them as trite, others indicated that they found them useful because they led to self-reflection. Gary stated that he uses discretion when he considers the results of his students’ evaluations of his teaching:

I take those student surveys seriously sometimes when there is a pattern. And what I do, and probably what most of us do, is you take “He is a big jerk” and “Every time he walked in the room I got sick at my stomach”—you take that one, and you take “[Gary] is
the finest teacher on earth,” “Nobody can teach like he can,” “That’s the smartest man I ever knew,” and so on—you take those and you put them . . . out of the way. And then if you see the “We needed more grades,” “I wish he had given more tests,” “I think my grade would have been better if we could have had more grades”—Aha! Now I will take that—and that was one that I did get a couple of years ago—and I fixed that right then and started giving an additional exam in my American literature classes. So I take that kind of thing [seriously].

Noting that some comments from the surveys are extreme and not necessarily reliable, Gary mentioned that he considers reoccurring comments useful and often reflects on and modifies his course design or teaching practices because of them. Similarly, Dot claimed that student evaluations often cause her to reflect on how she is teaching the content. She explained, “If there is a negative evaluation, I take it seriously, and I wonder about it, and I try to see why a student would have interpreted something that way.” Like Gary and Dot, Sue also uses the results of student evaluations to reflect on her instruction. She explained that the students’ comments often lead her to think about what she is not doing well:

Sometimes we [teachers] have a tendency to focus on the negative [comments], and I'll admit that I do that, but I also look at it in terms of how can I do better or how can I not do that again the next time I teach. And so I do take what students say to heart when they do their evaluations. I do look at their comments, more so, and I do look at the statistical data—what the numbers say in terms of engagement and so on. And I really do try to think back on, maybe, a lesson that maybe I could do differently next time and make it more interesting . . I do take what they say and I do try to apply it to the next semester that I teach it.

Similarly, Rhonda remarked that she has used students’ comments to alter her teaching methods:

“I’ve changed some of my teaching techniques and my handouts based on what the students said they needed.” Predictably, most of the interviewees claimed that students’ feedback, whether written or oral, encouraged them to think about their instructional practices and consider ways to improve or modify their pedagogy.
In addition to feedback from students, other indicators caused the instructors to re-examine their instructional methods. Nearly all instructors cited attendance as a past or current problem in their literature courses, and some participants did admit that low class attendance has caused them to think about and sometimes modify their instructional practices. To some instructors, student attendance indicated the success of their instruction. If students were not coming to class, then the instructors confessed that they often blamed themselves and questioned their abilities. A few interviewees believed students often stop attending classes because they are bored or uninterested in the content. Sunni shared that her students seem to attend class more regularly when she is teaching something of interest to them; absences are more frequent when she is teaching poetry or Shakespeare. She also discussed her belief that students will regularly attend class if they believe it is “fun” or “exciting.” Similarly, Gary remarked that attendance is generally not a problem in his American literature classes, and he attributed students’ regular attendance to the fact that they seem to have a good time while learning. According to Gary, he attempts to make his class entertaining so that his students will want to attend. For some instructors, student attendance, or the lack thereof, has caused them to reflect on and question the effectiveness of their instructional practices.

Students’ performance on assessments has also caused many of the participants to reflect on their instructional practices. Josh explained that after he grades exams and essays, he always looks at the results and questions his instructional decisions and abilities:

Honestly, I’ve looked at [the grades] and one of the things I’ve noticed . . . is that students tend to do really well on my exams. And sometimes I have to actively—the question I ask myself way too many times is—and I know this is going to sound funny—“Am I that good, or am I that easy?” And frankly, that’s something that I have to debate on. And I’m not sure I know the answer to that just yet . . . [I question:] “Am I teaching this course in a way that’s beneficial to them, in a way that’s also challenging, as well?”
The idea of using assessment results to determine the effectiveness of instructional practice was reiterated by Sue, who commented: “I look at what [students’] scores are on the tests to see what areas or how I can maybe articulate better for the next test.” To Sue, the test scores are indicative of her level or instructional proficiency, so she reflects on her practice and makes modification so that she “can do better” the next time she teaches the content. Explaining how grades can lead to changes in instructional practices, Gary shared that he had recently given and scored a test in his American literature class and that he felt that the grades indicated he had not adequately prepared his students for the exam. The remainder of the anecdote illustrates how Gary’s reflection changed his practice:

There was pattern here of too many people making bad grades . . . And I thought maybe I didn’t give them enough time; maybe I didn’t give them enough warning . . . So when I gave the papers back, I just simply said: “Here is your paper; we’ll go over it. Here is your grade. Now, when I call your name, tell me whether or not you want me to record that grade for you. If you say ‘no,’ I’ll just write ‘no’ and you can throw it away.” So that’s one way I use [grades]. I assessed my teaching and I thought that I had come up short. And I didn’t feel I should punish [the students], because I know—I’ve done this a long time—there were too many bad grades.

Because he felt that he had not sufficiently prepared his students for the assessment, Gary dropped the grades of those who scored poorly. Gary further explained that after this occurrence he changed his instructional approach with that particular class.

To encourage student success and learning, Dot, Stan, Lucy, and Gary discussed how they give students multiple opportunities to improve their test and/or essay scores. For example, Dot allows her students who score below a 70 to re-test on the material or correct their current unit tests for additional points. Similarly, Stan provides opportunities for students to revise their essays if their grades are below a 70. According to Lucy, if a majority of her students do not make passing scores, then she “has missed the mark” and will re-teach and re-test, as necessary.
Likewise, when Gary returns essays, he often gives his students a choice to either keep the score they have earned or to correct their essay and improve their scores. The rationale behind these instructors’ decisions is that student learning, not grades, is most important. Most of the instructors in the study discussed the importance of using grades to gauge their instructional effectiveness and, if necessary, to modify their pedagogical practices.

**Results of reflection.** Does an instructor’s reflection on his or her instructional practice yield positive change? According to the interview responses of the study’s participants, most would say yes. As previously noted, the interviewees discussed several catalysts for reflection; furthermore, they indicated that reflection typically led to change in their practices, including planning and instruction. In some cases, such as with Josh, Sue, and Gary, the self-evaluation led to a change in instructional methods. For other instructors, the results of self-evaluation helped them identify areas of weakness and improve upon them. For example, Dot began to plan for more student engagement and Stan began to use technology and other media to supplement his lectures. Additionally, several instructors reported other positive results that came from the changes they made to their practices because of self-reflection, including improvement of their class presentations, slight increases in students’ attendance, a rise in students’ exam and essay scores, and an improvement in instructor-student rapport.

Several instructors also noted that they have lessened the rigor of their courses and have revised their course syllabi, mainly by reducing the amount of reading that they assign. Gary admitted that it has become necessary “over the years” to drop certain authors and selections that he felt his students struggled to read and understand from the reading list. Gary explained, “I think the most important thing I have learned is to be more selective on my syllabus and to kind of weed out people that [the students] aren’t ready for yet.” Without apology, Stan declared,
“Over the years I have cut [reading assignments] down significantly; I used to have much larger reading assignments than I do now.” Carlton concurred, explaining that he also felt it necessary to reduce his reading list: “There are some texts altogether that I’ve just dropped off, you know, altogether off the syllabus and . . . there are authors that I would like very much for my students to like, but, hey, they don’t respond . . . .” Similarly, Josh confessed that he has reduced his course reading list and plans to remove even more non-fiction writings in the future. Josh defended his decision:

The early Puritan stuff—guys like Bradford, Winthrop—it’s hard to teach that sometimes without sounding like you’re giving a sermon or teaching a history lesson. It’s hard to bring that to life, and if there’s anything I’ve done in this particular course and plan on doing more of in the future, it’s trimming [the reading list].

These instructors indicated that they lessened the amount of reading by ridding the syllabus of writers and works that they believed their students struggle to comprehend. According to these instructors, it is important to reflect on instructional practice often in order to determine what methods are effective in meeting the course goals and objectives.

The belief that American literature instructors should be reflective practitioners emerged from the data analysis as fourth theme. Most participants noted that over time their approach to instruction became less teacher-centered and more student-centered. To determine what instructional practices were most effective in their teaching approaches, the instructors noted that they began spending more time reflecting on their instructional practices. Through reflection, the teachers could determine which practices were effective and which needed improvement. Additionally, certain factors, such as students’ comments, end-of-course evaluation results, students’ attendance patterns, and grades, also encouraged instructors to re-evaluate their practices. Many participants in the study admitted that self-reflection caused them to change
their instructional practices. Some reported improved rapport with students, increased student attendance, more entertaining and effective instructional presentations, and a reduction in course rigor and assigned readings.

**Discussion of Findings and Emerging Themes**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the course design decisions and instructional practices of American literature teachers at three rural community colleges in North Alabama. The researcher conducted interviews, class observations, and document analyses to investigate how these rural community college English instructors design, deliver, and evaluate student learning in their courses. The participants in the study provided robust responses about their course design decisions and pedagogical practices. Additionally, data gathered from the class observations and course-related document analyses supplemented the interview responses. Data collection and analysis led to the emergence of four themes: (a) Situational Factors Affect Course Design and Instructional Decisions; (b) Academically unprepared Students Affect Course Design and Instructional Decisions; (c) Instruction Should Be Engaging and the Subject Matter Should Be Relevant to Students’ Lives; and (d) American Literature Instructors Should Be Reflective Practitioners.

The participants in this study claimed that certain situational factors have affected their course planning and pedagogical decisions. According to the interviewees, the number of students enrolled in a course often limited their teaching methods to certain activities and assessments. Additionally, instructors claimed that the student population often affected their course design and delivery decisions. Most participants acknowledged that they are sensitive to the challenges many community college students must overcome to attend college and indicated that they attempt to be flexible and maintain a balance of common sense and compassion when
planning for and delivering their course content. Similarly, the instructors discussed the importance of class personality to their instructional decisions. They reported that preparing for and teaching a class of motivated students proved easy; on the contrary, the tasks of planning and teaching were difficult if students appeared apathetic and unmotivated to learn. Instructors also considered their own personal preferences a factor in their course design and instructional decisions. Some instructors admitted to creating a course reading lists that included their favorite authors or genres because they feel more comfortable teaching what they enjoy reading and studying. The expectations of external groups had little effect on their course design and delivery decisions, according to most of the instructors. These factors, individually or taken together, affected the participants’ course planning decisions and instructional practices.

A second theme to emerge from data analysis was the participants’ belief that many community college students are academically unprepared and the lack work ethic necessary to succeed in college. A recurring concern of the interviewees was their students’ difficulty with reading and understanding texts. Several instructors complained that trying to teach literature to a group of students who cannot or have not read the text is extremely difficult. In an effort to encourage student engagement, some of the instructors confessed that they have lessened course rigor and reduced the amount of reading assignments. Furthermore, the participants in the study were concerned because many students lack the analytical and writing skills needed to write a college-level literary analysis essay. Also impacting the teachers’ course design and pedagogical decisions was students’ apathy and lack of work ethic. The interviewees reported that students often fail to complete assignments, attend class, or participate in class activities. All instructors viewed students’ lack of skills and apathy as their greatest challenge in teaching American literature at the community college level.
The third theme to emerge from the data was the instructors’ belief that instruction should be engaging and the subject matter should be relevant. The interviewees agreed that it is important to provide engaging instruction that encourages students to take an active role in the learning process. Most instructors’ described their classes as being fun and engaging, and they seemed concerned with making their presentations entertaining. A few interviewees even equated teaching to giving a performance. Additionally, the interviewees indicated that they not only strive to make the subject matter interesting, but also work to make the content relevant to their students’ lives. Most of the participants acknowledged that their students learn more when they are active classroom participants. Likewise, the teachers suggested that students seem to show more interest in learning when they believe the subject matter is useful to them. All declared that finding a method to connect with the students was of utmost importance if they were to lead them to learn and apply the knowledge.

A final theme that emerged from the data was the instructors’ belief that American literature instructors should be reflective practitioners. The interview responses indicated that the study’s participants take pride in their instructional practices. It became apparent that these instructors were reflective practitioners who continuously work to improve their craft. According to the interviewees, they have and continue to spend time thinking about their instructional practices, which often led them to modify their course designs and/or methods of instruction. The participants indicated that certain factors often led them to reflect on their practice: students’ verbal and written comments, end-of-course evaluation results, students’ attendance patterns, and examination and essay grades. As a result of reflecting on their practice, some instructors reported improved relationships with students, increased student attendance, better instructional presentations, and a reduction in course rigor and assigned readings. All of
the participants acknowledged that self-reflection is necessary for their instructional practices to improve and not become stagnant.

**Chapter Summary**

The community college American literature instructors interviewed and observed for this study displayed a commitment to their profession as they shared how they design, deliver, and evaluate student learning in their American literature courses. These participants explained how certain situational factors impact their course design and instructional decisions. Additionally, they discussed their concerns about community college students’ lack of academic preparedness, especially noting some students’ deficiencies in reading, comprehension, and writing skills. Furthermore, these instructors discussed how they often change their instructional approaches because of their students’ apathy and lack of work ethic. While discussing their efforts to create and maintain a warm and welcoming classroom environment, the instructors explained their efforts not only to present the course content, but also to make the subject matter relevant and the learning process entertaining and engaging. Finally, the instructors explained how reflecting on their instructional practices has often led them to make beneficial changes in their pedagogy. The interviewees provided rich and robust responses concerning their course design decisions and pedagogical practices. Chapter V will include additional findings from the study, answers to the research questions, conclusions drawn from the research, implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and the researcher’s closing remarks.
CHAPTER V:
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Community colleges are often recognized as “teaching” institutions whose mission statements outline their goal of providing students with the best education possible (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Outcalt, 2000). To meet the increasing educational and economic demands brought on by changes in student demographics, the advancement of technology, and the need for a skilled and educated workforce, community colleges have undergone significant transformation in recent years (Bryant, 2001; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Saunders & Bauer, 1998). These changes in demographics and mounting pressures to meet stakeholders’ demands for greater accountability have caused many higher education institutions to place an even greater emphasis on instruction (Bresciani, 2006; Bryant, 2001; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Miller et al., 2005; Voorhees & Zhou, 2000). Today’s community college instructors are challenged to move beyond traditional methods of instruction and to take a more student-centered approach with their teaching (Bain, 2004; Barr & Tagg, 1995; Eble, 1988; Fink, 2003; McKeachie, 2002; Showalter, 2003). Renewed focuses on pedagogy and the incorporation of innovative instructional practices have helped to modernize community college classrooms and improve learning (Bain, 2004; Fink, 2003).

The recent interest in teaching and learning has generated numerous studies on a variety of topics related to pedagogy (Anderson & Carta-Falsa, 2002; Bain, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Kember, 2009; Sorcinelli, 1995; Young, 2003). However, the existing literature does not
specifically address the course design decisions and pedagogical practices of rural community college American literature instructors. Because community colleges serve a large and steadily-increasing number of students (Cohen & Brawer, 2008), research in the area of community college teaching is important to future instructors who might benefit from an understanding of course design decisions and pedagogical practices that positively affect teaching and learning. One means of determining how community college American literature instructors design and teach their courses is to learn from practitioners who have taught or currently teach the subject.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the course design and instructional practices of several American literature teachers at three different rural community colleges in North Alabama. By offering a discipline-specific examination of course design and instructional decisions of American literature instructors, this qualitative study contributes to and fills a gap in the existing literature concerning community college teaching. Additionally, because many college instructors lack formal training in pedagogical methods and theories (Bain, 2004; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; DeBard, 1995; Kroll, 1994; Showalter, 2003), this study provides information that may prove beneficial to current and/or future instructors who seek to improve their pedagogy.

Discussion

This study was designed and framed using Fink’s (2003) Model of Integrated Course Design (ICD), which offers an explanation of how instructors may provide students with “significant learning experiences” (p. 29) through course design and instructional decisions. The participants for the study were ten full-time community college American literature instructors from three community colleges of varying sizes in North Alabama. The data for the study were derived from the personal interviews, class observations, and course-related document analyses.
The data were collected over a period of five weeks in the fall term of 2011. The face-to-face interviews were conducted at times and locations determined by and convenient for the participants. The interviewees responded to questions from interview protocols, which were designed using Fink’s ICD Model to elicit information related to the research questions. The instructors who participated in the study shared their thoughts and opinions regarding their experiences of designing and teaching American literature courses at the community college level.

The data were analyzed using standard qualitative techniques (Merriam, 1998). As the data were collected, the researcher began transcribing, analyzing, and initial coding. After all data were collected, the researcher conducted cross-case analyses (Creswell, 2009; Meriam, 1998) to compare the results. As needed, the researcher continued analysis and coding to determine recurring ideas and establish tentative themes. Four distinct themes emerged from the analysis: (a) Situational Factors Affect Course Design and Instructional Decisions; (b) Academically Unprepared Students Affect Course Design and Instructional Decisions; (c) Instruction Should Be Engaging and the Subject Matter Should Be Relevant to Students’ Lives; and (d) American Literature Instructors Should Be Reflective Practitioners.

Discussion of these four emerging themes is found in Chapter IV. In addition to the findings discussed in the previous chapter, the researcher will now address each research question individually. Each of the eight sub-questions examines an aspect of rural community college English instructors’ course design decisions and instructional practices and contributes to an understanding of the overarching research question: How do rural community college English instructors design, deliver, and evaluate student learning in American literature courses?
Research Question 1

How and to what degree do rural community college English instructors take into account *situational factors* in the conceptualization and design of American literature courses?

During data analysis, the effect of situational factors on course design emerged as a theme. The general consensus among participants in this study was that they do take into account certain situational factors when thinking about and planning for their American literature courses; however, they also admitted that other factors have little impact, if any, on their course planning decisions. In the interviews, instructors noted that factors such as course enrollment numbers, class demographics and dynamics, students’ abilities, and personal preferences most often affect their course-design and instructional decisions.

Several instructors discussed the increasing number of students they have in their American literature classes as a situational factor that has impacted their course design decisions. In recent years, a struggling economy and lack of funding have caused college administrators to increase course enrollment caps as a cost-saving measure (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Kroll, 1994; Yates, 2000). As a result, the number of students admitted into an American literature course at the three research sites has increased substantially. A number of instructors reported that they now require fewer essays from their students; very few of them require their students to write a research paper, though several did mention that they provide their students with alternatives to writing the report. Others discussed decreasing the number of assessments they administer during the term. Because a larger enrollment means a greater paperwork load, these instructors unashamedly admitted to requiring less from their students so that their own workloads would not be overwhelming. Additionally, the instructors noted that larger class sizes also limit their choices in instructional decisions. The teachers claimed that larger class sizes have discouraged
them from using cooperative learning activities as often, primarily because classroom control is more of an issue when enrollment is greater.

Additional factors said to impact these instructors’ course design decisions were student demographics and class dynamics. The participants reported an increase in non-traditional students in their American literature classes in recent years. Upholding the work of Cohen and Brawer (2008) and Fink (2003), the instructors explained that many of their students face obstacles to attending college, including work responsibilities, parenthood, and financial difficulties. For many of these students, school is one in a long list of priorities. Supporting the claims of Cohen and Brawer (2008), the instructors in this study recognized that for many community college students, attending college is often not their main responsibility; therefore, several participants discussed the importance of considering their students’ life situations and additional responsibilities when designing their courses.

Additionally, earlier research has noted that community college students are often unprepared to meet the demands of college-level coursework (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Huber, 1998; Kozeracki, 2002). The topic of students’ lack of academic preparedness recurred during the interviews and emerged from data analysis as a major theme. Similarly, the participants in the study indicated that their recent students have not been as academically prepared for college as their past students were. Participants particularly noted their students’ deficiencies in reading, comprehension, and composition skills. Likewise, interviewees upheld the findings of Yates (2000), whose research found that students’ lack of academic preparedness and commitment was the most stressful part of part- and full-time instructors’ jobs. The participants repeatedly mentioned students’ apathy toward academics, especially reading. As a result, most teachers
claimed that they have reduced and continue to lessen the rigor of their courses and the amount of outside reading that they require of students.

Class dynamics was another factor affecting the participants’ course design decisions. Although most instructors have a general instructional plan in place prior to meeting with their students, many of them admitted that they have often altered their plans after they have met and determined the dynamics of the class. Like Angelo and Cross (1993), who suggest that effective instructors change their teaching styles to fit the context, most instructors in this study considered class dynamics to be an important factor in determining their instructional methods and in selecting and assigning reading assignments. For example, the instructors reported that they were more likely to utilize class discussion and cooperative learning activities with students who were studious and vocal; in contrast, the instructors were more likely to use lecture and other traditional practices with a class whose members were less eager to participate. The participants indicated that they are more apt to assign challenging texts to classes composed of students who are studious and willing to read and discuss the works.

The participants in this study also admitted that their personal preferences often affect their course design decisions. Supporting Fink’s (2003) idea that teachers have a particular feeling toward the subject matter, many professors indicated that they intentionally design their courses to include the specific genres, authors, and selections that they enjoy reading and discussing. The instructors claimed that they tend to teach with more enthusiasm and passion when they are teaching their preferred selections. Additionally, most instructors noted that they are also careful to choose selections that they feel their students will enjoy reading and discussing.
Though the instructors of this study admitted that they were aware of regional, state, college, and departmental expectations and/or requirements, nearly all of the participants indicated that they give these factors scant consideration when they design their courses. Notably, all of the syllabi analyzed for this study included the course descriptions and learning goals prescribed by the Alabama Community College System (ACCS), as well as a number of college and departmental goals and/or expectations. Nonetheless, the instructors admitted that they primarily used the course textbook’s table of contents to plan their courses. The instructors mentioned that they value their autonomy in course design and do not feel pressured by any external groups or requirements. The one requirement that participants did mention and most adhered to was the ACCS’s recommendation concerning the minimal number of required writings and examinations to be administered during the term.

The data collected and analyzed for this study indicated that the participants do consider certain situational factors when planning for their courses; however, the instructors admitted that other factors, particularly the expectations of external groups, have little influence on their course design decisions. Generally, these teachers explained that they design their courses in a way that benefits both, the teacher and the learners. These findings support the research of Fink (2003), who suggests that situational factors affect instructors’ course design decisions.

Research Question 2

How do rural community college English instructors determine the learning goals for American literature courses?

A review of the current literature on instructional planning underscores a connection between the establishment of clear learning goals and the result of increased student learning (Bain, 2004; Eble, 1988; Fink, 2003; McKeachie, 2002). Baiocco and DeWalters (1998) and
Barr and Tagg (1995) recommend that instructors specifically determine the knowledge and skills they expect their students to obtain. When asked what they hoped their students learned by taking their American literature course, participants’ responses were closely aligned with the learning goals prescribed by the Alabama Community College System (ACCS). The ACCS provides community colleges with a list of general learning goals for American literature courses; these objectives are broadly written, leaving much room for instructors’ interpretations. All of the participants were aware of these learning goals and included them in their course syllabi. Several participants noted that the prescribed learning goals are so broad in scope that any lessons derived from the course content would likely lead to compliance.

The instructors believed students should not only possess a general knowledge of American history, but that they should also have an awareness of its literary heritage. Therefore, most instructors’ goals were “content-centered” (Fink, 2003, p. 73), meaning that they were derived directly from the course content. Since many instructors acknowledged that they design their courses by using their textbook’s table of contents, their learning goals were heavily focused on what Fink defines as foundational knowledge (i.e., authors, time periods, and literary movements associated with America’s history and literature).

Although aware of the ACCS’s set list of learning goals, a few participants in this study discussed developing additional learning goals for their courses. Most instructors’ goals were based on their perceptions of what the students should learn in the class that may benefit them in the future. Simply put, these instructors developed their learning goals by asking themselves: “What is it that I want students to learn?” For example, some instructors planned for their students to learn how to analyze texts, to understand the logic and purpose behind writers’ rhetorical decisions, to develop and support a position, and to respect others’ opinions.
Participants identified these skills as those necessary for their students’ to succeed at a four-year college or in the workforce. These learning goals would be included in Fink’s (2003) application category. Additionally, these findings support the research of Kroll (1994), who reported that more than 75% of full- and part-time community college English faculty believed that preparing students for a career was an important learning goal.

Additionally, many participants upheld the beliefs of Beach and Marshall (1990), Davidson (2000), Scholes (2009), and Showalter (2003), all of whom suggested that the study of literature provides students with opportunities to connect with the past, share in the universal experiences of life, broaden their cultural perspectives, and become better citizens. Nearly all of the participants in this study stated that they want their students to see the connection between literature and life, which relates to Fink’s (2003) categories of integration, human dimension, and caring. Several literature teachers mentioned that they often have students who question why a literature class is required in their programs of study when they are entering a technical field; these students complained that they saw little personal value in reading and discussing literature. The instructors explained that the study of literature is important and that the lessons learned are applicable to most fields because humans share universal emotions and experiences, such as making decisions, falling in love, having a family, and losing a loved one (human dimension and integration). Nearly all of the participants indicated that a main learning goal they have for their course is that students will learn to have a greater appreciation for literature, which aligns with Fink’s learning how to learn category of significant learning. Two instructors modestly admitted that want their students to develop a passion for literature similar to their own.

The learning goals of the community college literature teachers who participated in this study are generally similar to the broadly written course objectives prescribed by the ACCS and
to Fink’s (2003) categories of significant learning. Though all of the instructors were aware of the ACCS’s list of learning goals, most of the instructors admitted that they only had a basic idea of these set goals in mind as they planned and/or taught their courses. Many of the goals that instructors mentioned were content-based, stressing the importance of foundational knowledge. Participants also explained that their goals included providing students with opportunities to develop and use the skills necessary to transfer to a four-year college or to begin their careers (application). Finally, the instructors mentioned that they develop learning goals that will hopefully lead their students to see the connection between literature and life (integration, human dimension, and caring) and to develop a greater appreciation of literature (learning how to learn). If the instructors were leading their students to significant learning experiences, it was done implicitly. Based on the data collected and analyzed, none of the participants intentionally included all of the six types of learning from Fink’s Taxonomy of Significant learning in their course plans; however, in their own estimation the participants were leading their students to meet the learning goals.

**Research Question 3**

How do rural community college English instructors determine the methods to be used to assess and provide feedback concerning student learning in American literature courses?

The Alabama Community College System (ACCS) provides general guidelines for instructors to follow as they teach their American literature courses, including minimal requirements regarding student evaluation and assessments. The instructors in this study mentioned that they typically adhere to their departmental recommendations concerning student evaluation and assessment. At the three research sites, the English department/division provided instructors with guidelines aligned with those prescribed by the ACCS.
Citing the task of grading large amounts of paperwork as their reason, most of the instructors in the study followed the minimum guidelines for examinations, writings, and research. A review of the participants’ syllabi indicated that these instructors administered three or four examinations and required their students to write between two and four essays during the semester. Some teachers required their students to write essays in class or as a part of their examinations; other teachers had their students complete both in- and out-of-class essays, some of which were research-based. Interestingly, none of the participants interviewed for this study required their students to complete and submit a research paper; instead, many instructors provided their students with alternatives to the paper, such as oral presentations, group assignments, or reflection essays.

Instructors used a variety of methods to assess and monitor their students’ progress. Most instructors discussed using formative assessments, such as unannounced quizzes, short written responses, and class discussions, to determine whether or not their students understand the material and to encourage them to complete assigned readings. Instructors explained that the results of these assessments allow them to make judgments about their own instructional decisions, such as whether to move forward with teaching new content or review certain concepts. Additionally, teachers also indicated that they use these formative assessments to provide their students with feedback about their performance in the course. The instructors considered discussion particularly useful because they believe that open dialogue provides students with opportunities to ask questions and the instructors chances to provide verbal feedback. The teachers indicated that such dialogue has often led students to a greater understanding of the text. Additionally, when they evaluated students’ quizzes, paragraphs, or other writing assessments, instructors provided feedback in the form of grades and comments.
The interviewees’ responses and a review of their course syllabi indicate that the participants’ summative assessments are very similar in format. These exams include a variety of question types, including multiple choice, short answer, matching, identifications, and essay. As most participants reiterated, they attempt to design their assessments so that the results will be a true representation of what knowledge and skills students have acquired. Because they believe writing is an important skill, nearly all of the instructors agreed that assessments requiring students to organize and write responses should be included in American literature classes. A few instructors noted that they no longer use multiple choice exams because they consider them to be ineffective in measuring student learning; instead, these instructors’ assessments solicit written responses to short answer questions and essay prompts. Noting that they have the students’ best interests in mind, most of the participants discussed using formative and summative assessments not only as a way to monitor students’ understanding, but also as a way to reflect on and improve their own teaching practices.

**Research Question 4**

How do rural community college English instructors determine the teaching and learning activities to be used in American literature courses?

In recent years, a student-centered approach to teaching has encouraged instructors to develop and implement more creative and engaging teaching strategies (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Bain, 2004; Eble, 1998; Fink, 2003; McKeachie, 2002; Stronge, 2007). Barr and Tagg (1995) stated that a teacher’s main focus should be leading students to learning by using whatever means are necessary. Likewise, earlier research emphasized the importance of instructional activities to the learning process (Anderson & Carta-Falsa, 2002; Angelo & Cross, 1993; Bain, 2004; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Darling-Hammond, 2001; McKeachie, 2002; Stronge,
Participants in this study discussed the importance of using a variety of teaching and learning activities to gain students’ attention, generate interest in the content, and encourage student engagement in the learning process. In the interviews, the participants discussed how they determine which teaching and learning activities to use.

Essentially, interviewees’ responses indicated that they determine their teaching and learning activities by asking themselves two questions: “What do I believe students need to learn from taking this course?” and “How can I best teach those concepts?” Some instructors commented that the particular text under study led to its own unique set of learning goals. For example, instructors indicated that they would have different learning objectives for each lesson; the goals for teaching a lesson on Benjamin Franklin’s writings would likely differ from the goals designed to teach a short story by William Faulkner. The instructors also noted that pedagogical approaches were often unique to particular authors and/or selections. In addition to course content, class dynamics also affected the participants’ instructional decisions.

Angelo and Cross (1993) assert that each group of students has a unique composition and that successful instructors are capable of changing their teaching methods to fit the personality of the class. Darling-Hammond (2001) and Reinsmith (1994) claim that instruction requires teachers to create unique encounters with their classes to promote student learning. Similarly, participants in the current study discussed changing their teaching styles because of class dynamics. Participants explained that some classes often respond better to texts than others; therefore, when students seemed to be interested in the content, spontaneity has often led the teachers to change their lesson plans to include an unscheduled learning activity. The instructors expressed that they were more apt to use cooperative learning activities when the class was composed of eager and vocal learners.
From the data collected and analyzed for this study, the theme that academically unprepared students affect instructors’ course design and instructional decisions emerged. Community colleges serve a non-traditional student population, which presents a unique set of challenges for the instructors at these institutions (Bryant, 2004; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Miller et al., 2005). According to the responses of the instructors, if their students were more capable of reading, understanding, and discussing the texts, then the teachers would be able to cover more material at a greater depth, include more class activities that require higher-order thinking skills, and make the class more engaging and less teacher-centered. However, most instructors admitted to lessening course rigor and reducing the reading requirements for their classes, partly because students struggle to read and comprehend the assigned texts. The instructors reported that they desire to meet their students’ learning needs, but they also want to make certain that the coursework is challenging and beneficial. Supporting the research of Lowman (1994) and Chickering and Gamson (1999), the results of the current study indicate that community college instructors are aware of and sensitive to their students learning needs. For most instructors, the lack of students’ academic skills helped to determine which teaching and learning activities they utilized.

Studies by Wenglinsky (2000, 2004) found that teachers who possess strong content knowledge tend to challenge students with higher-order thinking activities and engaging learning opportunities. Participants in the current study explained that their level of comfort with the content and their past teaching experiences also determine which learning activities they use to teach their classes. Shulman (1987) defines this phenomenon as “pedagogical content knowledge,” which is “the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse
interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction” (p. 8). Shulman (1987) asserts that because of their pedagogical content knowledge, effective teachers know how best to present the content, capitalize on teachable moments, and optimize students’ learning opportunities.

The participants in the study discussed that they often determine which teaching methods to use based on their level of comfort with the course content. Several instructors admitted to including familiar and/or favorite authors and works on their course reading list because they feel that they do a better job teaching those particular texts. When teaching works that are less familiar, some instructors explained that they feel less prepared and more uncomfortable. The instructors indicated that they feel the same way about their instructional practices. Several of the teachers explained that they have lessons in their repertoires that have repeatedly proven successful; many professors stated that they use these “favorites” each time they teach the course. Additionally, the instructors noted that they have also used teaching and learning activities that proved to be ineffective or unpopular with students, so the teachers either modified the lesson before using it again or decided not to use the activity in the future. Interestingly, a few instructors mentioned that activities that seemed to fail with one class proved to be successful with other groups. Some instructors also had better results with certain activities after making slight modifications. The teachers in this study discussed pairing their content knowledge with their past classroom experiences to determine what lessons to use with their current classes. The findings of this study support the works of Shulman (1987) and Hativa, Barak, and Simhi (2001), which ascertained that a strong pedagogical content knowledge is a distinguishing characteristic of exemplary instructors.
Research Question 5

How do rural community college English instructors determine what learning materials (i.e., literary works) to utilize in the teaching of American literature courses?

Based on the interview responses of the participants in this study, the simple and straightforward answer to this question is that the instructors use their textbook’s table of contents and their personal preferences to determine which materials and literary works will be taught in their courses. According to the participants, their respective department or division collectively decides on a textbook, and then the instructors have the autonomy to design their courses and create their reading lists from the selected text. The instructors in the study had few considerations when selecting works for inclusion in their courses.

The instructors stated that they consider their own preferences as they select the readings for the course. The participants reported that they feel more comfortable teaching and discussing works with which they are familiar. Several teachers noted that by teaching an author and his or her works repeatedly, they are able to “peel back the layers” of the text and increase their expertise. Also, the teachers claimed to do a better job teaching works that they enjoy reading and discussing because their passion and enthusiasm for the work is often noticeable to their students, some of whom learn to enjoy the work, as well.

When deciding on which literary works to study, the instructors not only talked of considering their own preferences, but they also spoke of the importance of selecting texts with their students’ skill levels and tastes in mind. Repeatedly, the instructors mentioned that their students had difficulty reading and understanding the assigned literature; they also stressed that many of their students were uninterested in reading. Therefore, the instructors discussed feeling a bit of pressure about selecting texts that their students could and would attempt to read. A
question several of the participants asked themselves was “What can these students read and understand?” Carlton explained that many of his students lack the perseverance to read through an entire text; instead, he claimed that they give up if they encounter a few tough words or feel that they have failed to grasp the meaning of the work in a paragraph or two. Similarly, nearly all instructors noted that they have reduced the number of required readings by eliminating several of the more challenging works from the list.

A recurring concern of the instructors was that they did not want to further their students’ hatred of English or their dislike for reading; instead, the participants’ desire was for their learners to develop a greater appreciation for literature. Dot’s concern that students have developed distaste for reading was evident in her comments. She mentioned that she feels the education system has failed students because most of them probably enjoyed reading when they first learned the skill; she lamented that over time they somehow “learn to hate reading.” It is her opinion that teachers are guilty of robbing students of the joy of reading, and she admittedly is cautious to choose reading assignments for her students that she believes are relevant and enjoyable. Like Dot, other instructors felt strongly about making the subject matter relevant to their students. Similarly, nearly all of the instructors discussed making an effort to include works that their past students seemed to enjoy reading and discussing on their required reading lists. Likewise, participants reported that students’ reactions to a text served as a guide for the instructors, who claimed that if the students seemed enthusiastic about discussing a work, then they would certainly include it in future reading lists.

Instructors also discussed the challenge of finding works that students have not previously read. Sue and Sunni complained that many of the works anthologized in their current textbook are also popular inclusions for high school texts, making it difficult to expose students
to works by familiar authors. To combat these issues, some of the participants have found works on the Internet and required their students to print, read, and bring copies to class. The instructors claimed that they often supplement the readings in their textbooks by posting additional works or information on Blackboard for their students to read and study.

**Research Question 6**

What are the most commonly identified learning goals, teaching and learning activities, assessment and feedback methods, and materials (i.e., literary works) being used in American literature classes?

According to Fink (2003), successful course design occurs when instructors establish long-term learning goals, determine how these goals can and will be measured, and develop the teaching strategies that lead to students’ mastery of the objectives. The importance of course planning to student learning has also been acknowledged in the research of Bain (2004), Eble (1998), Chickering and Gamson (1987), Martin et al. (1999), and McKeachie (2002). Responses from participating instructors and a review of the course syllabi revealed the most common learning goals, teaching and learning activities, assessment and feedback methods, and materials (i.e., literary works) being used in these instructors’ American literature classes.

**Learning goals.** As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the Alabama Community College System (ACCS) provides community college instructors with a prescribed list of learning goals/outcomes for all courses, including American literature:

1. The student will develop through the assigned literature the cognitive skills to read, interpret, and evaluate prose, poetry, and drama.
2. The student will identify cultural, historical, and philosophical forces revealed in and illustrated by the assigned literature.
3. The student will identify both the thematic and the aesthetic significance of the assigned literary works and will place the thematic and aesthetic concerns of a work in the context of the historical/literary period of work.

4. The student will recognize the role that the assigned literature has played in creating the cultural and philosophical foundations of contemporary society.

5. The student will understand literary scholarship and its relation to the primary literary works.

All participants in the study included these learning goals on their syllabi, and a few instructors slightly modified or added their own learning goals to the established set.

In their interview responses, the instructors stressed the importance of students’ learning and retaining foundational knowledge, such as names, dates, times, literary periods, etc. Additionally, many of the instructors stated that they wanted their students to be able to take lessons from literature and apply it to their own lives. Finally, most of the instructors commented that they want their students to develop a greater appreciation for literature, and two even commented that they want their students to develop a “love” for the subject.

**Teaching and learning activities.** One focus of this study was the examination of the participants’ instructional methods. Fink’s (2003) position is that significant learning experiences occur when teachers consider their students’ learning needs and provide them with multiple pathways to knowledge. Additional research by Barr and Tagg (1995), Bain (2004), and McKeachie (2002) advocates a student-centered approach to instruction that includes the use of multiple teaching and learning activities. In the current study, the researcher found that the participants primarily utilized three teaching methods: (a) lecture, (b) discussion, and (c) cooperative learning activities.
**Lecture.** A review of literature concerning instructional practices revealed much debate surrounding the use of lecture as a teaching method (Bain, 2004; Barr & Tagg, 1995; Bickman, 1995; Bligh, 2000; deWinstanley & Bjork, 2002; McKeachie, 2002; Showalter, 2003). Despite the claims that lectures are less effective than other instructional methods because they are passive learning activities (Bain, 2004; Bickman, 1995; McKeachie, 2002), other research indicates that the lecture can also be an effective teaching strategy (deWinstanley & Bjork, 2002; Showalter, 2003). In the current study, all of the participants indicated that lecture is their primary instructional method; however, nearly all agreed that alone the traditional lecture—a teacher dictating information to students for an entire class session—is ineffective. The instructors explained that over time they have modified their lectures to be more appealing, entertaining, and engaging.

Eble (1988), Palmer (1990), and Showalter (2003) noted that teachers are performers when they are in front of the classroom. Several of the instructors in this study also indicated that when they teach they view themselves as storytellers or entertainers who are “putting on a show” for students; therefore, the instructors discussed using humor, personal and historical anecdotes, and even sarcasm in their lectures to keep their students’ interest. The instructors discussed a need to make their presentations more appealing because students have short attention spans. Most instructors explained that they limit the amount of time that they lecture and that they include additional activities to keep students engaged in the lesson. To help keep the students’ interest during lectures, several participants discussed supplementing their talks with media clips, Powerpoint/slide presentations, interesting historical facts, jokes, and brief, interactive review strategies. These findings support the research of deWinstanley and Bjork
who claimed that lectures can be effective teaching strategies if they are well prepared and interactive.

Supporting the research of Palmer (1990) and Reeves (2007), instructors in the current study claimed that they feel comfortable using lectures, in part because they are easy to develop and modify. During the class observations conducted for this study, all of instructors used lecture as part of their instruction. Three instructors lectured for the entire class meeting, but they supplemented their presentations with brief teacher-student dialogue, guided textual analysis, and/or the use of questioning. The other instructors who were observed used brief lectures to introduce authors or concepts, review recent lessons, generate discussion, or segue into a classroom activity.

Though all instructors indicated that their primary instructional method is the lecture, nearly all of them agreed that their lectures should be engaging and entertaining. Most participants noted that the lecture is only one tool in their instructional arsenals and acknowledged the importance of using multiple activities to keep their students’ attention. Additionally, the instructors also discussed their efforts to make the subject matter relevant to their students’ lives—a recurring concept that emerged as a theme of the study.

Discussion. The participants in this study agreed with current research that indicates discussion is an effective teaching method (Bain, 2004; Burke, 1999; McKeachie, 2002; Showalter, 2003). Instructors in the study, especially those who have adopted a more student-centered approach to teaching, repeatedly mentioned the importance of discussion as catalyst for learning in their classrooms. All of the instructors in the study shared a belief that classroom discussion keeps students engaged, promotes interest in the topic, and helps learners arrive at a greater understanding of the literature. These claims support the earlier research of Linkin
(2009) and Burke (1999), who claimed that students benefit from and generally enjoy participating in class discussions. Additionally, interviewees claimed that they prefer discussion to the lecture because the ensuing exchange of ideas provides students with multiple opportunities to contribute to the conversation by making comments or asking questions. As Josh and Dot pointed out, discussion allows topics to take new direction; conversation does not limit students to one person’s thoughts or opinions, but, instead, it provides them with a means to share their own ideas and exposes them to a number of viewpoints.

Instructors also noted that they enjoy the flexibility discussion affords them. For example, a few instructors explained that they often plan for class discussion, but they also admitted to using it sporadically, as the need or teachable moment arose. Earlier research indicated that discussion can lead to or supplement a variety of teaching strategies (Bain, 2004; Burke, 1999; Showalter, 2003), and several instructors in this study mentioned that they have used discussion as a segue to other activities, such as small group conversations, debates, or teacher- or group-led text analysis. Another reason the instructors value discussion as an instructional tool is because they believe that it allows their students to make connections between their own lives and the literature. Some discussions not only lead students to a greater understanding of the works, but also provide them with ways to apply the information to current events, ideas, or situations. Discussion may also be used as a type of formative assessment (Bain, 2004; McKeachie, 2002; Showalter, 2003). Several participants in this study indicated that they often use discussion to determine how well their students understand the content and whether additional instruction or review is needed.

**Cooperative learning activities.** Palmer and Zimbler (2000) found that humanities instructors utilize cooperative learning activities more often than their peers in other disciplines.
Additional research indicates that both students and teachers value cooperative learning activities (Anderson & Carta-Falsa, 2002; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Reinsmith, 1994; Stronge, 2007). In the current study, teachers discussed their use of cooperative learning activities as a main teaching method. Teachers who have adopted a student-centered approach to teaching were more apt to use collaborative learning activities than those who have not (Palmer & Zimbler, 2000). For example, all but one of the instructors who participated in this study indicated that they use cooperative learning activities often. However, a few teachers admitted that cooperative learning activities often present challenges and that some factors, such as large class size or apathetic students, have deterred them from using group work frequently. These claims support the research of Reeves (2007) and Anderson and Carta-Falsa (2002), who found that teachers who prefer traditional methods of instruction shy away from cooperative teaching strategies because of their complacency, apprehension, or disinterest.

According to the interviewees, cooperative learning activities are beneficial because they include and engage all learners, promote problem-solving and teamwork skills, and provide opportunities for students to discuss their thoughts and share their opinions. These comments support the research of Bain (2004) and McKeachie (2002), who reported that cooperative learning activities are beneficial because they challenge students to work together, to use higher-order thinking skills, and to apply their skills and knowledge to solve-problems. Similarly, Johnson (1991), Pauley (2001), and Nelson (1999) reported that cooperative learning activities teach students skills that they will need as professionals and employees, including conflict-management, team-building, and communication skills. Several instructors in the study echoed these claims, noting that they require their students to work together to complete outside-of-class research projects. Their rationale for assigning these projects included claims that students
should learn to work together now because communication and collaboration are valuable work-related skills.

**Assessment and feedback.** Fink (2003) and Shulman (1987) agreed that the assessment and evaluation of student learning are necessary to determine not only the progress of the learners, but the effectiveness of instruction. Fink (2003) also stressed that assessments should be designed to measure students’ progress in meeting the intended learning goals for the course. Formative and summative assessments are used to monitor students’ understanding of the content and progress in the course; instructors often use the results of these assessments to reflect on and evaluate their teaching practices (Bain, 2004; Fink, 2003; McKeachie, 2002; Showalter, 2003). In the current study, instructors indicated that they use a variety of formative and summative assessments to measure and/or monitor student achievement.

The interview responses, course observations, and review of course-related documents indicate that the participants use several means of formative assessment in their American literature classes. The most common formative assessments used by participants were quizzes, reading checks, class discussions, and brief written responses. According to the data, all participants administer unannounced quizzes or reading checks throughout the term, mostly as a way to encourage students to read the assigned literary works before coming to class. Additionally, the instructors used class discussions and other brief activities to gain insight into how much the students were learning and retaining. For example, some instructors mentioned asking their students to list three things they had learned within the class period or to write down the “muddiest points”—terms, ideas, or concepts they did not fully understand—and submit them as they exited class. The participants claimed that the results of these formative
assessments often served as excellent indicators as to how much the students learned, understood, and retained.

A review of the instructors’ course syllabi and tests revealed that they also use several summative assessments. As with formative assessments, instructors indicated that they use the results of the summative assessments to measure student achievement and to reflect on instructional practice. All instructors administer either three or four exams during the term. According to the syllabi, most of the instructors’ exams consist of multiple choice and/or short answer questions, matching items, identifications, and/or written responses. Nearly all of the instructors require students to provide written responses to prompts or questions as a part of their assessments. In addition to these examinations, instructors also require students to write out-of-class essays, some of which are research-based. However, the traditional, research-based, multi-page term paper was not required by any of the participants in this study. Some instructors cited large class sizes or their students’ lack of abilities as reasons not to assign research papers; others provided alternative assignments, such as article summaries or reflective journal entries.

According to Fink (2003), feedback should be dialogical, frequent, and lead to greater understanding. Data analysis revealed that instructors provide feedback to their students using a variety of methods. Interviewees claimed that they provide oral feedback through dialogue during lectures. According to the participants, they interact with students during instruction to check for understanding, promote engagement, and encourage questions. Furthermore, participants noted that they meet with students as needed during office hours to provide additional instruction and feedback.

Participants also discussed providing students with written feedback on assessments, including quizzes, exams, in- and out-of-class writing assignments, and projects. Many
instructors mentioned the importance of writing encouraging and/or corrective comments on students’ submissions, explaining that these suggestions are intended to help the learners improve their future efforts; however, most instructors agreed that after seeing the grade, a majority of students spend little time reflecting on the comments. A few instructors mentioned that they have students correct their tests or revise their essays not only for the opportunities to improve grades, but also as a chance for them to learn from their mistakes. Finally, several instructors noted that they provide written feedback to their students via e-mail or Blackboard messaging.

Materials. Coincidentally, all participants in this study use the same textbook for their American literature courses: *The American Tradition in Literature* (12th edition), edited by George and Barbara Perkins. The textbook is an abbreviated anthology of American literature in one volume. Most of the instructors praised the book, especially noting the attention given to minority and women writers. A list of the most commonly taught literary works appears in Appendix D. Three of the participants in the study noted that they have their students read a few additional works not included in the textbook; these works were made available to students on Blackboard, via the Internet, or as a supplemental handout.

Class observations for this study were conducted in the first half of the fall semester in 2011. During class observations, the researcher noticed that many of the teachers were discussing the early works of American literature, which mostly consist of non-fiction journals, pamphlets, letters, and similar documents. Nearly all of the participants chose to include the works of Captain John Smith, famed for his early exploration of Virginia and his interactions with the Native Americans, and William Bradford, chronicler of the *Mayflower* voyage and the hardships of the Pilgrims. The instructors required students to read excerpts of these works,
likely because the texts are quite dense and the syntax and archaic vocabulary make the text a
difficult read. However, the subject matter of the texts would most likely be familiar to students
because of the prominence of these events in the American culture. Several movies document
John Smith’s fabled love affair with the young Indian Pocahontas; likewise, Thanksgiving is an
annual holiday celebrated in this country. It is very likely that the instructors choose to include
these works in their course curriculum because of their familiarity. Based on the interview
responses, the instructors sought to include texts that would be interesting to their students.

Additionally, each instructor included the some writings of Benjamin Franklin. Two of
the participants were teaching Franklin’s works when the researcher visited their classrooms for
observation. As they taught, these instructors built upon their students’ prior knowledge of
Franklin and discussed his contributions to the country’s literary heritage. The teachers used the
historical significance of Franklin to frame his literary contributions. The researcher surmises
that the instructors included Franklin’s works in their course reading lists for the same reason
that they chose to include Smith’s and Bradford’s, and that is because the students’ are familiar
with the author and his history.

Beyond the pre-Colonial and Colonial literature, the participants included a variety of
works from the Romantic Period through the Civil War. Short stories were popular choices, and
authors such as Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, and Nathaniel Hawthorne were among
those most often included on the reading lists. Additionally, the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson
and Henry David Thoreau were the representative Transcendental writers included on the course
reading lists. Finally, the poetry of the Fireside Poets—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John
Greenleaf Whittier, and Oliver Wendell Holmes—served as a prelude to the realist poetry of
Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson.
Generally, the participants included familiar writers and works from the literary canon in their curricula. Very few instructors included lesser-known authors or works in their course reading lists. These findings support the interviewees’ claims that their reading lists are predominately composed of their personal preferences and of those authors and works that they believe the students will recognize and enjoy.

**Research Question 7**

How and to what degree do rural community college English instructors work to ensure successful integration of the four primary aspects of course design (situational factors, learning goals, assessment methods, and learning activities) in American literature courses?

According to Fink (2003), integration occurs when instructors design their courses so that the four components—situational factors, learning goals, assessment methods, and learning activities—support and reflect each other. Based on the data collected and analyzed for this study, the participants do not deliberately work to ensure successful integration of all four components as they design or deliver their American literature courses. Simply put, when integration occurs, it occurs fortuitously. There is little evidence to support the idea that instructors give careful consideration to how each of these components work together when they design their courses.

**Situational factors.** Fink (2003) asserts that situational factors should affect all aspects of course planning. As reported previously, the participants in this study claimed that certain situational factors do affect their course design decisions and instructional practices. Because the Alabama Community College System (ACCS) has a recommended set of learning outcomes for community college American literature courses and the English departments at the three research sites highly encourage their instructors to use these goals, situational factors had virtually no
bearing on these instructors’ decisions concerning the learning goals. Additionally, the instructors explained that the prescribed learning goals are so broadly written that most instructional objectives or activities would likely relate to at least one of the goals.

Data analysis also indicated that situational factors such as demographics, class dynamics, and students’ abilities also affect the instructors’ decisions concerning assessments and learning activities. Because of larger class sizes, some instructors claimed that they eliminated or reduced the number or the length of writing assignments and more challenging reading assignments; likewise, several participants claimed to reduce the rigor of their courses so that students with insufficient reading, comprehension, and writing skills would have a greater chance for success. For example, several participants discussed providing students with multiple attempts to complete assignments, earn a passing test score, or revise their in- and out-of-class writings. The participants also suggested that other factors, including class dynamics and personal preferences, affected their instructional decisions, especially those concerning the selection of literary works and instructional methods. Instructors noted that they were more apt to use student-centered and engaging activities with classes whose students were motivated, studious, and vocal.

From the data analysis it became apparent that the participants consider what they perceive to be salient situational factors as they design and deliver their courses. Because the main learning goals are pre-determined by the Alabama Community College System, situational factors have virtually no affect on the learning objectives for the courses. However, other situational factors, such as enrollment, students’ abilities, and instructors’ personal preferences, do have a significant affect on how instructors plan for and deliver their courses. From the interview responses and a review of the course-related documents, the researcher gleaned that the
participants’ consideration of certain situational factors led them to design their courses in a way that reduced their workloads while still providing students with opportunities to learn and succeed. Consideration of these factors not only occurs in the planning phase of course design, but throughout the term. The participants discussed the importance of flexibility, noting that they often change their plans after they assess students’ abilities and the class dynamics.

**Learning goals.** The learning goals prescribed by the Alabama Community College System (ACCS) for American literature courses were broadly written. In short, the goals state that students should develop close reading and analytical skills, understand the historical, social, and philosophical significance of American literature, recognize tenets of and define the literary movements associated with American literature, and understand literary scholarship as it relates to the works. The participants in this study were aware of these learning goals and included them on their course syllabi. However, the interview responses revealed that the instructors gave little attention to these goals as they planned their courses; instead, most participants claimed to use their course textbook’s table of contents to select the assigned readings. Though the instructors admitted a general awareness of the learning goals, they did not purposefully choose the class readings or design their assessments with the goals in mind. The general consensus among the participants was that the goals were broad enough that their lessons, assessments, and activities would lead students to mastery.

**Assessments.** A review of course-related documents, including course syllabi, exams, supplemental handouts, and essay prompts, revealed that the assessments used by these instructors measure and support the learning goals. However, none of the instructors who participated in the study acknowledged that they purposely take the learning goals into consideration when they design their assessments. A review of the course-related documents
revealed that the examinations are primarily objective and call for students to recall and/or apply foundational knowledge; nearly all instructors require their students to provide written responses to essay questions or prompts, which encourage use of higher-order thinking skills. Most instructors require their students to provide textual evidence to support their claims. A few participants assign their students outside-of-class essays and/or group projects. Though none of the instructors mentioned that they used the learning goals to design their assessments, alignment with these goals, even if coincidental, is evident. However, there is little data to indicate that the instructors specifically consider the learning goals when they design their assessments.

**Activities.** Participants identified lecture, class discussion, and cooperative learning activities as their primary teaching methods and activities. Interview responses revealed that the instructors often determine their instructional decisions based upon certain factors, including class size, students’ abilities, and group dynamics. The participants explained that, aside from enrollment, they know little about their classes before the term begins; however, they noted that after meeting with their classes, they begin making informed decisions about their instructional practices. Likewise, based on the data collected and analyzed for this study, the researcher determined that the participants do not plan their course activities too far in advance; instead, many participants claimed to determine or alter their instructional approaches after they have had opportunity to interact with the group and assess the class’ dynamics. A few instructors discussed the importance of developing rapport with the group and fostering a comfortable class environment.

Though all instructors provided their students with an assigned reading list, most also included a course-calendar, noting which selections would be discussed on a specific date. None of the instructors listed specific teaching or learning activities on these calendars. Generally,
most professors talked of leaving flexibility in their schedules, mentioning that too much planning discourages spontaneity and creativity. According to some instructors, the sense of mystery about what will happen in a class session is a motivation for students to attend.

Most instructors determine their teaching and learning activities on a class-by-class basis; therefore, these activities are not purposefully aligned with the learning goals or assessments. The data does not support the idea that instructors spend time to plan activities or to ensure alignment with the learning goals. Rather, the results of the study indicate that such alignment often occurs inadvertently. These findings indicate that the participants are not following Fink’s (2003) model of course design and planning. Fink stresses the importance of designing and planning activities that align with and support the learning goals and feedback and assessment activities. It is the researcher’s opinion that these instructors could improve their courses and increase student learning by following Fink’s Integrated Course Design Model when designing and delivering their American literature courses.

Based on observations and data analysis, the researcher determined that the integration of the four primary aspects of course design mostly occurs unintentionally. The data indicate that the participants in this study spend little time intentionally planning or working to ensure successful integration of these four components as they design and deliver their courses. The instructors do consider salient situational factors as they plan for and deliver their courses; these factors particularly affect the instructors’ decisions concerning course rigor, assessments, instruction, and learning activities. Though aware of the Alabama Community College System’s prescribed learning goals, most participants admitted that they give them little consideration when planning for their courses; instead, they claimed to build their courses on what they believe their students need to know. Similarly, the instructors did not indicate that that they take into
account the learning goals or activities as they created their assessments. Additionally, interviewees’ responses and the course syllabi indicate that most instructional activities are not planned in advance, nor do they appear to be properly aligned to the learning goals. Generally, most instructors in this study appeared to follow a pattern: assign readings, lecture, generate discussion, review for a test, assess student learning, and repeat the cycle. The researcher found that participants in this study spend little, if any, time planning or working to ensure that the four components of course design support and reflect each other.

**Research Question 8**

To what degree do the situational factors, course learning goals, teaching and learning activities, and assessment and feedback methods considered and/or utilized by these rural community college instructors reflect the over-arching qualities and components of Fink’s Integrated Course Design model?

An instructor’s ability to design a course and deliver content knowledge are key components to the teaching and learning cycle (Bain, 2004; Fink, 2003, 2007; McKeachie, 2002). According to Fink’s (2003) Integrated Course Design (ICD) Model, instructors may provide students with significant learning experiences by designing their courses to be learning-centered, logical, and integrated. An examination of ten rural North Alabama community college instructors’ course design decisions and instructional practices revealed to what degree the participants’ pedagogy reflects the over-arching qualities of Fink’s ICD Model.

**Situational factors.** Fink (2003) asserts that situational factors affect every aspect of course design and must be carefully considered. Participants in this study reported that they do take into consideration certain situational factors as they plan and design their American literature courses. Instructors noted that some factors, such as class size, the academic culture,
and personal preferences, affect their planning decisions, particularly those involving course reading assignments and assessments. Furthermore, participants claimed that decisions regarding instructional methods and learning activities are affected by situational factors, including class’ dynamics and students’ academic abilities. The results of the study indicate that participants do think about and reflect upon salient situational factors as they plan for and teach their courses.

**Learning goals.** Fink (2003) maintains that for a learning experience to be considered significant, it must incorporate all six categories of learning defined by the Taxonomy of Significant Learning: foundational knowledge, application, integration, human dimension, caring, and learning how to learn. When teaching their American literature courses, the instructors in this study use the broadly written learning goals prescribed by the Alabama Community College System (ACCS); these goals complement the categories in Fink’s Taxonomy. Though aware of the ACCS’s goals, instructors noted that they did not purposefully consider them as they designed their courses; instead, they used the course textbook’s table of contents to determine the course reading lists and develop a few implicit learning goals.

When participants were asked what they want their students to gain from taking their courses, the instructors’ replies revealed a heavy focus on *foundational knowledge* and *application*. Additionally, the participants discussed wanting their students to understand the universal applications of literature, to see its relevance to the past and present, and to make connections between the literary works and their own lives, all of which fit into Fink’s *integration* and *human dimension* categories. Likewise, nearly half of the participants expressed their hope that their students would learn to see multiple sides to an issue and value others’ opinions, which shows a sense of *caring*, another of Fink’s categories. Lastly, most instructors discussed a desire for their students to improve their reading skills and develop a greater
appreciation for literature, which supports Fink’s (2003) learning how to learn category. The implicit goals derived from the interview data were not included on the syllabi; however, they are related to the ACCS’s broad learning goals prescribed for the course and Fink’s (2003) categories of significant learning.

Though inadvertently, most instructors, by leading students to the mastery of the ASSC’s learning goals, are also leading students to significant learning experiences as defined by Fink’s Taxonomy of Significant Learning. Though the interview responses indicate that there is a strong emphasis on students’ learning and applying foundational knowledge, they also prove that little importance is placed on instruction promoting respect, self-realization, and self-directed learning. According to the data, the instructors’ appear to be more concerned with covering course content than providing deeper learning experiences.

**Learning activities.** In recent years, the literature on teaching and learning has noted the shift from teacher-centered instruction and passive learning to learner-centered instruction and active learning (Bain, 2004; Barr & Tagg, 1995; Fink, 2003; McKeachie, 2002). According to Fink (2003), teaching and learning activities should be designed to lead students toward mastery of the course goals. Fink (2003) also recommends that learning activities should be meaningful, exciting, and should encourage self-reflection about learning experiences.

Most participants in this study remain in a transitional phase from a teacher-centered to student-centered paradigm of teaching and learning. Though the participants identified cooperative learning activities as a main instructional tool, class observations and interview responses also revealed that the participants rely heavily on the “lecture-discussion tradition” and “secondary learning experiences” (Fink, 2003, p. 105). Fink’s ICD Model stresses active learning—a type of learning where there is less teacher-led instruction and more student
engagement. Specifically, active learning encourages students to complete authentic and meaningful tasks, gain knowledge by observing others, and reflect on and make meaning of these experiences (Fink, 2003).

Based on the interview responses and class observations, participants are making an effort to include activities that are more student-centered and engaging. Fink (2003) claims that learning activities should present information in new and exciting ways. Several participants noted their efforts to make their lectures more entertaining and engaging by using media clips, supplemental handouts, visual aides, questioning, humor, and historical or personal anecdotes. Fink (2003) also stresses that learning activities should require students to use knowledge to complete authentic tasks, and several instructors in this study mentioned having students work together to analyze texts, answer questions related to the literature, debate the ethical and moral dilemmas faced by authors and characters, and complete research projects and presentations.

While many of the instructors used cooperative learning activities often, others claimed never to use them or only to utilize them occasionally. Those who use them explained that they often do not plan these activities far in advance, but they sometimes utilize them on impulse or as needed. Cooperative learning activities encompass the “doing” part of active learning, but opportunities for observation and reflection are lacking.

Based on the data, participants in this study did not provide many opportunities for students to learn through observational experiences. None of the participants mentioned hosting guest speakers or taking field trips. Students only observed their professors and classmates discussing and using content knowledge. Likewise, students were not afforded other opportunities to reflect on and make sense of their learning experiences. Aside from discussing
graded assessments or correcting their essays, students had few other opportunities to reflect on their learning experiences.

Interestingly, most of the participants in this study understood the term “student-centered” to mean engaging students through the use of entertaining lectures, full-class or small-group discussions, or other cooperative learning strategies. Though students are interacting and learning in some small group activities, the other suggested components of active learning—observation and reflection—are nearly absent. Most participants in this study still adhere to the traditional, teacher-led practices of lecture and class discussion; however, the incorporation of cooperative learning activities indicates that they are at least working to provide students with active learning experiences. To a very low degree, the learning activities used by the participants are reflective of Fink’s (2003) ICD Model.

Assessment and feedback. Fink (2003) proposes that assessments should be used for more than determining students’ grades; additionally, they should be used to improve the quality of the teaching and learning process. According to Fink (2003), assessments should

- provide students with opportunities to apply content knowledge;
- be based on a set of established criteria;
- afford students opportunities to self-assess their own academic performance; and
- allow instructors to provide feedback (Fink, 2003).

Assessments that include these four components not only allow students to utilize their skills, but they also encourage them to evaluate and reflect on their work. Likewise, instructors may use the results of these assessments to measure their students’ performances and evaluate their own instructional methods.
Fink (2003) asserts that assessments should require students to use their knowledge to complete authentic and meaningful tasks related to the course content. A review of the course-related documents revealed that most of the summative assessments were composed of multiple choice, matching, short answer, identification, and essay questions that required students to recall and apply foundational knowledge; nearly all of the exams required students to provide a written response. However, most of these exams were “backward-looking”—that is, they were used to measure whether students understood the material or not (Fink, 2003, p. 86). Most assessments were very content-centered and did not require students to complete authentic tasks, solve problems, etc. Generally, the formative assessments checked for student completion and comprehension; some of them required students to compare and contrast authors, works, time periods, and similar information. Few of the formative and the summative assessments required students to use their knowledge or skills in a way that they might use them in the future; instead, the exam questions tested general knowledge through recall and application.

Stan and Dot provided students with writing assignments that allowed them to apply their knowledge to real-world experiences. In lieu of a research paper, Stan assigns a “College Life Assignment,” which requires students to write five reflective essays about their college experiences. For example, a student may choose to attend a theater performance of a Shakespearean work and write a first-person reflection on his or her experience. The detailed instructions for the assignment provide students with myriad events from which to choose. Similarly, Dot has her students write reflective responses to thought-provoking questions that arise during the reading or discussion of the literature. For example, if the class is discussing a particular character who has a moral or ethical dilemma, Dot will ask her students to put themselves in the character’s situation and write about what they would do. This assignment
allows the students to make the literature applicable to their own lives. These assignments are examples of the authentic, “forward-looking” (Fink, 2003, p. 85) assessments that lead to significant learning experiences.

Because assessments are meant to measure student learning, Fink (2003) asserts that they should have clearly defined and appropriate criteria. A review of the course-related documents and discussions with the instructors revealed that most instructors use rubrics to evaluate and score students’ written work. Teachers assigning outside-of-class essays and projects provided students with detailed instructions and guidelines, including grading criteria. Some instructors included rubrics and information regarding assignments and grading in their course syllabi.

The participants in this study provided students with few opportunities to evaluate or self-assess their own work. Though some students could use the instructions and information provided to them to self-assess their work, instructors did not discuss giving them opportunities to review their work or assess their own performance. Aside from one mention of peer review, the instructors had little to say about this component of assessment.

Finally, Fink (2003) declared that feedback is important to the learning process because it has the potential to lead both the students and instructors to improvement. According to Fink, feedback is frequent, immediate, based on criteria, and supportive (Fink, 2003, p. 95). The participants in this study discussed using a variety of methods to provide feedback to their students. First, the instructors noted that they offer oral feedback through dialogue during instruction by repeatedly checking for understanding and encouraging questions. Participants also explained that they make themselves available before and after class and during office hours so that they can work with students who need further instruction or feedback. Additionally, participants provide written feedback in the form of grades to students on all assignments or
class assessments. Participants stated that the purpose for providing written comments is so that students will gain an understanding of what they did well and in which areas they need to improve. Several participants in this study also mentioned that they communicate with their students through the Internet, social networking sites, Blackboard messaging, and/or via e-mail.

Concerning feedback and assessment, the researcher found that participants in this study primarily use content-centered, objective summative assessments that measure students’ abilities to recall and use foundational knowledge; additionally, most instructors required their students to provide brief written responses to essay questions or prompts. Most in-and outside-of-class assignments and projects included detailed instructions and clear criteria for grading. With the exception of a few outside-of-class assignments, most formative and summative assessments used by the instructors fall short of Fink’s (2003) standards regarding effective assessment tools. Additionally, the interviewees indicated that they do not provide students with many opportunities to evaluate or self-assess their own work. However, the instructors’ responses suggested that they do give students adequate oral and written feedback. Based on the data, instructors in this study are only partially meeting Fink’s (2003) criterion for assessment and feedback.

**Integration.** As previously noted, the data do not indicate that the participants in this study intentionally plan or work to ensure successful integration of these four components as they design and deliver their courses. Though instructors do take certain situational factors into account as they plan for and deliver their courses, they do not intentionally work to make certain that the learning goals, teaching and learning activities, and assessment and feedback techniques supplement and support each other. Instructors indicated that they give little, if any, consideration to the learning goals as they design their courses. Most instructional activities are
not planned in advance and do not appear to be properly aligned with the learning goals. Generally, the assessments are content-centered and require students to know and apply foundational knowledge; some activities or assessments required students to use higher-order thinking skills to provide written responses or complete projects. Instructors lead their students to learning through lecture, class discussion, and cooperative learning activities. The researcher found that the participants spend little time planning or working to ensure that integration occurs; therefore, alignment is lacking because the four aspects of course design do not support each other.

Conclusions

Fink’s (2003) Integrated Course Design (ICD) Model demonstrates how instructors may create significant learning experiences for students by considering the situational factors that impact the teaching and learning process and through the integration of the learning goals, teaching and learning activities, and assessment and feedback techniques. Through data collection and analysis, the researcher examined the ten participants’ course design decisions and pedagogical practices. The researcher found that, generally, participants

- did consider certain situational factors as they planned for and delivered their courses;
- gave little consideration to the learning goals as they planned and delivered their courses;
- did not plan teaching and learning activities in advance;
- did not specifically design assessments and evaluations to align with class activities or support the learning goals;
- did not work to ensure alignment of teaching and learning activities with the learning goals or assessments; and
spent little time planning or working to ensure the integration of the learning goals, teaching and learning activities, and course assessments.

Based on these findings, it is clear that the participants’ course design decisions and pedagogical practices only partially reflect those outlined by Fink (2003) in his ICD Model.

Though study was delimited to three rural community colleges in North Alabama, context seemed to have little effect on the participants’ design and delivery of their American literature courses. Only two participants mentioned the rural location of their college in the interviews; the other participants did not address the topic. Though the researcher thought that the rural context of the colleges would affect the participants’ course design and instructional practices, they did not articulate it as a significant factor.

**Overarching Question**

How do rural community college English instructors design, deliver, and evaluate student learning in American literature courses?

The overarching question for this study sought to determine how rural community college American literature instructors design, deliver, and evaluate student learning in their courses. Fink’s (2003) Integrated Course Design (ICD) Model served as the framework for this study, and each of the eight sub-questions examined a specific facet of the model. The protocol items, which were designed using Fink’s ICD Model, sought responses from the participants concerning their experiences designing and teaching their community college American literature courses. Additionally, the researcher conducted class observations and analyzed course-related syllabi and documents. An analysis of the interview responses, class observations, and course-related documents provided a response to the central research question.
Research Question 1 revealed that rural community college American literature instructors do take into consideration certain situational factors as they design and deliver their courses. The effect of situational factors on course design and instructional decisions emerged from data analysis as a theme. Instructors reported that factors such as prior classroom experiences, personal preferences, class size, and the institutional culture often affect their course design decisions. Teachers also indicated that once they meet with their classes, additional factors, such as demographics, students’ academic preparedness, and class dynamics, often help them to determine their instructional methods. Data also indicated that these and other situational factors frequently affect instructors’ decisions concerning assessments, learning activities, and course rigor. Interview responses supported earlier research. Bresciani (2006), for example, suggested that colleges should work to ensure a connection between course design, pedagogical practices, faculty development, and the assessment of learning. These findings also support Fink’s (2003) claim that situational factors affect all components of course design.

Research Question 2 examined how rural community college American literature instructors determine learning goals for their courses. The researcher discovered that the main learning goals for American literature courses are prescribed by the Alabama Community College System (ACCS); therefore, all participants included these goals on their syllabi and used them as the primary objectives for the course. However, most instructors indicated that they give these goals little thought when planning for their courses; instead, they discussed using the textbook’s table of contents and their personal preferences to develop course reading lists and to determine additional objectives. When asked about their learning goals, most participants stressed goals related to foundational knowledge and application. Interviewees also explained that there are implicit learning goals for the course, including students’ understanding of the
connection between literature and life and their development of a greater appreciation of literature. These findings support earlier research stressing the importance of long-term planning to curriculum coverage and student achievement (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Baiocco & DeWaters, 1998; Barr & Tagg, 1995; Fink, 2003).

Research Question 3 explored how the participants determine the methods used to assess and provide feedback concerning student learning in their American literature classes. Interview responses revealed that participants generally adhere to the minimal requirements for assessment prescribed by the Alabama Community College System (ACCS) and/or their respective departments and/or divisions. The instructors admitted that they take into consideration several factors as they develop assessments. For example, a few instructors claimed that if their class size is large, then they lessen the writing requirements. Additionally, instructors also noted that class demographics and students’ academic preparedness often help them to determine the type and difficulty level of their assessments. Most instructors reported that they use a variety of formative assessments to measure students’ understanding and progress; additionally, they claimed to use the results of these assessments to help them develop their summative assessments.

Participants noted that they provide oral feedback to students at each class session through lecture and/or class discussion; they provide written feedback to students in the form of grades, comments on returned work, instructions, e-mails, and via Blackboard discussions. These findings support the research of Palmer and Zimbler (2000) and Showalter (2003), who reported that humanities instructors are more apt to utilize class discussions, writing assignments, and written feedback than their peers in other disciplines. Additionally, the findings support Fink’s (2003) claim that feedback is an essential component of the teaching and learning cycle.
Research Question 4 examined how the participants determine the teaching and learning activities to be used in their American literature courses. When determining teaching and learning activities, the instructors reported that several factors often influence their decisions, including course content, class dynamics, and students’ academic preparedness. The instructors explained that their lesson plans and/or activities are often unique to the author or selection(s) under study. Additionally, participants explained that class personality also plays a role in determining which instructional and learning activities to employ; the teachers claimed to use more active learning strategies when their students are diligent and vocal participants. Likewise, the participants explained that they are able to use more challenging and thought-provoking activities with students who are academically prepared to read, comprehend, and discuss the literary works. Finally, instructors claimed that past teaching experiences and their level of comfort with the content often affect their decisions regarding teaching activities. These findings support the research of Shulman (1987), Bain (2004), and Wenglinsky (2000, 2004) who claimed that teachers’ past experiences help them to become better instructors.

Research Question 5 investigated how the participants determined what literary works to utilize in the teaching of their American literature courses. Instructors in this study noted that they generally build their reading lists from the course textbook’s table of contents. The interviewees confessed that they often choose works with which they are familiar because they feel more confident teaching these texts. Additionally, the participants reported that they also keep their students’ abilities and interests in mind when developing the reading lists. Angelo and Cross (1993) and Chickering and Gamson (1987) explained that community college instructors must be sensitive to their students’ challenges and needs. Most teachers commented that their
students have difficulty reading and comprehending the assigned works; therefore, the teachers admitted to assigning their students fewer and less-challenging literary pieces.

Research Question 6 sought to determine the most commonly identified learning goals, teaching and learning activities, assessment and feedback methods, and literary works being used in American literature classes. According to the data, the most common learning goals are those prescribed by the Alabama Community College System (ACCS) for American literature classes. All instructors listed these goals on their syllabi as their primary learning objectives. Reflective of a move toward the student-centered paradigm of teaching (Bain, 2004; Barr & Tagg, 1995; Fink, 2003; McKeachie, 2002), the participants indicated that their primary teaching and learning strategies are lecture, discussion, and cooperative learning activities. The data indicate that the study’s participants use a variety of formative and summative assessments to measure student learning. A majority of the instructors administer three or four exams in each course; most of the instructors’ exams include objective questions and also require the students to provide written responses to essay questions or prompts. Additionally, some instructors require their students to complete outside-of-class essays, presentations, and/or group projects. All of the instructors in this study currently use the same textbook. The most common literary works taught by these instructors are listed in Appendix D.

Research Question 7 sought to find out how and to what degree the participants work to ensure successful integration of the four primary aspects of course design in their American literature courses. Through data analysis the researcher determined that the integration of the four primary aspects of course design mostly occurs inadvertently. The data indicate that participants spend little time planning or working to ensure successful integration of the four components when they plan for or deliver their courses. The instructors indicated that they do
consider relevant situational factors as they design and deliver their courses. Such factors affect decisions regarding course rigor, assessments, instruction, and learning activities. Most participants also admitted that they give the prescribed learning goals scant attention as they design their courses; instead, they claimed to build their courses on what they believe their students need to know after leaving the class. Similarly, the instructors indicated that they gave little consideration to the learning goals as they developed assessments. Likewise, instructors confessed that most instructional activities are not planned in advance and that they are not specifically aligned with the learning goals. Angelo and Cross (1993), Bain (2004), Bresciani (2006) and Fink (2003) stressed that planning is key to successful integration, but the current research indicates that the instructors in this study do little to ensure integration of the situational factors, learning goals, activities, and assessments in their American literature courses.

Discussion Question 8 sought to determine to what degree the situational factors, course learning goals, teaching and learning activities, and assessment and feedback methods considered and/or utilized by these rural community college American literature instructors reflect the over-arching qualities and components of Fink’s Integrated Course Design Model. Through data collection and analysis, the researcher found that participants did consider certain situational factors as they planned for and delivered their courses. Also, the data proved that instructors gave little consideration to the learning goals as they planned and delivered their courses. Similarly, the researcher discovered that participants did not plan teaching and learning activities in advance nor work to ensure alignment with the learning goals or assessments. Finally, it became evident to the researcher that the participants spent little time planning or working to ensure the integration of Fink’s (2003) four components of course design; when it
occurred, integration happened inadvertently. The participants’ course design decisions and pedagogical practices only partially reflect the tenets of Fink’s Integrated Course Design Model. Based on the data collected and analyzed for this study, there is little indication that Fink’s ICD Model works, particularly because of the lack of integration of the model’s key components.

**Implications for Practice**

Through interviews, class observations, and the analysis of course-related documents, the researcher examined the course design decisions and pedagogical practices of rural community college American literature instructors. The results of this study and the themes that emerged from the coding of interview responses are consistent with earlier research. The literature suggests that salient situational factors often affect the facets of pedagogy, that a student-centered approach to instruction increases students’ satisfaction with the learning process, and that self-reflection leads instructors to improved pedagogical practices (Bain, 2004; Barr & Tagg, 1995; Bresciani, 2006; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Eble, 1988; Fink, 2003, 2007; Martin et al., 2000; Marzano, 2007; McKeachie, 2002; Stronge, 2007).

Interestingly, the study’s participants are cognizant of the four different components of Fink’s Integrated Course Design (ICD) Model (2003), but the data collected and analyzed for this study indicate that there is little evidence of integration; evidently, these instructors are not collectively using these components to strengthen the design or delivery of their American literature courses.

Bain (2004) proclaims that for good teachers there “is always something new to learn” (p. 174). This discipline-specific examination of American literature community college instructors’ course design and instructional decisions provides information that may prove beneficial to current and/or future instructors who seek to improve their practices. Additionally, the literature indicates that many college instructors lack formal training in pedagogical methods
and theories (Bain, 2004; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; DeBard, 1995; Kroll, 1994; Showalter, 2003); therefore, the information gleaned from this study may lead higher education instructors to a greater understanding of the course design decisions and pedagogical practices that positively affect teaching and learning in the rural community college context. The following implications for practice were derived from the findings of the current study:

1. Several of the instructors mentioned that increasing class sizes have affected their course design and instructional decisions. Because course enrollment affects instruction and learning, colleges should review and discuss the issue of increasing class sizes with instructors in hopes of arriving at a mutual understanding of the problem and a reasonable course enrollment cap.

2. Many of the instructors in the study discussed lessening the rigor of their courses or reducing the amount of writing assignments that they required of their students. Furthermore, the researcher found that the instructors are not working to align course assessments and activities to the stated learning goals. To ensure consistency in course rigor and the integration of all components of course design, department/division chairs or other administrators should encourage frequent collaboration among American literature instructors.

3. Because many participants claimed that their American literature students arrive ill-prepared and unable to complete the necessary reading and writing tasks, the college’s department/division should review with all English faculty the curriculum and learning goals for English 101 and 102 courses to ensure that all instructors are providing students with adequate instruction and that the assessments for these courses are measuring the desired learning outcomes.
4. To encourage the scholarship of teaching among faculty, colleges should provide instructors with the opportunities and necessary resources to engage in conversation about research on effective teaching and its application in the classroom. Such conversations could improve instructional practices and lead to greater student achievement (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Boyer, 1990; Healey, 2000; Shulman, 1987).

5. The Alabama Community College System should promote a scholarship of teaching among all American literature instructors by developing and/or providing support for an inter-collegiate network. Such meetings would allow American-literature instructors to learn from each other by sharing ideas, teaching techniques, and concerns (Boyer, 1990; Shulman, 1987).

6. Fink (2003) recommends that assessments should be authentic and meaningful. Based on the data collected and analyzed, most assessments focused on students’ recall and use of foundational knowledge; few required students to use knowledge to complete authentic tasks. Teachers should work to develop and administer more authentic assessments that require students to utilize higher-order thinking skills.

7. Since the instructors are aware of the basic components of course design, colleges should provide teachers with professional development opportunities where they may learn to integrate the components. Specifically, colleges could introduce Fink’s Integrated Course Design (ICD) Model and work with instructors to implement the model to improve integration, course design, and instruction. Department- or college-wide implementation of Fink’s ICD Model could occur through a series of professional development workshops over a specific period of time.
Recommendations for Further Research

The implications for practice and the findings of this study encourage further research concerning the course design decisions and pedagogical practices of community college instructors. Based on the findings of this study, the researcher offers the following recommendations for further research:

1. Because the study was limited to rural North Alabama community college American literature instructors, the researcher recommends that future researchers expand the study to include participants from additional research sites within the state and/or from different disciplines. Similarly, future researchers might consider limiting their focus to community colleges of a particular size or Carnegie classification. Such studies with a broader or more limited focus could provide additional insight into community college pedagogy.

2. The researcher recommends that additional research be conducted to study the effects of certain situational factors on community college instructors’ course design and pedagogical decisions. Particularly, a study focusing on the effect of class size on instructors’ decisions concerning assessment and class activities would provide data for college administrators and instructors who make decisions concerning enrollment size. Such studies could examine how any number of situational factors influences instructional decisions.

3. The focus of this study provided information regarding the course design and pedagogical decisions of American literature instructors based on qualitative data collected from current full-time community college American literature instructors. Future researchers may consider examining course design and/or instructional practices by collecting and
analyzing student-produced products as data. Such research would provide information from the students’ perspective.

4. For this study, the researcher conducted two interviews and one class observation with each participant; he also analyzed course-related documents. Future research should include multiple class observations with each participant, and these observations should be spaced throughout the semester. Additional class observations conducted throughout the term—possibly at the beginning, middle, and end—will provide future researchers with additional data and a clearer picture of how the instructor truly teaches the course.

5. This study focused on American literature instructors whose class delivery was in a “live” format. Additional researchers could focus on American literature instructors who deliver their courses in an online or hybrid format. Future researchers might seek to determine if the tenets of Fink’s ICD Model are also applicable to alternative instructional delivery formats.

6. Finally, the researcher recommends that future researchers conduct a state survey that particularly focuses on community college instructors’ course design decisions and pedagogical practices. Such a survey, whether qualitative or quantitative, would generate data valuable to researchers who are completing studies similar to this one.

Closing Remarks

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the course design decisions and pedagogical practices of American literature teachers at three rural community colleges in North Alabama. Fink’s (2003) Integrated Course Design (ICD) model provided a framework for this study, and the researcher attempted to determine if and to what degree rural community college American literature instructors reflect the over-arching qualities and components of Fink’s ICD
model. Using basic qualitative methods, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis of the data, which enabled him to analyze and organize the large amount of qualitative data into smaller and more manageable strands. Using the study’s theoretical framework as a basis for coding and organizing the data, the researcher was able to establish connections between the collected data and the research questions. Four themes emerged from the analysis of the data: (a) Situational Factors Affect Course Design and Instructional Decisions; (b) Academically Unprepared Students Affect Course Design and Instructional Decisions; (c) Instruction Should Be Engaging and the Subject Matter Should Be Relevant to Students’ Lives; and (d) American Literature Instructors Should Be Reflective Practitioners. It is the hope of the researcher that the information gleaned from this discipline-specific study will add to the knowledge base in this field and fill a gap in the existing literature concerning community college instruction so that current and future college instructors may benefit from an understanding of their peers’ course design decisions and pedagogical practices.
REFERENCES


Davidson, C. N. (2000). Them versus us (and which one of “them” is me?) *Profession, 97*-108.


288


APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS
Introduction: Thank you for participating in this study and for allowing me to conduct an interview with you today. As we have previously discussed, I am a doctoral student pursuing a degree in Higher Education Administration at the University of Alabama. My dissertation topic focuses on the course design decisions and pedagogical practices of rural community college American literature instructors. The information garnered from this interview will be used to complete the study. You will remain anonymous and the information you provide will remain confidential. This interview will take approximately one hour to complete. Before we begin, I ask that you join me in reviewing the consent form, so that I may address any questions or concerns that you might have about the study. Once we have discussed and you have signed the consent form, we will begin the interview.

General Information and Demographics:

1. How many years of experience do you have in the field of education?

2. The highest degree you hold is in what field?
   a. Where did you earn the degree?
   b. When did you earn the degree?

3. What is the highest degree you hold in English or language arts?
   a. Where did you earn the degree?
   b. When did you earn the degree?

4. How long have you been at this institution?

5. How long have you been in your present position?

6. What led you to teach American literature at the community college level?

7. How long have you been teaching American literature courses?
I. Situational Factors

Prior to this question, the researcher will present the participant with a list of topics from which he or she may respond.

1. As you design your American literature course, what factors or “givens” do you take into consideration?

   Topics:
   - Specific context of the teaching and learning situation
   - Expectations of external groups
   - Nature of the subject
   - Characteristics of the learner
   - Characteristics of the teacher

2. What, if any, major problems do your students face in meeting the learning goals of your American literature classes?

II. Learning Goals

1. What do you hope your students learn by taking your American literature course?

   Probes:
   - What key information or ideas are important for the student to understand and remember in the future? *(foundational knowledge)*
   - What will students be able to do intellectually, physically or emotionally as a result of taking your American literature course? *(application)*
   - What connections might students recognize and make between the information, ideas, and perspectives in your American literature course and those in other courses or areas? *(integration)*
- How might students use information gained in an American literature course in their own personal, social, and work life? (*integration*)

- What might students learn about themselves and their interactions with others? (*human dimension*)

- How might taking your American literature course change students’ feelings, interests, or values? (*caring*)

- What would you like students to learn about becoming lifelong and self-directed learners? (*learning how to learn*)

III. Teaching and Learning Activities

1. In general, how do you determine the teaching and learning activities to be used in your American literature classes?

   Probe: Ask the participant to make connections between classroom activities and the learning goals mentioned earlier in the interview.

2. What instructional strategies and teaching methods have you found to be the most successful in teaching your students?

3. Could you share an example of a method or instructional approach that you modified because you determined it was ineffective?

At the close of the interview, the researcher will ask the participant to schedule the class observation and final interview. Additionally, the researcher will ask the participant to provide him with copies of any course-related documents that might aid the researcher with the study.
Introduction: Thank you for meeting with me today. As you know, this is our last interview. In addition to discussing my recent classroom observation, I would like to ask you some questions concerning assessment, feedback, course management, and integration.

Questions from Classroom Observation

The researcher will develop these questions after the observation and prior to the second interview.

IV. Feedback and Assessment

1. How often do you assess student learning in your classroom?

2. What types of assessments do you use to measure student learning and why?
   
   Probe: Ask participants to make a connection between assessments and learning goals.

3. How do you use the results of the assessments?

4. How often do you provide feedback to your students?

5. Describe how you provide feedback to your students.

V. Course Management

1. How do you determine which literary works should be included in your American literature course?

2. What textbook(s) do you require for the course?
3. What, if any, supplementary text(s) or media do you use with your American literature class?

4. Explain your attendance policy, including any related awards or consequences.

5. How do you determine and assign grades? (What is your grading policy?)

VI. Course Integration

1. As you reflect on the design and delivery of your American literature course as it is currently constructed, do you feel that there are any disconnects or areas in need of improvement?
APPENDIX B

OBSERVATIONAL PROTOCOL
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Observation:</th>
<th>Observation # _____</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructor:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College:</td>
<td>Location:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching/Learning Objectives:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formative Assessment</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Feedback</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of Fink's Major Categories of Significant Learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundational Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of Fink’s Major Categories of Significant Learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of Fink’s Major Categories of Significant Learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of Fink's Major Categories of Significant Learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Dimension</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of Fink’s Major Categories of Significant Learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of Fink’s Major Categories of Significant Learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning How to Learn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sketch of Classroom:

Additional Notes:
APPENDIX C

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS RUBRICS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Missing</th>
<th>Included, but lacking detail</th>
<th>Detailed/Exemplary</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Management Information: name, location, office hours, phone, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text and other required reading materials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calendar/Structure and Sequence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Policies: attendance, make-up work, academic misconduct, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Goals and Purpose</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments: Explanation/Examples</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments: Submission</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Format/Style</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grading procedures/Feedback</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Resources/Assistance Integration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Comments/Explanation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The document contains clear and detailed information/instructions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The document supports and/or supplements the course learning goals.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The document provides students with or leads them toward a significant learning experience.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The document informs students of how they will or should use the document.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The document requires intellectual engagement and is appropriate for American literature students.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The document reflects integration of the four primary aspects of course design (situational factors, learning goals, assessment methods, and learning activities).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The document was created by the instructor.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D

COMMONLY IDENTIFIED READINGS IN

COMMUNITY COLLEGE AMERICAN LITERATURE COURSES
William Bradford
from Of Plymouth Plantation
Anne Bradstreet
"To My Dear and Loving Husband"
"Upon the Burning of Our House"
"The Author to Her Book"
"Before the Birth of One of Her Children"
William Cullen Bryant
"Thanatopsis"
"To A Waterfowl"
William Byrd
from The History of the Dividing Line
James Fenimore Cooper
"The Slaughter of the Pigeons"
"Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook; Stories of the Fathers"
St. John de Crevecouer
from Letters from an American Farmer
Emily Dickenson
Selected Poetry
Frederick Douglas
Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass
Jonathan Edwards
"Sinners in the Hands of and Angry God"
Ralph Waldo Emerson
Selected Poetry
from Self-Reliance
Olaudah Equiano
Selected Poetry
Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano
Benjamin Franklin
"The Way to Wealth"
The Autobiography
from Poor Richard's Almanac
"Remarks Concerning the Savages of North America"
"The Speech of Polly Baker"
Philip Freneau
"The Wild Honey Suckle"
"The Indian Burying the Ground"
Nathaniel Hawthorne
"Young Goodman Brown"
"Rappacini's Daughter"
"The Minister's Black Veil"
"The Birthmark"
Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.
"The Chambered Nautilus"
"Old Ironsides"
Washington Irving
"Rip Van Winkle"
"The Legend of Sleepy Hollow"
Harriet Jacobs
Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl
Thomas Jefferson
The Declaration of Independence
Sarah Kemble Knight
from The Journal of Madam Knight
Lincoln
Public Addresses
"Reply to Horace Greeley"
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
"A Psalm of Life"
"Excelsior"
"Mezzo Cammin"
The Song of Hiawatha
"My Aunt"
Cotton Mather
"Indian Powaws and Withcraft"
"The Trial of Bridget Bishop"
Herman Melville
"Bartleby the Scrivener"
from Moby Dick
Thomas Paine
from Common Sense
from The American Crisis
from The Age of Reason
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
"A Psalm of Life"
"Excelsior"
"Mezzo Cammin"
The Song of Hiawatha
"My Aunt"
Mary Rowlandson
A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs.
Mary Rowlandson
Samuel Sewall
"A Withcraft Judges's Confession of Guilt"
John Smith
The General History of Virginia
Edward Taylor
"Huswifery"
"Upon Wedlock, and Death of Children"
Tecumseh
[The White Men Are Not Friends of the Indians]
Henry David Thoreau
from Walden
"Civil Disobedience"
Phyllis Wheatley
"On Being Brought from Africa to America"
"To His Excellency George Washington"
"Letter to Rev. Samson Occom"
Walt Whitman
"When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer"
"A Noiseless Patient Spider"
"Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking"
from Song of Myself
Michael Wigglesworth
The Day of Doom
APPENDIX E

APPROVAL LETTER FROM INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
September 13, 2011

Stephen Jerome Ward, MA
Department of ELPTS
College of Education
Box 870231


Dear Mr. Ward:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given exempt approval according to 45 CFR part 46.101(b)(4) as outlined below:

(1) Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

This approval expires on September 12, 2012. If the study continues beyond that date, you must complete the IRB Renewal Application. If you modify the application, please complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, please complete the Request for Study Closure form.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this application, please include the assigned IRB application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Carpanello J. Myers, MA
Director & Research Compliance Officer
Office for Research Compliance
The University of Alabama
APPENDIX F

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPLICATION
Consent Form

Study Title: Engaging Students in Life and Literature: A Qualitative Study of Rural North Alabama Community College American Literature Instructors' Course Design and Pedagogical Practices

You are invited to participate in a research study tentatively titled “Engaging Students in Life and Literature: A Qualitative Study of Rural North Alabama Community College American Literature Instructors Course Design and Pedagogical Practices.” This study is being conducted by Mr. Steven Jerome Ward, a doctoral degree candidate in the Department of Higher Education Administration at the University of Alabama. Mr. Ward is being supervised by Dr. David E. Hardy, Associate Dean for Research and Service and Associate Professor of Higher Education in the College of Education at The University of Alabama. Because this study is a partial fulfillment of degree requirements, Mr. Ward is not receiving any salary or financial aid for completing this project.

What is this study about?

The intent of this qualitative study is to examine the course design and instructional practices of several American Literature teachers at three different community colleges in North Alabama. By offering a discipline-specific examination of course design and instructional decisions of American Literature instructors, this qualitative study will contribute to and fill a gap in the existing literature concerning community college teaching. As enrollments continue to increase and student populations become more diverse, classroom instruction remains an area of focus at many community colleges. Prior research on higher education instructors' pedagogical practices has primarily looked across teaching within a wide variety of disciplines. Since over half of today’s entering undergraduate students attend community colleges, the need for meaningful instruction in English studies at these institutions has never been greater. However, existing literature does not specifically address the course design decisions and pedagogical practices of rural community college American Literature instructors.

Why is this study important? What good will the results do?

A qualitative, discipline-specific examination of course design and instructional decisions of American Literature instructors will contribute to the existing literature concerning community college teaching. Furthermore, because many college instructors lack formal training in pedagogical methods and theories, a study exploring course design decisions and pedagogical practices will provide information that may prove beneficial to current and/or future instructors who seek to improve their practices. Particularly because community colleges service a large and steadily-increasing number of students, research in the area of community college teaching is important to future instructors who might benefit from an understanding of the course design decisions and pedagogical practices that positively affect teaching and learning.
Why have I been asked to take part in this study?

You have been asked to take part in this study because you are a full-time community college instructor with experience in designing and teaching American Literature courses.

How many other people will be in this study?

A total of ten instructors from North Alabama community colleges will participate in this qualitative study.

What will we be asked to do in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, Mr. Ward will conduct two interviews with you at mutually agreed upon times and locations. Each interview will last approximately one hour. Mr. Ward will use a separate, structured interview question protocol as a guide for the interviews, and each interview be recorded and transcribed.

Additionally, Mr. Ward will conduct one classroom observation. Ideally, the observations will occur after the initial and before the concluding interview. During the visits, Mr. Ward will use an observational protocol sheet to record his observations of your activities in the classroom. Strictly an observer, he will not participate in or interrupt normal course activities.

Finally, Mr. Ward will ask you to provide a course syllabus and other documents germane to your American Literature class (ie: handouts, worksheets, group instructions, etc.).

How much time will I spend in the study?

Each of the interviews will last approximately one hour. The class observation will last one full class meeting (75 minutes). Your total time of involvement in this study will be approximately 3 1/4 hour.

What will this study cost?

The only cost to you for this study is your time.

Will I be paid for being in this study?

There will be no financial remuneration for participating in this study.

What are the risks (problems or dangers) for being in this study?

There are no foreseeable risks.
What are the benefits of being in this study?

There are no direct benefits to you. However, the researcher will use your personal experiences of designing and delivering American Literature courses to arrive at conclusions that may provide useful recommendations to current and future community college instructors interested in improving their course design and instructional practices.

How will my privacy be protected?

Your identity and participation in the study will be known only to the researcher, you, and your students in the class that is observed. You are free to decide where the researcher will conduct the private, one-on-one interviews so you may talk without being overheard. When the researcher reports findings and/or publishes any articles using this data, he will use pseudonyms to ensure participants’ anonymity.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

All data collected for this study—the audio tapes, transcripts of the interviews, field notes from observations, and documents provided by participants—will be kept in a locked file cabinet in Mr. Ward’s personal office, which is located on the first floor of his residence. He will be the only person with access to these data. The data will be retained in this filing cabinet for a period of five years after the study is completed. At the end of five years, all data will be shredded and/or incinerated. When the researcher reports findings and/or publishes any articles using this data, he will use pseudonyms to ensure participants’ anonymity.

What are the alternatives to being in this study?

The only alternative to participation is not to participate.

What are my rights as a participant?

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with your place of employment or The University of Alabama. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time during the study without affecting those relationships. Being in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you start the study, you can stop participating at any time.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board (a committee that looks out for the ethical treatment of people in research studies) will review study records from time to time. This is to be sure that participants in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.
Whom do I call if I have questions or problems?

If you have questions about this study, please ask them. Please contact me by phone at (256) 566-5686 or via mail at:

Jerome Ward  
132 Forest Chapel Rd.  
Hartselle, AL 35640

You may also contact the chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. David E. Hardy, Director of Research at the Education Policy Center at The University of Alabama and Assistant Professor in the Higher Education Administration Program, via phone at (205) 348-8038 or through mail at the following address:

Dr. David E. Hardy  
College of Education  
The University of Alabama  
207 Carmichael Hall  
Box 870231  
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0231

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant or at any time become dissatisfied with any aspect of this study, you may anonymously contact Ms. Tanta Myles, The University of Alabama Research Compliance Officer, at (205) 348-8461 or toll free at 1-877-820-3066. You may also ask questions, make a suggestion, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html. After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the online survey for research participants, which is located at the site above. If you prefer, you may ask Mr. Ward for a hard copy of the survey. Should you have further questions, you may send an e-mail to participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

I have read and understand this consent form. I have also had an opportunity to discuss and ask questions about the study. I voluntarily agree to participate in the study. After signing the consent form, I will receive a copy for my records.

_____ Yes, you have my permission to audiorecord the interview.

_____ No, I do not want my interview recorded.

__________________________________________________________
Signature of Research Participant Date

__________________________________________________________
Signature of the Investigator Date

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB  
CONSENT FORM APPROVED 9/3/2011  
EXPIRATION DATE 9/3/2011

324