The Academic Writing of Evangelical Undergraduates

Emily Ann Cope

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In *Regendering Delivery*, Lindal Buchanan outlines a continuum of “collaborative activities,” calling attention to the many overlooked acts of collaboration that support women rhetors (134). As I reflect on the process of imagining, designing, researching, and writing this dissertation, I am grateful for many people who have supported this work directly and indirectly, visibly and behind-the-scenes.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to better describe and understand the academic writing and experiences of evangelical undergraduates at a public university. Previous composition studies have drawn attention to undergraduate diversity and the role of religious rhetorics in writing classrooms. However, because much of the existing scholarship identifies evangelical students by their “problematic” writing, the field has focused on writing that does not conform to academic expectations and is obviously faith-motivated. Additionally, because most composition studies of religious student writing report on classroom anecdotes, it has prioritized instructors’ experiences rather than student experiences. In contrast, this dissertation used qualitative interview methods to understand how these evangelicals experienced academic writing situations and how their experiences shaped their academic writing and qualitative document analysis methods to describe the characteristics of the academic writing of ten self-identified evangelical undergraduates.

The interview data revealed that there is no single phenomenon of evangelical identity and, therefore, no single evangelical experience of academic writing, but that evangelical identities do exert pressure on academic writing by significantly shaping evangelicals’ rhetorical awareness and interpretation of the salience of their writing. Based on the interview data, this dissertation presents a model of how evangelical identities influence rhetorical purposes and uses the model to explain three primary patterns of faith-motivated writing that emerged. The document analysis revealed that participants’ academic writing was usually a fitting response to an academic writing situation. This study also found that participants’ rhetorical purposes and choices for academic writing were dynamic and that some evangelicals significantly developed as writers over time as they gained discourse community expertise.
This study’s findings do not support the dominant characterizations of evangelical undergraduates or their academic writing and suggest that we may be misreading this growing student population. Further research about the diversity of evangelical students in terms of race, geography, and theology as well as longitudinal studies are needed to better understand how evangelical undergraduates develop rhetorically during college and what types of schooling experiences best support their rhetorical development.
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Chapter I: Introduction

What has changed for younger Evangelicals is the slow-motion collapse of the Bible Belt and the notion of “Christian America.” The newer generations often see in the Bible Belt experiment a Christianity that sought to affix Jesus onto the American Dream. […] The times will demand that Evangelicals stand for the faith in a different way from that in which we have done in the past even when we were at our best, to stand in a way that lives in the tension of prophetic distance and prophetic engagement. Prophetic distance in that we don’t become mascots for any political faction, adding Bible verses to justify somebody’s agenda when called upon to do so. Prophetic engagement in that we understand that the Gospel speaks to the whole of reality, including the decisions we make together in civil society and statecraft.

—Russell D. Moore, *First Things*, 2013

The Southern Baptist Convention’s chief political lobbyist, Russell Moore, wants evangelicals to find a new voice and a new position from which to speak into American culture. In 2013, the newly appointed President of the SBC’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission made waves in the media for critiquing the “culture wars” paradigm, celebrating the “collapse of the Bible Belt,” and urging American evangelicals to embrace a non-majority status. 1 Moore certainly isn’t the first to call for evangelicals to adopt more humble and conversational rhetorics and reject a majoritarian mindset, but his prominent status within the conservative Southern Baptist Convention suggests that evangelical attitudes toward political engagement and discourse may have reached a tipping point. Moore’s call for “prophetic distance,” in addition to “prophetic engagement,” is a rejection of theocratic ambitions.

Such ambitions are precisely what worry media and scholarly observers of evangelical public engagement. Recently, this anxiety has been fueled by public actions including the Hobby Lobby owners’ efforts to control women’s reproductive choices in the name of their own religious beliefs, and the letter fourteen religious leaders sent to President Obama urging him to

1 See The Wall Street Journal’s profile of Moore, King’s “Evangelical Leader Preaches Pullback From Politics, Culture Wars,” and Moore’s April 2013 C-SPAN interview.
provide religious exemptions from federal anti-discrimination employment policies. Scholarly investigations of influential American religious rhetorics echo this concern about theocracy (Bivins; Boone; Crowley; Harding; Moffett). None has been more influential in rhetoric and composition studies than Sharon Crowley’s Toward a Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism, which argues that evangelical discourse, energized by “apocalyptism,” poses a threat to the “preservation of democracy” (132). Crowley warns that “encounters with disbelief can result in social and political antagonism toward unbelievers, which is ordinarily handled by argument, although other means, such as withdrawal, coercion, or violence, are certainly available” (74). Like many others, Crowley elides distinctions between the terms evangelical and fundamentalist (see Cope and Ringer). Leslie Smith has demonstrated that scholars frequently use evangelical and fundamentalist to signal “anti-intellectualism, anti-modernism, and militancy” (195; 208). As a result, evangelical discourse is often feared to be inimical to healthy public debate, if not outright dangerous to democracy.

While many studies of evangelicals critique their public discourse, empirical researchers are beginning to examine the phenomenon of evangelical public engagement and rhetorics, offering more mixed assessments of the consequences. For example, sociologist John Shields argues that “more than any movement since the early campaign for civil rights, the Christian Right has helped revive participatory democracy in America by overcoming citizens’ alienation from politics” (253). Sociologist Michael Lindsay’s study uncovered evangelical strategies and impulses that make engagement in a secular society possible: “elastic orthodoxy,” a pragmatic strategy used by evangelicals to maintain orthodoxy while collaborating with non-evangelicals to work within a diverse society, and “cosmopolitan evangelicalism,” a strain of evangelicalism

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2 See Werleman’s “We are a Corporate Theocracy Now,” The Boston Globe editorial “Gordon College Case Shows Need to Contain Hobby Lobby Ruling,” and “Letter to Obama from Faith Leaders.”
more concerned with legitimacy in the broader culture than with converting non-evangelicals
(*Faith in the Halls of Power* 216-217; 218-223). While Lindsay found correlations between
evangelicals’ levels of educational attainment and cosmopolitanism, we do not fully understand
which types of higher education experiences might support the development of cosmopolitan
identities and rhetorical strategies.

For university faculty, not only is evangelicalism an emerging area of inquiry, but
evangelicals are also a growing student constituency. According to Lindsay, “evangelicalism is
rebounding” because more and more evangelicals go to college every year. Although
evangelicals “still fall slightly below the national average, the percentage of evangelicals
receiving bachelor’s degrees has climbed 133 percent from 1976 to 2004… more than doubling
the change within the general population” (“Evangelicalism Rebounds”). Who are these
evangelical undergraduates? What do they do at college? What do they learn in college? And
how do their experiences at public universities shape their rhetorical practices?

These questions are especially salient to scholars of rhetoric and composition because the
phenomenon of evangelical undergraduates’ academic writing engages with one of the field’s
most cherished goals: to prepare students for participation in public life. Over the past twenty
years, compositionists have produced a small body of research on a group variously labeled
*conservative Protestants, evangelicals,* and *fundamentalists*—distinctions that composition
scholars have often elided—and their writing for college. Most of these studies support what
Phillip Marzluf has termed “the conflict narrative,” that is, a largely unquestioned assumption
that evangelical and academic discourses are conflicting and, perhaps, incompatible (Anderson;
Browning; Dively; Downs; Neuleib; Perkins; Rand; Smart; Thomson).
The composition literature attributes conflict between academic and evangelical discourses to evangelical identity. Compositionists largely accept the premise that “spiritual identity may be the primary kind of selfhood” that evangelical students “draw upon in making meaning” (Rand 350). Amy Goodburn critiques fundamentalist discourse for its tendency to give “precedence to religious identity over gender” or any other kind of “difference” (340). Shannon Carter argues that “much of the traditional conservatism through which evangelical Christianity resonates seems to embrace familiarity above all else, representing difference not as a benefit to embrace and learn from but as a threat to overcome” (572). Several empirical studies of campus ministries by higher education researchers confirm the experience of conflict between evangelical and academic identities at the undergraduate level (Bramadat; Magolda and Ebben-Gross). However, another study at a selective research university found that evangelicals were countercultural primarily when it came to the “moral permissiveness they encountered on campus” (Bryant, “Evangelicals on Campus” 12). Although some evangelicals in Alyssa Bryant’s study experienced conflict in college classrooms, conflict was not the only experience; for some evangelicals, “their Christianity identity was not a liability, but simply one perspective among many in the ongoing classroom dialogue” (Bryant, “Evangelicals on Campus” 17). Additionally, Bryant’s longitudinal study found that for some evangelicals, identity was fluid and context-dependent (Bryant, “Developmental Pathways” 8-9; 19). The existing research, then, suggests that only some evangelicals experience conflict between their religious and student identities, but additional research is needed to understand how widespread this experience is, what other types of identity formations evangelical undergraduates have, and, more specifically, how evangelicals experience identity in the classroom and academic writing situations.
Composition studies also attribute conflicts between evangelical and academic discourses to differences between evangelical and academic epistemologies (Carter; Downs; Goodburn; Perkins). Goodburn describes one student’s view of “values and knowledge” as “stable, unitary, universal, and revealed by God” (344). Carter contributes to this characterization, describing her students’ rhetoric as trying to “convert” the listener to the speaker’s ways of knowing and living, a conversion completely dependent upon the acceptance that the speaker’s own subject position is far from ‘partial’ or ‘socially situated’ but rather ‘universal, right, and—above all—True’” (572). According to Douglas Downs, evangelicals participate in a “discourse of affirmation” that conflicts with the academic “discourse of inquiry” (43; 45).

However, larger empirical studies suggest a more complicated terrain of evangelical epistemologies. Although Bryant found evidence of conflicts between evangelical and academic ways of knowing the world, many of her participants maintained belief in absolute Truth and a sense that “their knowledge was incomplete” and subjective (“Evangelicals on Campus” 13). Bryant argues that this dissonance provided space for intellectual curiosity and inquiry within an “absolutist” framework (“Evangelicals on Campus” 14). Additionally, Bryant’s longitudinal research found that throughout the undergraduate years some evangelicals developed a concept of truth that allowed them to affirm absolutism but practice pluralism: evangelical undergraduates who socialized outside a Christian enclave “did not embrace pluralism” but “recognized that truth is sought by people of all faiths and is inherently mysterious” (“Developmental Pathways” 13). Bryant characterizes the belief “that something had to be true…even if [students] lacked the ability to ascertain with complete certainty whether it was Christianity or something else altogether” as a “post-positivist” ontology (“Developmental Pathways” 21). Thus, while compositionists often interpret evangelical undergraduate writing as
evincing the writers’ foundationalism, Bryant’s qualitative interview studies suggest that evangelical undergraduates’ ontologies and epistemologies may not fall into neat categories of “foundationalism” and “pluralism.”

Some compositionists are beginning to question the inevitability of conflict for evangelicals in the academy. Toby Coley uncovered the phenomenon of “restraint,” or self-silencing, among evangelical graduate students, but this phenomenon has not been investigated among undergraduates, a considerably larger population. While Coley suggests that many evangelicals in the academy choose to avoid conflict, Marzluf’s mixed-methods study found little evidence to support the conflict narrative: he found that college instructors’ “secularism” is overstated and that the instructors in his study did not “base negative judgments about the students or the faith-based texts solely on a simplistic consideration of religion” (286). Rachel Reneslacis’s dissertation also complicates compositionists’ assumptions about the nature of evangelical identity by examining how some women’s marginalization within evangelicalism aligned them with academic feminism.

As the conflict narrative is undermined, a few compositionists are arguing that evangelical discourses can serve as resources for academic writing (Carter; DePalma; Ringer). Shannon Carter recommends a pedagogy of “rhetorical dexterity,” which she argues “might enable our students to use literacies they already possess (like deep knowledge of the Bible and its applications in day-to-day life) to negotiate those the academy expects them to exhibit” (574). Two recent case studies investigated these possibilities and found that academic and religious discourses are not “fixed and stable” and that evangelical and academic discourses can overlap productively (DePalma 225; Ringer, “Consequences of Integrating Faith”). While Carter’s, Michael-John DePalma’s, and Jeffrey Ringer’s case studies suggest that “rhetorical dexterity” is
possible, more interview and longitudinal studies are needed to understand how it develops and what role schooling plays in its development.

Although scholars are increasingly attending to religious students and discourses, qualitative studies remain rare. Rhetoric and composition studies of evangelicals’ academic writing overwhelmingly identify evangelical students by their “problematic” texts, texts that noticeably depart from academic conventions, and report anecdotal evidence from teachers (Anderson; Bizzell; Browning; Carter; Dively; Downs; Gilyard *Composition and Cornell West*; Goodburn; Montesano and Roen; Neuleib; Perkins; Rand). Even as a few composition scholars are beginning to use qualitative methods to analyze evangelical student writing, such studies are often case studies that capture the experiences and writing of only one participant (DePalma; Ringer “Consequences of Integrating Faith”). As a result, we still know much more about teachers’ experiences with evangelical writers than we do about evangelical undergraduates’ experiences as academic writers. Larger interview studies that use systematic sampling methods to recruit a wider range of evangelical undergraduates are needed to provide a better understanding of this student population and their experiences writing for college from their own perspectives.

Also missing from the composition literature are descriptions of evangelical student writing itself; to date, there has been no systematic inquiry into the features of evangelicals’ academic writing. Larger empirical studies that collect a wide range of evangelicals’ academic writing—including different disciplinary genres and samples written beyond the first year—would help the field construct a more complete and nuanced understanding of the characteristics of evangelical academic writing.
Statement of the Problem

Although rhetoric and composition scholarship is increasingly attending to evangelical writers and discourses, empirical studies remain rare. Moreover, the prevailing assumption has been that evangelical identity, epistemology, and discourses conflict with academic purposes and discourses, despite some higher education research that suggests that some evangelicals have other and more successful experiences in the academy. Because of an over-reliance on teacher identification of evangelicals and anecdotal evidence, the existing scholarship on evangelical undergraduates and their writing may not account for the diversity of evangelical undergraduates’ experiences writing for college or accurately characterize their academic writing. A more complete understanding of their experiences and writing may affect how we understand this growing student constituency and lead us to reimagine how undergraduate education could support their rhetorical development. Further research that uses more systematic sampling methods is needed.

Purpose of the Study & Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to learn about how self-identified evangelical undergraduates at a public university experienced academic writing situations and to describe the characteristics of their academic writing. This study combined qualitative interviews and document analysis to answer the following research questions:

1. How do evangelical undergraduates experience academic writing situations?

2. What are the characteristics of the academic writing of evangelical undergraduates at a public university?
Significance of the Study

The study’s findings improve our understanding of evangelical undergraduates’ experiences as students and rhetors by describing the diverse ways that faith motivated and shaped some evangelical students’ academic writing. This study describes three primary approaches that evangelical undergraduates took to performing faith in their writing for college and uncovers key factors that account for a variety of evangelical rhetorical practices. It also describes the characteristics of evangelicals’ writing for college, which rarely enacts evangelical discourse explicitly. It is my hope that these findings will help faculty become better readers of their evangelical students’ texts and invite faculty and administrators to consider how instructional practices can encourage (and discourage) religiously motivated undergraduates to develop frameworks for integrating their faith and learning and for effectively communicating in diverse contexts.

This study also attempted to model an emic approach to investigating evangelical rhetorical practices, an approach that has rarely been taken. Most composition scholarship on evangelical student writers is anecdotal and relies on teachers to identify evangelicals; this qualitative study instead recruited *self-identified* evangelical undergraduates, consulted participants about their own experiences as academic writers, and collected a wide range of their actual academic writing (195 total writing samples). This study’s findings confirm the fruitfulness of using self-identification for sampling, taking a naturalistic approach to collecting writing samples, and pairing qualitative interviews with document analysis.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study extends the line of inquiry within rhetoric and composition research seeking to “reduce the puzzlement—what manner of men are these?—to which unfamiliar acts emerging
Stephen North insists that “this value holds even when, as is mostly the case in Composition, the settings seem less than exotic—when they are communities, schools, homes in our own culture” (278). Many evangelical students are not obviously different, but their writing has sometimes seemed difficult for teachers to interpret. While this study allows faculty to hear from evangelical undergraduates directly and to better understand their experiences, the study’s findings about the heterogeneity of evangelical identities and discourses confirm that evangelical academic writing is a complex phenomenon.

Here, I briefly outline the role of social constructionism and feminist qualitative research in the design of this study; these theoretical frameworks and the specific ways they shaped research methods are described more fully in Chapter Three.

**Social Constructionism and Naturalistic Research**

This study took a social constructionist approach to qualitative research, acknowledging that “realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific, dependent for their form and content on the persons who hold them” (Guba 27). Thus, this study did not seek to describe a “typical evangelical” experience of academic writing but a range of experiences that must be understood in the individuals’ contexts.

The qualitative paradigm of social constructionism is well suited for the study of lived religion (Ammerman; Hall).

As a qualitative researcher, I was committed to maintaining an emic orientation in the collection, analysis, and reporting of my findings. I understand myself as a research “instrument” (McCracken 18-19) and this study’s findings as the results of the collaboration between the participants and myself. Egon Guba describes the epistemology of constructionism as “subjective,” reminding us that “[f]indings are literally the creation of the process of interaction
between the two” [“inquirer and inquired”] (27). In order to mitigate my influence on the research findings, I relied on naturalistic research methods such as collecting a range of participants’ writing for actual college classes, rather than asking students to write in a contrived situation, and by letting interviews progress as naturally as possible (McCracken 21-22). I also took an inductive approach to data analysis, and used interviews to guide my analysis of the writing samples. Finally, I strove to maintain the emic orientation of this study by including participants’ own accounts as much as possible when reporting findings.

**Feminist Qualitative Research**

My teaching and administrative experiences have led me to consider the value of feminist criticism that seeks to make “invisible” groups within cultures and classrooms more visible and that investigates alternative responses to perceived conflict. Because evangelical students have been defined by a few of their more outspoken peers, many faculty are unaware of the diversity of evangelical undergraduates, and certain evangelicals may not be visible to them. Some may be uncomfortable applying feminist criticism to the experience of evangelicals; many scholars, most notably Crowley, have argued that evangelical discourse is hegemonic within American public life. Nevertheless, it is possible that evangelical undergraduates may be an invisible population within undergraduate classrooms in secular institutions, even if evangelicals have a loud voice in other contexts.

Feminist qualitative research is an appropriate model for this project because it emphasizes the political nature of empirical research. Feminist empirical researchers insist that “empirical research, despite any claims to objectivity, is never neutral [. . .]. The choice of methods, methodology, epistemology, and most important, the choice of participants, are always political acts with social implications” (Addison and McGee 3). My choice to study evangelical
undergraduates is a political act, based in part on my own experiences. As I have described elsewhere, my own experiences as an evangelical motivate my interest in this topic (see Cope and Ringer). I grew up in conservative, non-denominational evangelical churches in the Midwest and western New York and attended a Bible college in the Midwest. Through undergraduate courses in religion and theology, I came to understand American evangelicalism as embedded in and reflecting its historical and cultural contexts. In particular, I questioned the subculture’s dominant epistemology, authoritative claims regarding gender roles, and attempts to use legal and political power to impose its values on others. My evangelical identity is conflicted. While my religious practices and attitudes are rooted in historically evangelical expressions of Christianity and I identify with some evangelicals, I reject many aspects of the dominant evangelical culture in the United States.

I became interested in studying the experiences of evangelical undergraduates at public universities as a graduate teaching assistant at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK). Workshops designed to initiate new writing teachers featured discussion of particular groups of students—student-athletes, students from minority cultures, and LGBTQ students, among others. No one discussed evangelical students even though they may well constitute the single largest subculture at UTK. Over time, I have frequently heard colleagues expressing frustration when students invoke faith in their writing. When I began reading the rhetoric and composition literature about evangelicals, I was disturbed by how narrowly evangelicals were characterized. I knew many young evangelicals who bore little resemblance to the evangelicals depicted in the literature. Concerned that the literature did not capture the diversity of American evangelicalism and that a better understanding of this diversity might open up possibilities for educating evangelical undergraduates, I designed this study to capture a more representative range of
evangelical experiences, identities, and approaches to academic writing and to create adequate paradigms for instructors to understand how these students encounter the academic rhetorical situations.

Although my research is thus motivated in part by a wish to correct misrepresentations of a subculture with which I maintain an ambivalent identification, I also recognize that my experiences as an evangelical are not identical to those of my study participants. Unlike them, I am not a Southern evangelical, and I was never an evangelical undergraduate at a public university. By engaging in a bracketing interview, consulting experienced qualitative researchers who are not evangelicals about the data and findings, and relying on participants’ interviews to guide the analysis of the academic writing samples, I was better able to account for my own positionality and to prioritize evangelical undergraduates’ voices and perspectives.

Key Terms and Definitions

Academic Writing

In this study, academic writing refers to composing processes as well as products (texts) that undergraduates engage in or produce as students. Academic writing includes curricular genres such as lab reports, reading journals, field notes, research papers, speech outlines, take-home exams, and extracurricular genres intended for academic audiences including instructors and fellow students, such as application essays and competitive speeches.

Evangelical

Defining evangelical is a notoriously difficult task (Cope and Ringer; Hackett and Lindsay). In order to take as wide a view of the phenomenon as possible, this study relied on three well-established scholarly ways of defining evangelical: historical, attitudinal, and subcultural (Noll, “Future”). Historians provide a genealogical definition of evangelical, using
the term to describe a subset of Christianity, specifically the movements, denominations, and institutions that arose from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century revivals in the UK and US (Noll, “Future” 421). In this view, evangelical functions as an umbrella term for related labels including fundamentalist, charismatic, and various denominational identities, which refer to movements, denominations, and institutions whose values can be traced back to the transatlantic revivals. I also relied on historian David Bebbington’s “quadrilateral” definition, which outlines four attitudinal “hallmarks” of evangelicalism:

1. conversionism, the understanding of conversion as a personal experience that significantly transforms each Christian’s life;
2. biblicism, the premise that the Bible is the ultimate authority for Christian living;
3. activism, the impulse to spread and enact faith through relief or social work; and,
4. crucicentrism, a focus on the substitutionary death of Christ. (3)

Supplementing these historical and attitudinal approaches, sociologists define evangelicalism as a subculture, or group of related subcultures, that provides an alternative to the larger culture but also adapts to cultural shifts (Balmer; Gallagher; Christian Smith; Webber; Wilcox). In this vein, Christian Smith describes evangelical identity as a “distinct, publicly recognizable collective identity” and an identity “‘space’ between fundamentalism and liberalism” (15; 14).

At the outset of this study, I chose to layer all three of these definitions of evangelical and evangelicalism in order to avoid narrowly defining the phenomenon and to allow as much range as possible for participants to self-identify as evangelicals. Definitional flexibility is especially important when considering the religious identities of undergraduates: because college is a transitional time, many religious students make campus ministries, rather than churches, their primary faith communities. And compared to previous generations, Americans born after 1981
are more likely to practice a religion without identifying with religious institutions. The Pew Forum recently described the 5.8% of the population that is religious but unaffiliated as “the nones” (“U.S. Religious Landscape Survey” 5). Some younger evangelicals are part of this group, “the nones” (Cope and Ringer). This study contributes to scholarly definitions of evangelical by bringing self-identified evangelicals’ own descriptions of themselves and their experiences into conversation with existing definitions. In Chapter Two, I review multidisciplinary scholarship on American evangelicals, and, in Chapter Six, I explore how this study’s findings confirm and challenge received definitions.

**Limitations and Delimitations of the Study**

This study was delimited to participants who self-identified as evangelical Christians and were enrolled at the time of the study as undergraduate students at a public university in the southeastern United States. As with any qualitative study, the findings of this study are not conclusive or generalizable beyond similar contexts. This study relied on a purposive sample of ten participants that is not representative and does not capture the entire spectrum of evangelical culture. Significantly, the participant sample lacks racial diversity: because nine out of the ten participants were white, this study largely describes white evangelical experiences and practices.

**Organization of the Study**

This dissertation presents the study in six chapters. Chapter One briefly describes the context for the study; states the problem, purpose, and significance of the study; summarizes the theoretical frameworks guiding methodological choices; defines key terms; and outlines delimitations and limitations of the study.

Chapter Two reviews several bodies of literature relevant to this study. In order to contextualize composition scholarship about evangelical undergraduate writing, I locate the
origins of this conversation within the field’s debates about diversity and the role of ideology in rhetorical education. I then critically review the existing composition studies of evangelical undergraduates and their writing for college, paying attention to how the field’s lore and research methods have shaped this conversation and recommendations for writing pedagogy. In order to provide additional context for this study of evangelical writers, I also review relevant studies of evangelical identity and discourse from across the academy, focusing on empirical studies of younger evangelicals and evangelical undergraduates. I then synthesize what is known about undergraduate writing development more generally. I conclude by discussing gaps in our knowledge about how evangelical identity influences academic writing, the characteristics of evangelicals’ academic writing, how evangelicals experience academic writing, and how evangelical undergraduates develop writing expertise.

Chapter Three describes the qualitative methods I used to answer the study’s research questions. I discuss the theoretical frameworks and methodological paradigms that guided this study and explain how they shaped the methods used in this study. Then, I describe the research site and outline this study’s specific methods for sampling, recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. Finally, I discuss the steps taken to ensure the quality of this study and the trustworthiness of the findings.

Chapter Four presents the findings that arose from the interview study about the variety of ways evangelicals approached academic writing situations and a model of how evangelical identity influences rhetorical purposes for academic writing. The major finding is that while there is no single phenomenon of evangelical identity and, therefore, no single evangelical experience of academic writing, evangelical identity did exert pressure on academic writing because it significantly shaped evangelicals’ rhetorical awareness and interpretation of the
salience of their writing. All but one of the participants experienced their evangelical faith as relevant to the writing they did for college. However, because participants experienced what it meant to be an evangelical in a variety of ways, their faith motivated and shaped their writing in a variety of ways. I present a model of how evangelical identity influences rhetorical purposes and use it to explain three primary patterns of faith-motivated writing that emerged in the interview data. I also present data that suggests evangelicals’ rhetorical purposes and choices for academic writing are dynamic and sometimes evolved over the course of their college experience.

Chapter Five presents three major findings from the document analysis study about the characteristics of the academic writing of evangelical undergraduates. Analysis of a representative sample of participants’ writing samples revealed that the academic writing of these evangelicals was usually a fitting response to an academic writing situation. The document analysis study also found that some evangelicals significantly developed as writers over time as they gained discourse community expertise. Finally, I present evidence of gaps between participants’ perceptions of their academic writing and what their academic texts were actually doing.

Chapter Six puts the study’s findings in conversation with the existing literature on evangelicals’ academic writing, evangelicals in the academy, and developmental research. I also discuss how the study’s design affected the findings. Finally, I discuss implications for undergraduate rhetorical education and make recommendations for future research.
Chapter II: Literature Review

In this chapter, I review several bodies of literature relevant to this study of the academic writing of evangelical undergraduates. In order to contextualize composition scholarship about evangelical undergraduate writing, I locate the origins of this conversation within the field’s debates about diversity and the role of ideology in rhetorical education. I next critically review the existing composition studies of evangelical undergraduates and their writing for college, paying special attention to how the field’s lore and research methods have shaped this conversation and recommendations for writing pedagogy. In order to provide additional context for this study of evangelical writers, I then review relevant studies of evangelical identity and discourse from across the academy, focusing on empirical studies of younger evangelicals and evangelical undergraduates. I also briefly synthesize what is known about undergraduate writing development more generally. I conclude by discussing gaps in our knowledge about how evangelical identity influences academic writing, the characteristics of evangelicals’ academic writing, how evangelicals experience academic writing, and how evangelical undergraduates develop writing expertise.

Composition, Social-Epistemic Rhetoric, and Liberatory Pedagogy

The scholarly conversation about faith-motivated undergraduate writing, whose developments I trace in the next section, originated in the late 1980s as writing instructors and scholars considered the implications of social-epistemic rhetoric and liberatory pedagogy for the teaching of writing. In 1988, *College English* published James Berlin’s “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class,” a seminal argument for making social-epistemic rhetoric the basis of the teaching of writing. Berlin’s article draws together a range of variously articulated rhetorical theories under the banner of “social-epistemic rhetoric,” a view of rhetoric that understands
knowledge as constructed by the “dialectical interaction of the observer, the discourse community (social group) in which the observer is functioning, and the material conditions of existence” (488). Berlin advocates for making social-epistemic central to the teaching of writing because, he argues, it supports the goals of liberatory education. “Every pedagogy,” insists Berlin, “is imbricated in ideology, in a set of tacit assumptions about what is real, what is good, what is possible, and how power ought to be distributed” (492). Berlin critiques two competing paradigms underlying the teaching of writing, cognitive psychology and expressivism, for either denying their ideological bents or being easily co-opted by those who already hold power.

Social-epistemic rhetoric:

inevitably supports economic, social, political, and cultural democracy. Because there are no “natural laws” or “universal truths” that indicate what exists, what is good, what is possible, and how power is to be distributed, no class or group or individual has privileged access to decisions on these matters. (Berlin 489-90)

While the writing pedagogies that Berlin recommended provoked intense controversy within the field of rhetoric and composition, the tenets of social-epistemic rhetoric still significantly shape writing scholarship and the teaching of writing.

Research that seeks to understand marginalized students’ literacies, identities, rhetorics, languages, and dialects taps into the democratic and inclusive impulses of social-epistemic rhetoric and liberatory education. These values have prompted compositionists to join with sociolinguists and literacy scholars working to understand the discourses, languages and dialects, rhetorics, and traditions students bring with them to the academy. Most of this scholarship has focused on differences of race, class, and gender. One exemplar of this type of research is Shirley Brice Heath’s *Ways with Words*, an ethnographic study of three different communities’
“home” literacies. Studies like Heath’s not only highlight the biases of American educational institutions, but also demonstrate that “minority” literacy practices are in no way “deficient”—that is, each literacy culture is coherent, rich, and adapted to a particular culture. Black English Vernacular and African American rhetorics have been productive sites of this kind of research (Balester; Ball and Lardner; Canagarajah; Gilyard, *Race, Rhetoric, and Composition*). For example, historical discourse analyses and empirical studies have described complex rhetorical styles such as “fancy talk” and “signifying,” shifting the field’s attention from dialectic diversity to contrastive rhetorics (Balester). Compositionists have also explored the vernacular rhetorics of other groups marginalized within the academy including Appalachian, rural, and inner-city students; women and LGBTQ students; working class students; and L2 students.

Such studies have exposed inequalities in educational institutions, revealed biases underlying assumptions about what constitutes academic discourse, and described how less-privileged students develop as writers in a variety of contexts. Scholars who conduct research on religious rhetors have argued that it has a place alongside studies of other types of diversity. Beth Daniell contextualizes this impulse:

> Modern composition studies began in attempts at inclusion, in the movement to higher education of so-called underprepared students…. Recently, we have gone beyond class, race, and gender to include sexual orientation, and have begun to consider, as well, students for whom religion is a, if not the, primary identification. (“Whetstones” 79)

Patricia Bizzell has also pointed out parallels between the students’ right to their own dialects and religious discourses (“Believing Game”). My review of the literature about Christian student
writing confirms that many compositionists were in fact influenced by liberatory pedagogy and a desire to be inclusive (Carter; Goodburn; Neulieb; Rand).

In the same year that Berlin’s “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class” appeared, Ann Berthoff inadvertently exposed the taboo surrounding discussions of religion in the field of rhetoric and composition. At the 1998 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), Berthoff asked members of a panel on liberatory pedagogy, “who had stressed the political aspects of the pedagogy of the oppressed,” why they “had neglected to take into account Freire’s religious convictions, commitments which had made him one of the chief influences on Liberation Theology” (Berthoff, et al. 237). Daniell, who was also in attendance at that CCCC panel, recounts that Berthoff’s question met with embarrassed silence because, “for all our erudition, we did not possess a language that would permit us to discuss in an academic setting the spiritual aspects of Freire’s work” (Berthoff, et al. 239).

Convinced that liberatory literacy and writing education had “spiritual” as well as “political aspects,” Daniell organized the “Spiritual Sites of Composing” panel at the 1992 CCCC (Berthoff, et al.) The May 1994 College Composition and Communication presented essays that grew out of that panel (Berthoff, et al.) Daniell contributed a portion of her ethnographic research that revealed how literacy and spirituality were powerfully linked for women in Al-Anon; she argued that scholars should investigate “all the multifaceted ways actual human beings use literacy to compose power in their daily lives” (Berthoff, et al. 246). JoAnn Campbell’s essay advocated including meditation in the composition classroom and Jan Swearingen’s described her experiences leading summer workshops that sought to integrate spirituality and creativity for women authors and artists. In his response, James Moffett applauded the panelists for raising the topic of spirituality and writing instruction. While neither
the CCCC panel nor the CCC publication addressed evangelical students in composition classrooms, many scholars point to this panel and publication as the turning point in gaining permission to write about the topic at all.

**Faith-Motivated Students and Academic Writing: A Review of the Composition Literature**

Little empirical research has been conducted about the academic writing of evangelical undergraduates or their experiences with academic writing. Much of the relevant composition literature reports on instructors’ reactions to religiously-motivated academic writing and/or interactions with their religious students. Additionally, many compositionists who write about undergraduates who could be identified as evangelical use other labels ranging from the broad term *religious* to the narrow term *fundamentalist*. Thus, rather than reviewing empirical studies of the academic writing and experiences of evangelical undergraduates, in this section I review composition studies that have shaped the field’s understanding of the academic writing of undergraduates who might loosely be called *theologically conservative Christians*. Throughout I draw attention not only to each study’s characterization of Christian undergraduates and their academic writing, but also each study’s methods and implications for pedagogy.

The earliest composition studies of faith-motivated writing arose out of a current of instructor complaints. Chris Anderson’s 1989 “The Description of Embarrassment: When Students Write About Religion,” which remains one of the most-cited studies of faith-motivated undergraduate writing (cited in 23 publications), reported and reflected on Anderson’s interactions with a teaching assistant who was offended by a Christian student’s paper. Anderson characterized Cathy’s paper as reproducing “the language of the fundamentalist, of the testimonial, of *Guideposts* magazine and Sunday morning television” (19). He critiqued the student’s writing as dogmatic and expressivist:
It’s not just the simplicity and superficiality of the writing that bothers me. I’m bothered more by Cathy’s assumption of authority, however mild, which is what I think bothers all of us—not foolishness, but foolishness that is unaware of itself, superficiality that is either/or, dogmatic, unexamined. (20)

Anderson argued that “the religious rhetoric of Cathy and other born-again writers” is expressivist because “it assumes the existence of an authentic self and an authentic experience” and “oversimplifies, falsifies, the complexity of meaning” (21; 22). Anderson admitted to “fictionalizing” this anecdote, so it is unclear whether the excerpt of Cathy’s paper was actual student writing or his construction of such a text. Nevertheless, Anderson’s characterization of Cathy’s writing and her lack of awareness have become foundational to the field’s understanding of faith-motivated undergraduate writing.

Anderson’s purpose was not to describe the academic writing of religious undergraduates, though it did so powerfully, but to argue that the field of rhetoric and composition must “be open to the possibility of religious discourse” (21). Drawing from social-epistemic theories of rhetoric, Anderson critiqued its proponents, James Berlin and John Trimbur, who “are absolutist in their antiabsolutism, blind, like [his] teaching assistant, to their own bias” (21). Anderson insists that writing teachers should be sympathetic to religious students and recommends making religious discourse the focus of a course unit and providing models of “tough-minded, truly critical, intellectual” and “self-aware” writing that engages with faith (24). The goal of the composition instructor, Anderson argues, “is to make students like Cathy aware […] show them how meaning is always in flux, always changing, not fixed and immutable, not once and for all, as Cathy naively assumes. We need to teach Cathy that language creates us” (20).
Janice Neulieb’s 1992 article “Spilt Religion: Student Motivation and Values-Based Writing” responded directly to Anderson and further connected teacher complaints about religious writing to the ongoing debate over ideology and rhetorical education. Like Anderson, Neulieb recounted colleagues’ complaints about faith-motivated writing; as an Advanced Placement English Language exam table leader, Neulieb worked to persuade other readers not to automatically give low scores to exams that used “religious language” (42). Neulieb provided an example of language that was likely to offend exam graders and receive a low score:

“I believe that the gaining of wisdom is best interpreted as the understanding of God’s word, which is found in the Bible. Through this gaining of wisdom a person would be reminded of the punishment of our sins and that the punishment is damnation in hell forever.” This writer concluded with “only through the suffering and death of Jesus Christ on the cross and his resurrection from the dead are our imperfections atoned for and our place reserved in heaven.” (42)

Neulieb did not indicate that she obtained IRB approval or consent to use student writing as data, so it is unclear whether this example is actual student writing.

To the AP exam readers and to composition instructors more generally, Neulieb advocates interpreting faith-motivated writing in a way that was “meaningful for both of us” [the writer and the teacher/reader] (48). She insists that writing teachers “must find approaches that enable us to negotiate the differing terms in which we phrase our values” and modeled a sympathetic response, imagining that the AP exam writer was “resisting the new system of academia in her own way. Perhaps she is ‘studying up’ by trying to talk about her values to the professors above her and finding the faculty confusing and perplexing. Perhaps she is challenging my power” (43; 47). Neulieb drew from her own childhood experiences as a
Jehovah’s Witness and psychology research on “peak experiences” and “flow” to argue that when students write from deeply held values, including religious values, they are more likely to “lose their inhibitions and write enthusiastically” (45).

Ronda Leathers Dively’s empirical study of effective pedagogies and responses to students’ religious writing also arose in response to instructor complaints and dismissals of “any written expression of religious faith” as dualistic (“Religious” 91). Her 1993 article, “Religious Discourse in the Academy: Creating a Space by Means of Poststructuralist Theories of Subjectivity,” works from the assumption that faith-motivated student texts are “dualistic” and “typically problematic in that they do not demonstrate the complexity, proof, detachment and irony expected of academic writing” (93; 93-93). Dively suggests that poststructuralist theories of subjectivity could support a pedagogy that would help “inexperienced writers break the confines of dualistic thought and expression” (“Religious” 94). Like Anderson, Dively recommends designing a course unit that focuses on religious discourses and uses poststructuralist and feminist theories to guide students through reading and writing about faith. She cautions “that the intent to destroy a student’s belief system may be unethical,” but argues that “leaving any belief system unexamined or uninterrogated is potentially harmful in that such apathy perpetuates a narrow outlook on society and on the nature of human existence” (“Religious” 100).

Dively’s 1997 “Censoring Religious Rhetoric in the Composition Classroom: What We and Our Students May Be Missing” presents partial findings of her dissertation research, which evaluated the effectiveness of the poststructuralist pedagogy she sketched out in 1993. Her teacher-research study was conducted over a period of two years in three sections of an honors first-year composition course (58). The data she collected from 50 participants included multiple
drafts of a major course paper, surveys, process journals, and reflective essays. Dively described her study as an attempt to evaluate the “effectiveness of [her] pedagogy for helping students productively revise their own unsophisticated or dualistic rhetoric” (59). To her surprise, Dively found that many students did not need such “help”: at the beginning of the semester, fully half of the study participants wrote “non-dualistic,” “non-reductive,” and “non-dogmatic” drafts (59; 63). A majority of participants who wrote about their personal religious experiences in the assignment “demonstrated a penchant for questioning doctrine and/or the seemingly simplistic answers that had been handed to them by parents, ministers, and religious institutions” (63).

Dively argues that the participants’ “texts reveal inquisitive, questioning personae that are easily distinguished from the judgmental, reductive, dogmatic personae of the texts” that compositionists had come to expect (63).

Dively’s research also investigated students’ experiences of writing about religion. Based on her analysis of the survey data, she found that most participants “enjoyed the opportunity for religious exploration” and that “the greatest appeal of the assignment was that it provided students a venue for clarifying their own beliefs” (64). Dively advises writing instructors against prohibiting religious discourse in academic writing tasks. Dively does not provide information about her participants’ specific religious affiliations, but the examples she provides are of undergraduates who came from Christian backgrounds or were practicing Christians at the time of the study. Without specific data about participants’ religious affiliations, it is impossible to determine to what extent Dively’s findings characterize evangelical student writing and experiences. Nevertheless, Dively’s study suggests that the field’s characterization of faith-motivated academic writing as “problematic” is incomplete.
Amy Goodburn’s 1998 article “It’s a Question of Faith: Discourses of Fundamentalism and Critical Pedagogy in the Writing Classroom” rekindled the disciplinary conversation about faith-motivated writing by arguing that despite the ascent of critical pedagogies and interest in student identities in terms of “race, class and gender,” scholars had overlooked religion, “a construct which intersects and envelops these categories in many students’ lives” (333). Goodburn addressed this gap through a case study taken from her larger empirical study of how students experienced writing courses that enacted critical pedagogy. Her dissertation research combined teacher-research with participant observation, qualitative interviews, and analysis of student writing. Goodburn profiled Luke, an undergraduate who was openly resistant to the course goals and frequently wrote about his faith-motivated beliefs and values in course assignments. Goodburn analyzed Luke’s classroom behavior and writing in light of her research on fundamentalism; she characterized Luke as a “Conservative Christian” who could be considered fundamentalist because he “defined [himself] as holding ‘true’ Christian beliefs that were more authentic than those of other students” (336). Based on her analysis of the data, Goodburn concluded that “[a]lmost all of Luke’s oral and written responses reflected a fundamentalist discourse that motivated his resistance to class assignments and the overall goals of the course” (337). Specifically, Goodburn argues that Luke’s writing demonstrated the influence of fundamentalist discourse in its insistence on biblical authority and literalism, defense of hierarchical gender norms, binary thinking, and fear of cultural assimilation.

From Goodburn’s perspective, the conflict that she experienced with Luke throughout the semester was deeply rooted in divergent ontologies and epistemologies:

I realized once again that Luke and I were not simply disagreeing over the type of topic he and his group members might use; we were clashing over assumptions of
authority and value. For Luke, values and knowledge are stable, unitary, universal, and revealed by God. For me, values and knowledge are always changing, multiple, partial, and contingent upon various communities in specific contexts. […]

While I wanted students to explore a topic by highlighting multiple perspectives and examining different ways the issue has been contextualized for different purposes, Luke found it difficult, if not impossible, to embrace such goals. For Luke, there are clear cut positions that one can take on every issue and thus a research paper is an exercise in persuasion [….] To present multiple perspectives is to acknowledge and legitimize their validity, a move that he was unwilling to make based on his beliefs about the nature and authority of knowledge. (344)

Ultimately, Goodburn reflects that her interactions with Luke “encourage[d] me to examine the ways that my reliance on critical pedagogical discourses obscured…the limits of my own tolerance for difference” (347). Like Neulieb, Goodburn concludes that there are “more connections than differences between the discourses of fundamentalism and critical pedagogy” and suggests that these connections can guide instructors engaging with religious undergraduates (348). Rather than asking fundamentalist students to restate or argue with positions they are resistant to, she recommends inviting students like Luke to write about what is at stake in a specific conflict or mapping out identity conflicts they negotiate on a daily basis (350).

Like Dively, Goodburn brought empirical data to the table and sought to understand the phenomenon of faith-motivated undergraduate writing from the writer’s perspective. Goodburn’s article also enriched the field’s conversation about faith-motivated student writing by
highlighting the diversity of American religious communities and discourses. For her 1999 article, “A Radical Conversion of the Mind: Fundamentalism, Hermeneutics, and the Metanoic Classroom,” Priscilla Perkins followed Goodburn’s lead in attempting to understand the complexity and diversity of her students’ religious commitments. Throughout the article Perkins uses the terms evangelical, fundamentalist, and conservative Christian interchangeably, but she nevertheless demonstrates awareness of the differences between various Protestant subcultures and draws from “the writings of conservative theologians who self-consciously stop short of fundamentalism” to imagine a “hermeneutically oriented” pedagogy aimed at helping teachers “convert impasses [with evangelical students] into teachable moments” (595-596). Then Perkins provides examples from her evangelical student Clifford’s writing and her responses to his writing to demonstrate the effectiveness of her pedagogy. According to Perkins, Clifford’s writing illustrates that “students can create their own strategies for ‘benevolent interpretation’ when they are prompted by textual challenges to their own theological certainty, on the one hand, and supported by culturally sensitive teachers, on the other” (601). Importantly, Perkins argues that Clifford developed significantly as a reader and writer over the course of a semester, while remaining “as faithful a Christian at the end of class as he had been at its beginning” (605). Based on her experiences implementing this metanoic pedagogy, Perkins recommends a hermeneutic-oriented rather than argument- or persuasion-oriented writing pedagogy for working with evangelical undergraduates.

Lizabeth Rand’s 2001 “Enacting Faith: Evangelical Discourse and the Discipline of Composition Studies” marks a critical moment in the field’s conversation about faith-motivated writing. “Enacting Faith” appeared in College Composition and Communication, the field’s leading journal, and brought the conversation into the center of the field’s consciousness. While
Rand did not provide any new information about evangelical students or their academic writing, she critiqued the ways compositionists discussed Christian students’ writing and argued that the field’s “discourse at times trivializes and misrepresents faith-related expression” (350). Rand called for compositionists to move beyond a tradition of complaint about evangelical student writing to a fuller understanding of evangelical identity and discourse:

I contend that religious belief often matters to our students and that spiritual identity may be the primary kind of selfhood more than a few of them draw upon in making meaning of their lives and the world around them. […] I believe that it would be useful for us as writing instructors to explore more fully the ways that religious identity shapes the kind of texts that we sometimes receive from students in the composition classroom. In order to respond more effectively to those who write about religion, we would benefit from extended conversation of the ways that faith is “enacted” in discourse and sustained through particular kinds of textual and interpretive practice. (350)

In response to Rand’s invitation for more inquiry, in the past 15 years, many more compositionists have joined the conversation about faith-motivated writing and many have taken seriously her call to explore more carefully “the ways that religious identity shapes” undergraduate writing.

Of course, not all compositionists have heeded Rand’s call. Jan Worth’s 2003 “Student Pieties and Pedagogical Hot Spots: Mediating Faith-Based Topics in First-Year Composition” offers a laundry list of suggestions, based on her teaching and personal experiences with fundamentalism, for writing instructors who encounter students wanting to write about their faith. She describes her own practice: “I don’t want a sermon: I want a critique built out of
curiosity and an open mind. It chafes some students, who want to declare their faith and beseech me and their classmates to get right with God. I say the university, and specifically my class, is not the place for this kind of rhetoric” (25). And, in 2008, Keith Gilyard famously responded to Rand’s call for more better understanding and responses to faith-motivated writing: “While Rand’s criticism is powerful, I doubt that high-volume creativity is going to flow from fundamentalist or evangelical students. Their religiosity tends not to be of the prophetic, socially ameliorative type, but the conservative, George W. Bush type” (Composition and Cornell West 58). Worth’s and Gilyard’s assumptions about evangelical students—their motives, their beliefs, and their writing—were offered (and published) with no evidence to support their characterizations.

Despite the persistence of reductive generalizations about evangelicals and their writing, recent composition scholarship has increasingly sought to understand the ways that religious identity is enacted in academic writing. Rachel Reneslacis’s 2005 dissertation complicates the field’s assumptions about the primacy of evangelical identity; her qualitative research revealed that some evangelical undergraduate women’s experiences of marginalization within evangelical communities actually aligned them with feminist discourse.

Elizabeth Vander Lei and bonnie lenore kyburz’s 2005 book Negotiating Religious Faith in the Composition Classroom collects several studies of the ways religious identities are performed in academic writing. While the scope of the book is wider than evangelicalism, four chapters focus on conservative Protestants. Like many earlier studies, Juanita Smart’s “‘Frankenstein or Jesus Christ?’ When the Voice of Faith Creates a Monster for the Composition Teacher” draws primarily from teacher lore and anecdotes. Smart, a gay ex-evangelical, describes her encounters with a conservative Christian student and how she felt “cornered by the
nonnegotiable terms” of her student’s rhetoric (15). Smart recommends that writing teachers show such writers how their rhetoric “erected a barrier where he had intended to build a bridge” (19). Although Smart’s chapter primarily focuses on the instructor’s experience with faith-motivated writing, her discussion of the way that religious identity intersects with gender and sexual orientation reminds us that religious identity is complex and never the only source of students’ identities. Brad Peters’ chapter, “African American Students of Faith in the Writing Center: Facilitating a Rhetoric of Conscience,” also highlights the layered identities students bring to their writing. Recounting his work with a writing center tutor who had an unsuccessful consultation with a student whose paper quoted the Bible, Peters demonstrates the influence of African American sermonic discourse on undergraduate writing and argues that tutors and teachers misunderstand such writing if they do not see the ways in which AAVE and religious discourses interact.

Douglas Down’s chapter “True Believers, Real Scholars, and Real True Believing Scholars” echoes Perkins in his insistence that the difference between the expectations of academic writing and the writing that conservative religious students produce is not merely rhetorical, but epistemological. Drawing from his work with Keith, a Mormon (LDS) student in his writing course, and James Gee’s concept of Discourse, Downs distinguished between the “Discourse of inquiry,” which favors questioning, pursuit of new knowledge and understanding, desire to analyze and synthesize, curiosity, and ‘negative capability,’” and the “Discourse of affirmation,” which “affirms given knowledge and overtly resists critical inquiry into it” (42). He insists that papers evincing the Discourse of affirmation should not be mistaken as failed attempts at the Discourse of inquiry, or the phenomenon Bartholomae calls “inventing the
university” (43). Rather, Downs argues that a religious “student’s Affirmation ways of knowing will conflict with the critical thinking asked of them in writing courses” (45).

Mark Montesano and Duane Roen’s chapter, “Religious Faith, Learning, and Writing: Challenges in the Classroom,” is more hopeful about the prospects for supporting the rhetorical development of religious undergraduates. Montesano describes his work with four evangelical undergraduates, three of whom showed development in “critical thinking about their own and other students’ religious beliefs” over the course of the semester (84). Then Montesano and Roen dialogue about pedagogies for effectively working with undergraduates who want to write about their faith or argue from faith-motivated positions. Taken as a whole, *Negotiating Religious Faith in the Composition Classroom* enriched the field’s understanding of faith-motivated writing simply by bringing more voices into the conversation. The four chapters focusing on conservative Christian writing introduced a more diverse group of undergraduates and their faith-motivated writing than was previously available. However, while these teacher-scholars describe their students and quote from their writing, none indicate whether their studies had IRB approval or used systematic qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. Rather, these essays constitute a sort of reflective practice, synthesizing composition theory and research with teaching experience.

Shannon Carter’s 2007 “Living Inside the Bible (Belt)” marks the first systematic study of evangelical literacy practices since Dively’s. Drawing from case studies of four evangelicals—two undergraduates and two graduate students—Carter argues that evangelicalism can be understood as a community of practice and that evangelicals can practice “rhetorical dexterity” to “use literacies they already possess (like deep knowledge of the Bible and its applications in day-to-day life) to negotiate those the academy expects them to exhibit” (574).
Carter describes evangelical and academic literacies as “irreconcilable” and works to explain why evangelicals experience schooling as “threatening” (575). Like Downs, Carter located an essential conflict in evangelical and academic epistemologies, but suggests that a pedagogy of rhetorical dexterity can help students “communicate across very different communities of practice” and “make sense of [their] own Christian literacies in terms legible and accessible to those much less literate in Christianity as it manifests itself in evangelical churches” (591).

Heather Thomson’s 2009 dissertation also reports on empirical research, a mixed-methods survey and interview study of 40 composition instructors and 45 Christian undergraduates at a large, public university in the Midwest. Thomson found that instructors and students frequently had divergent perceptions of academic writing and of the purpose of a writing course; that instructors’ perceptions of Christians sometimes influenced their responses to and expectations of Christian students; and that Christian students often interpreted instructor feedback in ways that constrained their writing and classroom interactions (205-206). Thomson concluded that “instructors and Christian students sometimes face great difficulty as they try to communicate with each other” (viii). She argues that writing teachers and scholars need to resist not only stereotyping students and their religious cultures, but also interpreting religious identities and discourses as “deficits” (215-216). Ultimately, Thomson encourages instructors to cultivate and sustain conversations with their Christian students and work toward “co-constructed articulations of what academic writing is for” (220). Thomson’s research is significant for including the voices of Christian students and highlighting their perceptions of and experiences in composition courses.

Phillip Marzluf’s 2011 article “Religion in U.S. Writing Classes: Challenging the Conflict Narrative” revealed that the conflict between religious students and non-religious
instructors is overstated. Marzluf’s mixed-methods study collected information about college instructors’ religious identification and responses to fictional student writing in order to combat the “powerful belief” that “U.S. higher education is dominated by liberal, anti-religious intellectuals whose bias against religious and conservative students unfairly marginalizes them” (267). Marzluf concluded that college instructors’ “secularism” is overstated and that the instructors he studied did not “base negative judgments about the students or the faith-based texts solely on a simplistic consideration of religious” (286).

Despite these significant findings about the conflict phenomenon, Marzluf’s study inadvertently reified the conflict narrative he sought to question. One reason the conflict narrative persists is because of a focus on “problem” texts—student writing that is somehow offensive to the teacher and/or epistemologically problematic within academic discourse conventions. Marzluf’s study contributed to the conflict narrative by its very design; he asked participants (composition instructors) to “grade and comment upon two faith-based texts” (271). He explains that these “texts were constructed by the principal investigator and modeled on previous student texts as well as features of fundamentalist discourse” identified by previous studies (271). The first text was a personal narrative that “described the adoption of the writer’s younger brother in order to demonstrate the values of the writer’s Christian identity” (Marzluf 271). The second text was titled “Gay Adoption” and argued against adoption rights for homosexual parents using “Internet sources from Focus on the Family and the Christian Answers Network, two highly biased U.S. evangelical Christian sources” (Marzluf 272). The papers that Marzluf constructed intentionally made faith-based arguments and used identifiably evangelical discourses, thereby perpetuating the impression that evangelical undergraduates typically write explicitly faith-motivated texts.
Michael-John DePalma’s 2011 CCC article “Re-envisioning Religious Discourses as Rhetorical Resources in Composition Teaching: A Pragmatic Response to the Challenge of Belief” used qualitative case-study methods to understand the phenomenon of faith-motivated academic writing from a student’s perspective. DePalma analyzed excerpts from a personal narrative essay written by Thomas, an evangelical in his honors first-year writing course, to demonstrate the ways in which the essay succeeds rhetorically despite features that might lead teachers to reject it (for example, biblical citation and descriptions of supernatural experiences). DePalma calls on compositionists to construct a more complex backdrop for their reading of evangelical student writing:

To this point, much of what has been written in this area of inquiry has relied on preconceived ideas about how “fundamentalist Christians” view the Bible, truth and so on. This literature has not, however, seriously investigated individual students’ perceptions on these matters. Narratives of this kind tend to start with a description of how religious students think about language and texts, based on definitions generated in religious studies or elsewhere, and move on to an illustration of student texts that fit those definitions. Such research, in my view, is limited, because it works from generalizations that do not account for the complex notions about texts and language that many religious students have. (239)

In addition to reading student writing with more openness to their motives, DePalma recommends further research that consults students directly about their writing and rhetorical choices.

While DePalma argues that evangelical student writing is frequently more successful than assumed, he also offers suggestions for pedagogy, including openly inviting students to write
about their religious experiences. But he cautions against asking religious students to “provide a rationale for their beliefs” and instead suggests inviting them to “mine their ‘God-terms’ and reflect on defining events in their lives in order to communicate them to an audience in writing” (DePalma 238). Like Anderson and others, DePalma recommends that writing teachers provide “examples of rhetoric in which writers have effectively drawn upon their religious traditions to meet the demands of their particular situations,” modeling the kind of audience and situation awareness they are asking students to develop (237).

Jeffrey Ringer’s 2013 “The Dogma of Inquiry: Composition and the Primacy of Faith” also challenges the field’s assumptions about the nature of faith and its influences on academic writing. Ringer demonstrates that compositionists have frequently assumed that faith is inimical to inquiry and often relied on the language of dogma to explain evangelical students’ resistance to feedback on their writing. Ringer works to theorize humble dogma, drawing from Augustine and contemporary theologian Leslie Newbigin, and argues that this “terministic screen [helps] us recognize how commitments to belief make inquiry possible” (351). Ringer also provided an example of how humble dogma can support academic inquiry through a case study of one evangelical undergraduate’s writing.

Ringer’s most recent studies of the academic writing of evangicals arise from his qualitative interview and document analysis dissertation research with six participants. Ringer’s 2013 “The Consequences of Integrating Faith into Academic Writing: Casuistic Stretching and Biblical Citation” centers on Austin, a first-year writing student, and describes how academic writing affected his religious identity. Ringer uncovered the phenomenon of casuistic stretching and shows how Austin’s “attempt to persuade his non-Christian audience” caused him to discursively shift from a dualistic view of his subject to “a more relativistic position” (272).
According to Ringer, Austin “‘appropriates’ his audience’s values in ways that complicate his evangelical belief” (291). Based on this finding, Ringer calls for more research to understand the consequences of teaching evangelicals how to “engage productively within academic discourse” (292).

Priscilla Perkins’s 2014 “‘Attentive, Intelligent, Reasonable, and Responsible’: Teaching Composition with Bernard Lonergan” picks up this project. Perkins describes her experiences working with Tina, an evangelical student, in an honors course that sought to enact a self-reflective writing pedagogy based on Lonergan’s “method of self-appropriation” (74). Perkins contrasts the writing of two evangelicals in her class, Tina and Sara. Perkins describes Tina’s early writing in the course as indistinguishable from that of other students; however, when asked to write a narrative about her beliefs, Tina became resistant and focused on proselytizing. Sara, on the other hand, took the same assignment as an opportunity to probe her beliefs and explore the consequences of her beliefs for others. Perkins concludes that for some evangelicals, the imperative to “witness,” or at least be seen as being a faithful representative of Christ, interferes with their ability to engage in inquiry or to develop rhetorically (88).

**Evangelical Identity, Engagement, and Rhetoric**

**Rhetorical Studies of Evangelical Discourse**

During the same period that compositionists have taken up the academic writing of religious students, rhetoricians began attending to evangelical public discourses, and their research has significantly shaped the field’s assumptions about evangelical students’ identities and discourses. James Moffett’s 1988 *Storm in the Mountains* looms large in the field’s understanding of evangelicals; it describes the violent 1982 “textbook rebellion” in Kanawha County, WV (187). According to Moffett, whose textbook was central in the controversy,
“conservatism” “is a direction in which […] people move when they became anxious” (197). A number of studies are less focused on the violent or dangerous consequences of fundamentalist discourse and more interested in how evangelical discourse works. Kathleen Boone’s 1989 *The Bible Tells Them So* uses literary theory to analyze the role of the Bible in “constituting the authority of fundamentalism,” although her study actually examines evangelicalism more broadly (1). Boone found that “[t]hrough its appropriation and management of the Bible, fundamentalism thrives. Its compelling power is a function of its success in portraying itself as the clear and plain exposition of the words of God himself” (107). Susan Friend Harding’s 2000 *The Book of Jerry Falwell* investigates the power, flexibility, and appeal of the evangelical vernacular, while Kevin McClure’s 2009 study of Young Earth Creationism uses “narrative identification” theory to explain why people believe irrational stories. Brian Jackson’s 2009 study of Jim Wallis, a politically liberal evangelical leader, describes the blending of prophetic and political discourse, which Jackson calls “prophetic alchemy” (53). Boone’s and McClure’s studies reveal why evangelical rhetorics are often so appealing, while Harding’s and Jackson’s studies of evangelical public discourses demonstrate the ways that evangelical discourse shapes political discourse, even in an ostensibly secular political system.

The most influential rhetoric study of evangelical discourse is Sharon Crowley’s 2006 *Toward a Civil Discourse*, which argues that fundamentalist discourse, energized by “apocalyptism,” poses a threat to the “preservation of democracy” (132). Her methods, which focus on the popular *Left Behind* fiction series and elite pre-millennial discourses, cause Crowley to overestimate the importance of apocalyptism for ordinary evangelicals and the conflict between evangelical culture and liberal political culture. Crowley bleakly concludes that for many evangelicals, “encounters with disbelief can result in social and political antagonism
toward unbelievers, which is ordinarily handled by argument, although other means, such as withdrawal, coercion, or violence, are certainly available” (74).

Rhetoric scholars have responded to Crowley, celebrating her compelling vision of rhetoric (indeed, her chapters “Speaking of Rhetoric” and “Belief and Passionate Commitment” constitute an unparalleled defense of rhetoric and critique of liberal public sphere theory) and pointing out her methodological weaknesses (Daniell, “Whetstones”; DePalma, Ringer, and Webber; Timmerman 86; Lundberg 107). Some of these responses mark interesting avenues for future analysis of evangelical rhetoric; for example Christian Lundberg argues that the field should consider “fundamentalism as a habitus, orienting believers to the non-fundamentalist world” and characterizes “the encounter between rhetoric and religious fundamentalists is itself an antagonism—a battle of dueling fundamentalists” (106-7). Crowley has renewed attention to evangelical discourses, inviting a new generation of rhetoricians to consider the power of religious rhetorics.

**Anthropology and Sociology Research on American Evangelicalism**

In a 2010 review of recent publications on evangelicalism for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Timothy Beal observes, “American evangelicalism is finally coming into its own as a subject of social research and academic attention…. It seems we now realize there is more to know than what we learned from the Simpsons’ neighbor Ned Flanders.” Much of the recent scholarship that has shown the complexity of American evangelicalism has been the work of anthropologists and sociologists of religion. In this section, I review just a small selection of the recent anthropology and sociology research on American evangelicals, focusing on studies that shed light on evangelical identity and engagement in public life.
Randall Balmer’s *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, first released in 1989 and updated in 2014, is a collection of local ethnographies of American evangelicalism. Balmer highlighted evangelicalism’s diversity by visiting fundamentalist sites of evangelicalism including Dallas Theological Seminary and Word of Life Fellowship; a range of evangelical churches including a charismatic Episcopal church, a Native American Episcopal church, a Pentecostal “Cathedral,” and the casual California Calvary Chapel; a variety of evangelical parachurch organizations including Jimmy Swaggert’s, a black mission organization, political and media organizations, and Thomas Kinkaid’s painting empire; and evangelical events including revivals, crusades, and concerts. Balmer opines that evangelicalism is uniquely American, shaped by the available media, marketplace competition, and celebrity-appeal (338-9). Balmer found that “the evangelical subculture is broad and deep in the United States, and is sustained by numberless institutions…that often escape the notice of the casual observer” (341). For Balmer, the most appropriate metaphor for American evangelicalism is a “patchwork quilt,” whose “beauty… lies precisely in its variegated texture and even, sometimes, in the absence of an overall pattern” (337-9).

Christian Smith’s 1998 *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* reports on his mixed-methods study of a national evangelical subculture, which he constructs as a “distinct, publicly recognizable collective identity,” an identity “‘space’ between fundamentalism and liberalism” (15; 14). Smith mined his survey data to compare evangelicals to fundamentalists, mainline and liberal Protestants, Catholics, and nonreligious Americans; pointing to comparatively high levels of recruitment, retention, and participation, Smith characterizes American evangelicalism as “thriving.” Smith attributes this success to the adaptability of evangelicalism, which is “less an organization than a vast, loose network of small denominations,
denominational and nondenominational congregations…., parachurch ministries, missions agencies, and educational institutions” (86). Evangelicalism is “structurally wide open for inventive leaders to emerge and launch new initiatives” and highly competitive in the religious marketplace (Smith 86). But Smith did find a center of evangelicalism: evangelicals “are coordinated by a set of minimal, baseline, supradenominational theological beliefs and, perhaps more importantly, by a distinctive, shared sensibility about strategy for the Christian mission in the world” (87).

A more controversial aspect of Smith’s research is his finding, based on qualitative interviews, that an important element of evangelicalism’s success is its self-perception as “embattled.” Working out his “subcultural identity theory of religious strength,” Smith argues that evangelicalism needs a context of pluralism and “thrives on distinction, engagement, tension, conflict, and threat” (89). But, Smith is careful to emphasize that evangelicals have a less-explicit awareness and discourse about difference than fundamentalists do: “the distinction with the world is something more consistently lived and breathed by evangelicals, than consciously contemplated” (125).

Robert Webber’s 2002 *The Younger Evangelicals* also considers evangelicalism as a national subculture. Writing as an evangelical, Webber sheds light on the felt sense that evangelicals have of being a subculture. Webber works to show how evangelical culture adapts to shifts in dominant culture, arguing for three distinct waves/paradigms of American evangelicalism. According to Webber, “Traditional Evangelicals,” represented by Billy Graham, emerged after WWII and articulated “Christianity as a rational worldview” in response to empiricism; “Pragmatic Evangelicals,” represented by Bill Hybels, emerged from the 1960s and offered “Christianity as therapy” as an antidote to technological culture; the “Younger
Evangelicals,” exemplified by Brain McLaren, emerged post 9/11, and respond to postmodernism by offering “Christianity as a community of faith” (18). Drawing from surveys, interviews, and correspondence with young evangelicals as well as public evangelical texts, Webber optimistically portrays young evangelicals as welcoming diversity and shedding the boundaries of earlier evangelicalism (18-19).

Michael Lindsay’s 2008 *Faith in the Halls of Power* reports on interviews with hundreds of evangelical leaders in government, businesses, and higher education as well as leaders of evangelical culture. Although Lindsay dismisses concerns that evangelicalism is becoming “dominant” in American culture, the sheer number of evangelicals he identifies in elite and powerful settings demonstrates that evangelicals can and do engage successfully in public life. Particularly relevant to rhetoricians and compositionists interested in evangelicals is Lindsay’s concept of “elastic orthodoxy,” a way of describing evangelicals’ ability to maintain a “cohesive” orthodoxy while “forming alliances and working with others” “to engage pluralistic society” (216-217).

John Shields’s 2009 *The Democratic Virtues of the Christian Right*, a mixed-methods empirical study, interrogated the assumption that “conservative Christians threaten democratic values” by examining “how religious activists actually behave in the public square” (1). Shields enumerates evangelicalism’s “democratic virtues”—including activism, participatory democracy, and “democratic education,” a tradition that advocates deliberation—and argues that “more than any movement since the early campaign for civil rights, the Christian Right has helped revive participatory democracy in America by overcoming citizens’ alienation from politics” (253).

Bielo’s findings reveal the significant influence of the ECM on American evangelicals, especially younger evangelicals. Bielo describes “Emerging Evangelicalism” as “a movement defined by a deeply felt disenchantment toward America’s conservative Christian subculture” and working toward “redressing the perceived problems of the conservative Christian establishment” (197).

History of Higher Education and Higher Education Research

Social historians have been especially active in exploring the relationship between evangelicals and higher education. George Marsden’s *The Soul of the American University* traces the shifts from Protestant control of American higher education in the seventeenth century to evangelicalism’s marginalization in the late nineteenth century as the German university model spread and finally to the “near exclusion of religious perspectives” within the academy in the twentieth century (265). Marsden does not blame this alleged shift entirely on hostility toward religious belief, but on a constellation of cultural and material pressures. Evangelical historians including Marsden and Noll have also contributed to a growing body of literature arguing for an “evangelical life of the mind” (Blamires, *Christian Mind*; Noll, *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* and *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind*; and Marsden, *Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*). Several other historians have presented the history of American evangelicalism so as to refute the charge that evangelicalism is essentially anti-intellectual (Carpenter; Hart; Worthen).

Higher education researchers are also using empirical methods to understand how evangelicals experience and participate in university life. Many of these studies arise from a line of research that has sought to understand how higher education affects religious identity (and vice-versa) and how undergraduates develop spiritually or religiously while in college. One of
the largest of these studies, the 2004 *The Spiritual Life of College Students: A National Study of College Students’ Search for Meaning and Purpose*, reported findings from a three-year multi-part survey of 112,000 students enrolled at 236 colleges and universities. The study found correlations between undergraduates’ levels of spirituality and religiosity and a range of behaviors and attitudes, including drinking and political views. A 2010 study found that religious participation was correlated with higher grades and satisfaction with college; another 2006 study found that spirituality was positively correlated with “deep learning” (Mooney; Kuh and Gonyea).

Several studies have attempted to understand if higher education positively or negatively affects students’ spirituality and religiosity. One 2002 survey study found mixed results: nearly half of participants reported no changes in their religious commitments, while approximately 33% reported “a strengthening of their religious convictions and beliefs” and 14% reported weakened religiosity over time (Lee). Another 2003 longitudinal study found that students became more interested in spirituality throughout their first year in college (Bryant, Choi, and Yasuno). Other studies, however, have pointed out that Christian fundamentalists are less likely than their peers to attend college in the first place or progress in higher education (Darnell and Sherkat).

Recent ethnographic studies of campus ministries highlight the social experiences of evangelicals on university campuses. Peter Magolda and Kelsey Ebben Gross’s *It’s All About Jesus!* reports on their two-year mixed-methods study of one campus ministry at a public university. Magolda and Gross characterize this campus ministry as an “oppositional subculture” that “politely yet firmly opposes public higher education values” and “resists the dominant student culture” (266). Paul Bramadat’s ethnography of an InterVarsity Christian Fellowship
chapter at a “secular” college found that the campus ministry functioned as “an alternative institution within an institution” and “enable[d] students to cope with their essential social and spiritual estrangement from the lifestyles, values, and relative religiosity of their secular peers” (21). These studies suggest that evangelical undergraduates are simultaneously undergoing two socialization processes, one with “the academy” (instructors and disciplinary colleagues) and another with student culture.

Alyssa Bryant’s studies of evangelicals at a large public university examine peer socialization and academic development. Her 2005 ethnography, “Evangelicals on Campus,” which reported on participant-observation and qualitative interviews with evangelical undergraduates at a “selective research university,” is especially nuanced (9). Bryant found that evangelicals were countercultural when it came to “moral permissiveness they encountered on campus” (12). Additionally, although Bryant found evidence of conflicts between evangelical and academic epistemologies, many participants maintained belief in absolute truth and a sense that “their knowledge was incomplete” and subjective (13). Bryant argues that this dissonance provided space for intellectual curiosity and inquiry within an “absolutist” framework (14). Likewise, Bryant found that some evangelical undergraduates experienced a conflict in college classrooms, characterized as a choice between “selling-out” and “defending” their faith (especially in the sciences), but also found that this is not the only experience. For some evangelicals, “their Christianity identity was not a liability, but simply one perspective among many in the ongoing classroom dialogue” (17).

Bryant’s 2008 “The Developmental Pathways of Evangelical Christian Students,” a longitudinal continuation of the 2005 study, provides an even better look at the effects of the undergraduate experience on evangelical identity. For some participants, evangelical identity was
very fluid and context-dependent; some consciously performed evangelical identity in enclave situations (Bryant 8-9; 19). Bryant returned to the question of epistemology and found that some evangelicals developed a concept of truth that allowed them to affirm absolutism but practice pluralism: evangelicals who also socialized outside the enclave “did not embrace pluralism,” but “recognized that truth is sought by people of all faiths and is inherently mysterious” (13). Bryant characterizes the belief “that something had to be true…even if [students] lacked the ability to ascertain with complete certainty whether it was Christianity or something else altogether” as a “‘post-positivist’ understanding of reality” (21).

Undergraduate Writing Expertise and Development

The final body of scholarship that I review in this chapter is empirical studies of undergraduate writing expertise and development. This literature is relevant to a study of the academic writing of evangelical undergraduates because it provides a context for understanding whether and to what extent evangelical undergraduates are different from their peers. In this section my purpose is to synthesize what is known about writing expertise and development in the undergraduate years, rather than to provide a critical review of the empirical research.

Longitudinal studies find that students do improve as writers throughout college, but that writing development is slow and uneven. Mina Shaughnessy’s and Marilyn Sternglass’s longitudinal studies of “basic writers” and “underprepared” students at CUNY both found improvement in writing over the course of their participants’ undergraduate careers. Sternglass argues that eventually, “even the weakest students benefit by appropriate instructional prodding to achieve the levels required for academic success” (Sternglass 289). Ilona Leki reported similar findings from her study of L2 writers (249). Other studies of more “traditional” undergraduates also found that undergraduates’ academic writing improved over time. Marcia Curtis and Anne
Herrington’s study uncovered “syntactic growth, growth in critical thinking and writing within a given discourse community” (85), while Lee Ann Carroll’s study found evidence of “growing ability” in the several areas: “employing appropriate genre and discourse conventions, locating and interpreting relevant sources, applying concepts from a discipline, developing evidence acceptable in the discipline, and organizing all of this information within a single coherent text” (90).

Researchers consistently find that writing development occurs over long periods of time and is never finished. Studies of “basic writers” find that error persists even as students are improving as writers; Sternglass warns that FYC courses cannot produce “finished writers” (296). Shaughnessy found that “it is not unusual for people acquiring a skill to get ‘worse’ before they get better and for writers to err more as they venture more” (119). Sommers and Saltz observe that “writing development isn’t always happening on the page during freshman year” (144). They explain this lag as a normal phenomenon, noting that “gaps between what a student knows about writing and what the student can actually do can be observed throughout all four years… making it difficult to measure writing development at any one point in a student’s college career” (144). Similarly, Curtis and Herrington found “positive changes in all” of their participants’ writing, but note that “these changes plotted a trajectory more like an oscillating wave with recurring peaks and valleys than any straight rising line” (70). Sternglass agrees that “no clear linear pattern of writing development” emerged from her study (289). Taken as a whole, this body of research suggests that all students can improve as writers, but that in the space of any given course it is reasonable to expect only some development—not “finished writers.”
Studies of undergraduate writers also find that writing development is affected by many extracurricular factors. Researchers consistently found that material, social, and institutional contexts shaped writing development to a greater degree than teachers might imagine. For example, Leki uncovered “the importance of establishing satisfying socioacademic relationships” for ESL writers (261). Sternglass also considered the effects of supportive and unsupportive personal relationships on writing development as well as the “crucial role” that “empathy and support between an instructor and an individual student play” in writing development and motivation (195). Importantly, financial realities also significantly influence writing development as many students work full-time jobs to put themselves through college and financial crises force students to stop and restart college (Sternglass). These studies suggest that schooling often has a limited influence on undergraduates’ writing development.

Empirical studies of undergraduate writing demonstrate that writing expertise and writing development are context-specific. Studies looking at writers moving across a variety of academic writing situations demonstrate that “school writing is not a monolithic activity or global skill” (McCarthy 260). Rather writing is a social activity that requires discipline-specific content, rhetorical, and genre knowledge (Beaufort). To use Carroll’s slogan: “The how of writing cannot be separated from the what” (115). Because writing expertise is context-specific, written conventions transferred from one classroom to another may actually be considered a “negative transfer of learning” (Beaufort 10). Writing development is also context-specific, so as writers move from one class to another or into new disciplines, their writing may actually appear to “regress.” McCarthy describes that as her participant Dave entered “each new classroom community,” he “resembled a beginning language user” (261). Sommers and Saltz report a similar phenomenon; for their study participants, “learning to write has been a slow process,
indefinitely varied, with movements backwards and forwards, starts and stops, with losses each time a new method or discipline is attempted” (145).

Finally, empirical studies show that undergraduate writers are most likely to develop as writers if they can see themselves as “beginning insiders.” Many studies point to the important role that student identity plays in motivating sustained engagement with writing and developing context-specific writing expertise. Sommers and Saltz highlight the importance of first-year students accepting a “novice” identity, which allows them “[to adopt] an open attitude to instruction and feedback, a willingness to experiment, whether in course selection or paper topics, and a faith that, with practice and guidance, the new expectations of college can be met” (133-134). They found that “freshmen who cling to their old habits and formulas and who resent the uncertainty and unfamiliarity of being a novice have a more difficult time adjusting to the demands of college writing” (134). “Novice” college writers, however, should be invited to see themselves as beginning “insiders” rather than “outsiders” (McCarthy 259). Several studies suggest that students experienced complex and “authentic” problem-based writing assignments as more engaging than simpler tasks (Sternglass 297; Wardle 77-78; Sommers and Saltz 140).

Gaps in the Literature on the Academic Writing of Evangelical Undergraduates

While attention to the academic writing of evangelical undergraduates has increased since Chris Anderson’s 1989 article, empirical studies remain rare. There is, instead, a rich collection of reflective teacher-research, describing writing instructors’ interactions with conservative Christian undergraduates.

Undergraduate Evangelical Identities

These anecdotal studies characterize evangelical identity as oppositional and evangelical discourse as antagonistic: instructors critique evangelical discourse for its tendency to give
“precedence to religious identity over gender” or any other kind of “difference” and argue that “much of the traditional conservatism through which evangelical Christianity resonates seems to embrace familiarity above all else, representing difference not as a benefit to embrace and learn from but as a threat to overcome” (Goodburn 340; Carter 572). Additionally, these anecdotal composition studies characterize evangelical epistemologies as foundationalist, which is not supported by Bryant’s empirical research (Perkins; Downs; Carter; Goodburn). As DePalma has pointed out, much of the field’s assumptions about the identities and epistemologies of evangelical undergraduates comes from teacher lore and research on fundamentalism and evangelical public discourses, rather than systematic inquiry into the identities, ontologies, and epistemologies of actual evangelical undergraduates. Empirical studies of younger evangelicals, including the phenomena of “cosmopolitan evangelicals” and “emerging evangelicals,” suggest that evangelical identity is not as stable or monolithic as the composition literature assumes (Lindsay; Bielo). More qualitative research is needed to understand the varieties of evangelical identities and the ways that evangelical identities influence academic writing.

**Characteristics of Academic Writing**

Compositionists are increasingly using qualitative research methods to examine the phenomenon of faith-motivated academic writing (Dively; Thomson; DePalma; Ringer). Dively’s study found that religious students frequently wrote papers that did not evince dualistic thinking. However, Dively’s findings have had little influence on the field’s characterizations of the academic writing of religious undergraduates; the assumption that conservative Christians typically write faith-motivated papers that violate conventions of academic discourse persists and is perpetuated by anecdotal studies that rely on teachers to identify religious students by their “problematic” papers. Systematic research that uses other sampling methods to identify
evangelical participants is needed in order to determine if current characterizations of evangelical undergraduates’ academic writing are representative. While Ringer’s case-study research did not rely on teacher-identification of evangelicals, his study focused on academic writing that enacts faith explicitly; thus, it does not provide information about the characteristics of evangelical undergraduates’ academic writing in general. Missing from the literature is evangelical student writing itself; to date, there has been no systematic inquiry into the features of evangelicals’ academic writing.

**Student Perceptions and Experiences**

Several qualitative case studies have contributed to the field’s understanding of the academic writing of evangelical undergraduates by including students’ perceptions and interpretations of their own writing (Carter; DePalma; Ringer; Thomson). This is an important contribution because research on evangelical graduate students suggests that evangelicals in academia may experience significant constraints that are not visible via their writing. Joonna Smitherman Trapp’s 1999 “Religious Values and the Student: A Plea for Tolerance” describes her experiences of feeling marginalized as a Christian during her graduate training and seeing similar marginalization of undergraduates in composition programs. Toby Coley’s 2010 “Opening a Dialogue about Religious Restraint in Graduate Professionalization” investigated the phenomenon of restraint among evangelical graduate students in Rhetoric and Composition programs. His IRB-approved study used email interviews to collect evangelical graduate students’ perceptions of and experiences negotiating their religious and professional identities. Coley’s analysis revealed that his participants “feel that their faith is not a welcome position from which to speak […] in the academy” and frequently “choose to remain silent” (398). Coley characterizes this phenomenon as restraint, rather than silence, to emphasize that this
phenomenon has several origins: “restraint enacted by students of faith upon themselves for various reasons,” “restraint that communities of religious discourse have enacted upon their own members,” “restraint that outside, secular members of a desired community […] have enabled through force or assumption,” and “restraint that secular, academic institutions (as a whole and as individual faculty) have enabled through implicit gestures” (399). Coley’s findings about the phenomenon of restraint are significant; further qualitative interview studies are needed to understand if this phenomenon affects evangelical undergraduate students, a considerably larger population.

Carter’s, DePalma’s, and Ringer’s case studies of evangelical undergraduates have demonstrated the value of asking for students’ perspectives on their purposes and choices for academic writing. Thomson’s interview and survey research on Christian student experiences of composition courses also demonstrated the value of consulting students directly about their schooling experiences. Additional qualitative interview studies with larger sample sizes are needed to better understand how evangelical undergraduates experience a wider range of academic writing situations, processes, and sites of writing instruction.

Development

Nearly all of the composition scholarship on faith-motivated writing makes recommendations for teaching. An overwhelming concern, then, is helping evangelical undergraduates develop as writers. Yet, to date, no composition studies have attempted to trace the rhetorical development of evangelical undergraduates or to understand what types of school experiences best support the rhetorical development of evangelical undergraduates. Longitudinal studies of undergraduate writing expertise and development demonstrate that development occurs over time; thus, longitudinal studies of evangelical undergraduates are needed to better
understand if and how evangelicals develop as writers during college and to make credible recommendations about pedagogy.
Chapter III: Research Methods

In order to better understand how evangelical undergraduates engage in academic writing situations, this dissertation used qualitative methods to collect and analyze the academic writing and experiences of self-identified evangelical undergraduates at a public university. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do evangelical undergraduates experience academic writing situations?
2. What are the characteristics of the academic writing of evangelical undergraduates at a public university?

In this chapter, I describe the qualitative methods I used to answer these research questions. I first discuss the theoretical frameworks and methodological paradigms that guided this study and explain how they shaped the methods used in this study. Then, I describe the research site and outline the study’s specific methods for sampling, recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. Finally, I discuss the steps I took to ensure the quality of this study and the trustworthiness of the findings.

Research Design

Composition studies of religious students and their writing for college usually rely on anecdotal classroom evidence (Anderson; Bizzell; Browning; Carter; Dively; Downs; Goodburn; Neuleib; Perkins, Rand). Writing instructors’ reflections on classroom experiences have drawn attention to the religious diversity of undergraduates and contributed to the field’s understanding of how religious rhetorics operate in writing classrooms. However, because much of this scholarship relies on instructors to identify evangelical students by their “problematic” writing, the field has tended to focus on writing that does not conform to expectations for academic writing and is obviously faith-motivated. Additionally, because most composition studies of
religious student writing report and reflect on classroom anecdotes, it has prioritized instructors’ experiences rather than student experiences. In contrast, this dissertation took a qualitative approach to inquiring about the writing and experiences of evangelical undergraduates.

Acknowledging that qualitative research is a diverse field, Norman Denzin and Yvonne Lincoln nevertheless define qualitative research as:

a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations […] At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (3)

Qualitative research is an appropriate research paradigm for this study, which aimed to address a gap in the existing literature by making evangelical undergraduates’ writing and experiences more “visible” and sought to “make sense of” evangelicals’ academic writing in ways that were meaningful to them. This study used qualitative interviewing methods to understand how evangelical undergraduates experienced academic writing situations and how their experiences shaped their academic writing and qualitative document analysis methods to describe the characteristics of evangelical undergraduates’ academic writing.

Social Constructionism and Naturalistic Inquiry

This dissertation took a social constructionist approach to qualitative research, acknowledging that “realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific, dependent for their form and content on the persons who
Egon Guba describes the epistemology of constructionism as “subjective,” reminding us that “[findings are literally the creation of the process of interaction between the two” [“inquirer and inquired”] (27). Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss also emphasize the thoroughly constructed nature of qualitative research findings, pointing out that research findings are “concepts and theories” that “are constructed by researchers out of stories that are constructed by research participants who are trying to explain and make sense out of their experiences […] Out of these multiple constructions, analysts construct something that they call knowledge” (10). Qualitative interviews are well-suited to the constructionist paradigm because they are a “construction site of knowledge” (Kvale 42).

Influenced by constructionist ontology, I designed this study to be open to the possibility of multiple evangelical identities and experiences, rather than assuming the existence of a unified evangelical reality. Specifically, this perspective led me to use self-identification rather than criterion-based sampling to identify evangelical participants. My concern with particularity also informed the design of my interview guide, which asked questions not only about how participants’ experienced academic writing and their perceptions of how their faith informed their academic writing, but also about their social experiences on campus, prior familial and institutional religious experiences, and prior schooling and writing experiences. Importantly, although social constructionism emphasizes the multiplicity and constructedness of realities, it does not deny the significance of constructed realities. Qualitative researchers are alert to “the implications of those constructions for [individuals’] lives and interactions with others” (Patton 96). In this study, I sought to understand evangelical identities and perceptions of religion and schooling in order to describe the consequences of those identities and perceptions for academic writing.
A social constructionist perspective also reminds us that qualitative research findings are localized. Qualitative research demands “context sensitivity,” interpreting and explaining findings “in a social, historical, and temporal context” rather than attempting to generalize “across time and space” (Patton 41). Thus, this study does not describe a “typical evangelical” experience of academic writing, but a range of experiences and approaches to academic writing that arose at a particular time and place.

In addition to valuing participants’ perspectives on their own experiences, qualitative research values naturalistic inquiry. Constructionist ontology “suggests that realities are wholes that cannot be understood in isolation from their contexts, nor can they be fragmented for separate study of the parts” (Lincoln and Guba 39). Thus, naturalistic design entails a commitment to studying human phenomena in their “natural” settings and “as they unfold naturally” (Patton 40). While this is not a totally naturalistic study—I did not observe participants in their classrooms or while they wrote academic papers—I did strive to make the data collection as naturalistic as possible. For example, rather than asking participants to write in a contrived situation, I collected writing samples that participants had already composed for their actual college classes. I also took a somewhat naturalistic approach to designing a semi-structured interview protocol and conducting interviews; the interview questions were designed to be conversational and open-ended and I strove to let interviews progress as naturally as possible, following the participants’ leads (McCracken 21-22).

Feminist Qualitative Research

My experience as an evangelical within academia led me to consider the value of feminist qualitative research, a tradition of qualitative research that works to expose invisibility and distortion (Lather 91). What I take up from feminist qualitative research is not the lens of gender,
but the “need to look for what has been left out” or distorted (Creswell 30). Although evangelicals constitute a powerful subculture within American culture and political life, evangelical undergraduates may nevertheless be an “invisible” and marginalized population within academia and their academic writing may be distorted by scholars’ and instructors’ assumptions about evangelicals. Feminists working to “overcome the misinterpretation and concealment of women’s experiences” have argued for the value of descriptive research methods that “are understanding based and not explanatory based” and that “give women the opportunity to talk about their experiences in their own voices” (Garko 168). This study prioritizes description and seeks to give evangelical students a voice in the field’s scholarship by extensively paraphrasing and quoting from their interviews and writing. Additionally, my analysis of participants’ academic writing was guided by the participants’ perspectives, gleaned from qualitative interviews.

Like all “orientational qualitative inquiry,” feminist qualitative research recognizes that “the ideological orientation or perspective of the researcher determines the focus of inquiry” (Patton 129). Feminist qualitative researchers insist that “empirical research, despite any claims to objectivity, is never neutral and that the researcher’s political commitments in relation to the research should be explicitly acknowledged. The choice of methods, methodology, epistemology, and most important, the choice of participants, are always political acts with social implications” (Addison and McGee 3). In the case of this study, my choice to study the experiences and academic writing of evangelical undergraduates is a political act based, in part, on my own experience of being an evangelical in academia and, in part, on my sense that dominant scholarly characterizations of evangelical students and evangelical discourses are distorted by stereotypes and a lack of awareness of contemporary evangelicalism. As a feminist
qualitative researcher, I am interested in research that results not only in understanding, but change (Lather 87-88). Ultimately, I hope that this study will begin to address scholarly distortions and help instructors become better readers of their evangelical students’ writing.

Feminist qualitative research also provides tools for accounting for the researcher’s positionality. Feminist qualitative research not only brings previously excluded perspectives and experiences into view and works against marginalization, but also “insists that the inquirer her/himself must be placed in the same critical frame as the over subject matter” (Sandra Harding 9). Feminist theorist and methodologist Sandra Harding argues that “the beliefs and behaviors of the researcher are part of the empirical evidence for (or against) the claims advanced in the results of research. This evidence too must be open to critical scrutiny” (9). These concerns motivated me to disclose my own conflicted relationship with evangelicalism in publications and presentations about the study, to participate in a “bracketing” or “debriefing” interview, and to engage in regular conversations about the study design and emerging findings with experienced qualitative researchers who did not share my relationship to evangelicalism.

Methods

Pilot Study

While enrolled in two graduate-level qualitative research methods courses, I conducted two pilot studies of this project, which allowed me to work through methodological difficulties and to gain experience collecting, analyzing, and reporting qualitative research. The first was an interview study with three evangelical undergraduates attending three different public colleges or universities; the second was a document-analysis study of the academic writing of two evangelical undergraduates attending public universities. Both pilot studies revealed that the existing composition literature missed an important kind of evangelical academic writers: those
who have largely assimilated the norms of the university but who may, nonetheless, believe that their faith is relevant to their academic writing.

The pilot studies also demonstrated the challenges of recruiting evangelical undergraduate participants. I experimented with three methods: recruiting participants directly during invited visits to evangelical campus ministries, recruiting participants directly during invited classroom visits, and recruiting participants through mutual friends. Using these methods, I recruited only three participants, one from a campus ministry visit and two through introductions from friends. When recruiting participants for the pilot studies, I had avoided identifying with potential participants and identifying myself as an evangelical because of my own conflicted relationship with evangelicalism and my fear of being negatively perceived within the academy. However, I came to see this research as an opportunity for even ambivalent evangelicals to contribute to scholarly constructions of evangelical identity and discourse and decided to disclose my own evangelical identity to potential participants in order to foster trust and thereby more successfully recruit participants.

Site

This study was conducted at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK), a public flagship university in the southeastern United States. The university is located on a large, urban campus. During the 2011-2012 academic year, the year in which study interviews were conducted, the university enrolled approximately 27,379 undergraduate, graduate, and professional students (Office of Institutional Research and Assessment). Of the approximately 21,126 undergraduate students, 82.3% were between the ages of 18 and 22, and 82.6% identified their race as white (Office of Institutional Research and Assessment). During the 2011 fall semester, the university enrolled 4,188 first-time freshmen, over 99% of whom were enrolled full
time (Office of Institutional Research and Assessment). The average ACT composite score of incoming freshmen was 26.7, and the average incoming GPA was 3.87 (Office of Institutional Research and Assessment).

Approximately 89% of undergraduates were in-state residents, and nearly 94% of undergraduates were from the southeastern United States (Office of Institutional Research and Assessment). This university was an appropriate site for inquiry into the academic writing of evangelical undergraduates at a public university because of its location in Tennessee, which has a high density of evangelicals. The university does not provide information on students’ religious affiliation, but, according to the Pew Forum’s U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, 51% of Tennessee residents are affiliated with evangelical Protestantism. And, according to the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, 50% of all American evangelicals live in the southeastern United States.

**Population**

This study used a purposive sample of ten self-identified evangelical undergraduates at a public university. Self-identification was paramount because I wanted to understand how “ordinary,” non-elite evangelicals write for college. Most studies of evangelical student writers rely on teachers’ anecdotes about working with outspoken students and thus overestimate how frequently such students produce “problematic” texts (see Chapter Two). Rather than choosing participants based on the extent to which their academic writing confirmed existing beliefs about

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3 This section, “Population,” is revised based on an excerpt from a paper published by Emily Murphy Cope and Jeffrey M. Ringer:


The excerpt that is revised and included here was substantially written by me, with some editing by Jeffrey M. Ringer.
evangelical discourse, I sought to identify a broader range of evangelical undergraduates through self-identification.

Self-identification was an especially appropriate sampling method in this study’s context, a large public research university in the Bible Belt where evangelicalism infuses the “ambient” religious culture (Engelke). Of the study’s ten participants, fully half would not have been visible through affiliation-based sampling: one participant had no institutional affiliation and four others attended mainline campus ministries or churches. The ambient evangelical culture also presented the challenge of cultural evangelicals—individuals who do not engage in characteristically evangelical practices like church attendance, witnessing, or prayer, but who remain embedded in evangelical culture and discourse (Eskridge, “How Many”). Cultural evangelical undergraduates may not attend church frequently but still sound like evangelicals to their instructors. Because evangelical Christianity is normative in the southeastern U.S., where the Southern Baptist Convention exerts outsized cultural influence, traditional measures of piety are not useful for identifying individuals who enact evangelical discourse. The pilot study confirmed the value of self-identification, suggesting that the existing literature ignored evangelical students who had largely assimilated the norms of the university but who believed their faith was relevant to academic writing.

The requirements for participation in the study were that participants identified themselves as evangelical Christians, that they were currently enrolled as undergraduate students at a public university, and that they were willing to submit and discuss samples of their academic writing. Region of birth, gender, sex, age, race, sexual preference, or any other aspects of personhood were not taken into consideration when choosing participants.
Unlike quantitative research, which uses random and representative samples to facilitate generalizability, purposive sampling “focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (Patton 230). The primary criterion for evaluating qualitative sampling methods, then, is the extent to which they select cases that are “‘information rich’ and illuminative; that is, they offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest” (Patton 40). Steiner Kvale reports that recent interview studies typically rely on a sample size of 15±10 (102). This study’s purposive sample of ten self-identified evangelical undergraduates falls within that range and proved to be information rich and illuminative, providing abundant data for describing a broader variety of evangelical academic writing and experiences. In fact, the sample captured significant, though in no way representative, variation in terms of evangelical attitudes, practices, and institutional affiliations. This sample may share characteristics with other evangelical undergraduates in other large public universities in the southeastern United States.

**Access**

After conducting two pilot studies, I began designing the dissertation research study in consultation with a composition faculty member who was also an experienced qualitative researcher. In spring of 2011, I submitted an IRB proposal and received approval from the university to begin the study.
Recruitment

Upon receiving IRB approval, I recruited participants through a combination of methods. Because I wanted to capture a wide range of evangelical experiences and writing, I contacted multiple instructors at the university to request permission to contact their students. With the instructors’ permission, I sent recruitment emails to all of the students in the instructors’ classes (see Appendix A for the IRB-approved recruitment email). I also relied on snowball sampling, asking participants or other evangelicals on campus to help recruit other participants for the study, usually by forwarding my recruitment email to potential participants.

Based on my experience recruiting participants for the pilot studies, I revised my approach to recruitment and openly identified as an evangelical in the recruitment email and during meetings with potential participants. My pilot study demonstrated the challenge of recruiting self-identified evangelical undergraduates. The pilot study experimented with three recruitment methods: approaching participants directly at evangelical campus ministries, visiting a classroom, and recruiting participants through mutual friends. Using these methods, I recruited only three participants I realized that foregrounding the term evangelical likely alienated potential participants, especially those who had not come to me through a trusted contact, and that potential participants might trust me more if I disclosed my own evangelical identity. During the pilot study, I had avoided doing so because of my conflicted relationship with evangelicalism and my fear of being negatively perceived within the academy. However, I came to see this

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research as an opportunity for even ambivalent evangelicals to contribute to scholarly constructions of evangelical identity and discourse.

For this IRB-approved study, I revised my approach to recruitment and identified as an evangelical. In order to capture a wide range of experiences and writing, I relied on a combination of snowball sampling, wherein participants help recruit other participants, and direct email appeals to classes whose teachers allowed me to contact their students. Both methods foster identification and I enacted evangelical discourse in the recruitment email. I avoided using the term evangelical in the beginning of the email, using instead the emic term faith in the subject line (“Faith and Writing”) and first paragraph: “Do you ever think about how your faith relates to what you learn in college? What about how your faith relates to your academic writing? Do you like to write about your beliefs or do you prefer to keep your faith and education separate?” Faith is not exclusive to evangelical Christianity, but this use of it (“your faith”) appeals to American evangelical individualism. I strengthened my insider status by explicitly identifying as a “Christian” scholar. Doing so allowed me to then use the term evangelical:

If you’d be interested in talking about these issues, I’d love to discuss them with you as part of a study I’m conducting about the academic writing of evangelical undergrads at public universities. I’m working on a PhD in English and as a Christian scholar I’ve thought about these questions a lot. […] If you’re a Christian undergrad and this sounds interesting, please send me an email so we can set up a time to talk [...].

Using these methods, I quickly recruited ten participants.
Undergraduate students who were interested in participating in the study contacted me via email. I met individually with interested undergraduates to discuss the study, self-identification as an evangelical, and the Informed Consent Statement (see Appendix B for the IRB-approved Informed Consent Statement). During these initial, unrecorded meetings I explained that I was using the label *evangelical* in the study because while evangelicals had become the focus of significant discussion among writing teachers, that discussion did not reflect all evangelicals. This became a selling point for participants who were keenly aware of negative perceptions of evangelicals. I asked each participant if he or she felt comfortable identifying as an evangelical; I had been prepared to discuss various meanings of the term evangelical, but nine out of the ten participants quickly agreed that they were evangelicals without any discussion. All ten undergraduates who expressed interest in the study agreed to self-identification as evangelicals and participated in the study.

During our initial unrecorded meeting, each participant was given an Informed Consent Statement, which provided information about the purpose of the study; the voluntary nature of their participation; the risks and benefits of participating; the steps that would be taken to maintain the confidentiality of participants’ identities; audio-recording, transcription, and destruction of the interview data; and the steps that would be taken to securely store all study data (see Appendix B). After having an opportunity to read the form and ask questions about the study and their participation in it, participants signed two copies of the Informed Consent Statement. Each participant was given a signed copy of the Informed Consent Statement to keep; my copies of the signed Informed Consent Forms are stored in a locked filing cabinet in the Office of the Director of Composition at the University of Tennessee campus and will remain there for three years after the completion of this study.
Data Collection

Documents

After receiving a signed Informed Consent Statement from the participant, I collected samples of her/his academic writing through email. The purpose of the document analysis study was to describe the characteristics of evangelical undergraduates’ academic writing. This study took a systematic and naturalistic approach to investigating the characteristics of evangelicals’ academic writing, seeking to describe as wide a range of evangelicals’ actual writing for college as possible. Most rhetoric and composition studies of evangelical student writing rely on anecdotal evidence from teachers about student writing that noticeably violates academic conventions by attempting to convert its audience or citing religious texts to authorize faith-motivated claims; qualitative document analysis addressed this gap in the literature by collecting and analyzing a wide range of the academic writing of evangelical undergraduates. Additionally, collecting participants’ actual writing for college allowed me to compare their perceptions of their writing, captured in the interview data, with what I saw happening in their specific texts.

I invited participants to share any and all writing they had produced for college to that point and most participants sent me electronic copies of as many papers they could find on their computers. I encouraged participants to remove all identifying markers from their papers before emailing them to me; when present, I deleted participant and instructor names from the documents. All together, this study collected 195 samples of academic writing from evangelical undergraduates. The number of writing samples submitted by each participant varied depending on the number of years they had been in college, whether they had retained copies of their academic writing throughout their college careers, and the amount of writing required in their coursework.
I read the writing samples each participant submitted prior to their interview, in order to make our discussions about their academic writing as specific as possible. In some cases, participants sent me additional writing samples after our interview. I also asked participants to send assignments sheets or descriptions of the assignments in order to provide additional context for the writing samples they submitted. If no assignment or description was submitted, I asked participants to describe the context during our interview.

**Interviews**

After collecting writing samples from participants, I read each document and scheduled a one-hour interview with each participant (see Appendix C for the IRB-approved interview guide). The purpose of the interviews was to learn about how self-identified evangelical undergraduates at a public university experienced academic writing situations. Consistent with a social-constructionist paradigm of qualitative research, these qualitative interviews sought to “describe and understand the central themes [participants] experience and live toward” vis-à-vis academic writing (Kvale 30; 29). Most rhetoric and composition studies of evangelical student writers are anecdotal and rely on teachers to describe evangelicals; this qualitative study addressed this gap in the literature by consulting evangelical undergraduates directly about their own experiences as academic writers through semi-structured interviews. Combining document analysis and qualitative interviews corrects one of the major problems with the existing scholarship, namely its distance from the phenomenon. Most of the studies rely on the instructor’s memory of an incident, but this study sought to be as “down-to-earth” as possible, to conduct “direct examination” of the phenomenon by asking for recent texts, looking directly at those texts, and asking the authors to tell their stories of writing them (Blumer 47). Together, qualitative document analysis and interviewing “yield detailed, thick description” of actual
writing and “capture direct quotations about people’s personal perspectives and experiences” (Patton 40).

The participant and I agreed upon the time and location for our interview; all of the interviews were conducted in private recording rooms in the university’s media studio. This location offered privacy and was convenient for participants, all of whom lived on campus. I conducted one-hour qualitative interviews with each participant during the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 semesters. Interviews were semi-structured; the guide outlined “a sequence of themes to be covered, as well as suggested questions” but was flexible and simple enough to allow for “changes of sequence and forms of questions in order to follow up the answers given and the stories told by [participants]” (Kvale 124). One section of the interview guide included questions adapted to each participant’s particular writing samples (see Appendix C). The interviews focused on collecting information about participants’ religious experiences and their educational backgrounds as well as their specific experiences with academic writing in college. In order to invite participants to talk about their evangelical identities in ways that were salient to them, I began by asking two open-ended questions, “Would you tell me about your faith?” and “What does being a Christian mean to you?,” and followed up on these questions with more specific probes when appropriate. To get participants talking about their prior educational experiences, I asked “Would you tell me a little bit about your education before you came to the University?” Typically I followed up this question with specific probes about their prior experiences with writing instruction.

The longest section of each interview was devoted to talking about participants’ experiences writing specific papers for college. In each interview, I provided a copy of each paper the participant had submitted and prompted them, “Tell me the story of writing this paper.”
When appropriate, I followed up with probes in order to learn more about specific aspects of their writing contexts and experiences. Probes included asking participants to “tell me more about” the assignment, their audience, other topics they considered, why they chose this topic, how they chose sources or evidence, what other sources or evidence they considered, and how this paper changed as they wrote/revised it. I also asked participants to describe any feedback they received about specific papers from their instructors or their peers. I ended our discussion of specific documents with the open-ended question “Would you like to tell me anything else about this paper?” This line of open-ended questions not only invited natural conversation, but also elicited “nuanced descriptions of specific situations and actions,” rather than “general opinions” (Kvale 30).

I waited until the last part of the interview to raise the question of intersections between participants’ faith and academic writing. Only after participants described specific academic writing situations and choices, I asked, “Do you think your faith affects your writing for college?” or “Do you think your faith is relevant to the writing you do for college?” Kvale suggests that collecting “this type of general opinion” is valuable in as much as it “is of interest in itself” and “may be compared with the understanding of [the phenomenon] expressed in the spontaneous descriptions of [specific] situations” (33). By waiting until after participants had described specific academic writing experiences to ask if their faith influenced their writing, I did not impose that perspective on participants and was better able to interpret the salience of faith on their academic writing from their perspective. I ended each interview by asking “Is there anything else you’d like to tell me about your faith or your writing in college?” and “Is there anything else you can think of that might be relevant to this study?” According to Kvale, successful qualitative interviews invite participants not only to “describe their lived world” but
also to “discover new relationships” and “see new meanings in what they experience and do” (189). These open-ended questions frequently yielded surprising responses, clarifications of earlier statements, and synthesis and complication of topics discussed earlier in the interview (Kvale 145).

During the interviews, participants chose the pseudonyms that were used when reporting on this study. I used a digital audio recorder to record each interview; I received a grant to have the interviews transcribed by a professional transcription service. Although I used a transcription service, I listened to each audio recording multiple times, not only to verify the accuracy of the transcripts, clarify inaudible sections, and indicate intonation, but also to become immersed in the data. I removed participant names that appeared in the transcripts and replaced them with pseudonyms.

Data Analysis

Throughout the research, data analysis was “a continuous, iterative enterprise” (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 14). One of the primary tools that I used to manage the data analysis process was analytic memoing (Glaser and Strauss; Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña; Saldaña). Memoing not only helped me capture my research activities and reflect on my own positionality while conducting the research, but, more importantly, it provided a method for constantly condensing data, comparing data, and noticing patterns in the data. During data collection, I composed analytic memos shortly after each interview as I listened to the recorded interview; these early analytic memos noted major and repeated themes from each interview and each participants’ writing samples and compared emerging themes across participants.

After the interviews were transcribed and I had reviewed and edited the transcriptions, I loaded all of the transcribed interviews and collected documents onto Atlas.ti, a qualitative data
analysis software. Atlas.ti does not analyze data, but provides tools for coding data and producing reports based on codes. As a novice researcher I found grounded theory approaches to data analysis especially helpful in providing structure and purpose to my data analysis. Although my study cannot be characterized as a grounded theory study, the basic grounded theory methods of constant comparison, open coding, and axial coding proved useful (Charmaz; Glaser and Strauss; Strauss and Corbin).

In the first wave of formal data analysis, I coded the transcribed interviews inductively using multiple open coding methods (Charmaz; Corbin and Strauss; Glazer and Strauss; Strauss and Corbin). I understood open coding methods as heuristics, tools for examining the data from as many angles as possible (Saldaña 8). The open coding methods I used to analyze the transcribed interviews included:

- attribute coding (attaching descriptive markers to the data so that it could be sorted by gender, year in college, etc.),
- descriptive coding (breaking the interview data into natural sections and labeling the topic of each section),
- In Vivo coding (using a direct quote from the interview to label sections of the data),
- process coding (labeling sections of data with gerunds to capture actions and processes),
- emotion coding (labeling sections of data that describe participants’ emotions),
- values coding (labeling sections of data that reveal the participant’s values, attitudes, or beliefs),
- versus coding (labeling sections of data that reveal dichotomous thinking or use binary terms), and
• evaluation coding (marking sections of data that make judgments).

I used open coding methods to become deeply immersed in the interview data. While I was engaged in open coding, I also was constantly engaged in analytic memoing. In analytic memos, I described the type of coding I was undertaking, my progress, and tentative definitions of the codes I was using. I also noted any patterns that stood out, whether themes within one participant’s interview or similarities and differences between different participants’ interviews. I also frequently discussed my research and emerging patterns with other qualitative researchers.

The first round of data analysis took place over the period of a year and resulted in thousands of individual codes. By this point, the coding had become redundant and the volume of codes overwhelming; I knew it was time to stop open coding and begin constructing axial categories.

While open coding aims to inductively “summarize segments of data,” axial coding works to “[group] those summaries into a smaller number of categories, themes, or constructs” (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 86). In the second wave of analysis, I used analytic memoing again, along with code mapping, modeling, and consulting with experienced qualitative researchers to explore relationships within the interview data until a “big picture” and axial categories emerged. In order to bring focus and order to my analysis, I returned to the research questions and, in light of the data, attempted to tentatively describe how evangelicals experienced academic writing.

What quickly became obvious was that some of my participants experienced academic writing very differently from other participants. Based on this realization, I returned to the interview data in order to group participants according to similar experiences. In consultation with other experienced qualitative researchers, I grouped the participants in various configurations and sketched out models to explain why these groups emerged. While I had
initially begun grouping participants according to similarities in their religious identities and experiences, I ultimately found the most explanatory categories emerged when participants were grouped according to their feelings of satisfaction with academic writing and their descriptions of their purposes for academic writing. Three primary groups of participants emerged from the interview data; I consulted with an experienced qualitative researcher to confirm the three groups and articulate the key features of each group.

At that point, I moved my coded data from Atlas.ti to NVivo because NVivo had the capability to merge codes and code hierarchically. Given the volume of codes I had produced in the first wave of analysis, it was important not only to see relationships between codes, but also to streamline codes. I then worked to merge redundant codes, delete irrelevant codes, and create code hierarchies. For example, the code category “activism” was created when I saw a common theme running through a number of process codes: “changing the world,” “converting others,” “loving,” “ministering,” “spreading beliefs,” and “talking about faith.” During the second wave of data analysis, I was engaged in a recursive process of stepping away from my data to observe large, explanatory patterns through code mapping and modeling and then returning to the data to recode in light of the emerging categories. Through this process, I developed and revised a model for explaining relationships between participants’ evangelical identities and their rhetorical purposes for academic writing (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña). This model is presented in Chapter Four.

In the third and final wave of data analysis, I turned to the document analysis portion of the study. Other researchers may have chosen to analyze the writing sample data and interview data simultaneously, however I began with the interview data in order to prioritize participants’ perceptions of their writing. I hoped that by becoming immersed in participants’ perceptions of
their writing, I would be better prepared to interpret their writing in ways that were salient to them. The document analysis, then, was guided by the findings that emerged from the interviews.

Of the 195 writing samples submitted by participants, this study analyzed a representative sample of 66 papers that captured as much diversity (participant, year in college, discipline) as possible (see Tables 5.1 and 5.2 in Chapter Five). This sample retains all of the writing submitted by participants who provided ten documents or less (eight out of ten participants). For the two participants who submitted more than ten documents, Ember (43) and Jean-Luc (106), a representative sample of ten documents was selected. Representative samples of Ember’s and Jean-Luc’s writing were selected first by excluding extracurricular texts such as competitive speeches and sermons. Because Ember and Jean-Luc were the only participants who submitted extracurricular texts, excluding them allowed for comparison of more similar texts. Ember’s and Jean-Luc’s documents were then purposively sampled to provide a diversity of year and discipline; after excluding extracurricular texts, I selected at least two texts per year per participant from diverse course categories (Arts and Humanities, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences) and diverse courses within each category (i.e. English Literature, English Rhetoric and Composition, Philosophy, History, and Religious Studies).

This sample of participants’ academic writing was analyzed deductively, using participants’ descriptions of their experiences as well as themes in the existing rhetoric and composition literature to focus coding and analysis. I again used analytic memoing, along with code mapping, and consulting with experienced qualitative researchers to explore relationships within the data until axial categories emerged. Importantly, my choice to use deductive codes based on findings from the interview study revealed the integrity of the three primary categories
of evangelical identity and rhetorical purpose (see Chapter Four); some patterns of characteristics of participants’ writing were aligned with patterns in evangelical identities (see Chapter Five).

**Trustworthiness and Dependability**

I took a number of steps to ensure the trustworthiness and dependability of this study. In preparation for this project, I successfully completed Communications 643: Qualitative Research and English 682: Qualitative Research Methods in Composition Studies. In both courses, I conducted pilot studies under the supervision of experienced qualitative researchers. I was invited to present this project at the 2010 Qualitative Research Network (QRN) at the Conference on College Composition and Communication. At the QRN, I worked with Beth Daniell, a well-published qualitative researcher, who encouraged me to turn this study into a dissertation project and provided valuable feedback on the research design. Since then, I have presented initial findings on peer-reviewed panels at the Conference on College Composition and Communication. In addition to my training in qualitative research, IRB oversight, and continued feedback from colleagues in the field of rhetoric and composition, the dissertation process provided accountability for this project.

During the data collection phase, I used purposive sampling to recruit participants who were diverse in terms of years in college and denominational backgrounds and to collect a large sample and wide range of texts written for college classes. During the data analysis phase, to ensure the trustworthiness of my findings, I used several methods of triangulation including combining multiple data sources and using multiple types of coding to analyze the data set (Patton 247). I also used negative case analysis and auditing to safeguard the quality of my analysis and findings (Lincoln and Guba).
I also practiced reflexivity and worked to disclose my own subjectivity and positionality throughout the research process. Because of my identification as an evangelical, I decided to participate in a “bracketing” or “debriefing” interview with an experienced qualitative researcher (McCracken 32; Creswell 251). During this interview, I was asked to discuss the ways in which I perceived myself as similar and dissimilar to my participants, the extent to which I felt “responsible” to the evangelical community, and the ways in which I perceived my own evangelical identity to be influencing the study. I also practiced reflexivity by co-authoring a book chapter about the specific challenges of defining evangelical and of recruiting evangelical participants for qualitative composition research. In “Coming to (Troubled) Terms: Methodology, Positionality, and the Problem of Defining ‘Evangelical Christian,’” Jeffrey Ringer and I compared and contrasted our study designs and examined the way our evangelical identities both made possible and constrained our research. These informal and formal conversations served to make me more aware of the ways my own identity and experiences influenced the study design, data collection, and data analysis.
Chapter IV: How Evangelicals Experience Academic Writing

The purpose of this study was to learn about how self-identified evangelical undergraduates at a public university experienced academic writing situations and to describe the characteristics of their academic writing. This study took an emic approach to investigating evangelical rhetorical practices, seeking to describe and understand evangelicals’ experiences with academic writing from their own perspectives. Most rhetoric and composition studies of evangelical student writers are anecdotal and rely on instructors to identify evangelicals; this qualitative study addressed this gap in the literature by recruiting ten self-identified evangelical undergraduates, collecting and analyzing a wide range of their actual academic writing, and consulting them directly about their own experiences as academic writers through semi-structured interviews.

The interview data were analyzed inductively, using analytic memoing and multiple open coding methods (descriptive, In Vivo, process, emotion, values, versus, and evaluation coding) in the first wave of analysis to examine the data from many perspectives. In the second wave of analysis, I used analytic memoing again, along with code mapping, modeling, and consulting with experienced qualitative researchers to explore relationships within the data until a “big picture” and axial categories emerged.

This chapter first presents information from the interview data to describe the study’s participants as a group and to construct individual profiles of the participants. Then, I present the two major findings from the interview data. Finally, I discuss a negative case that brings the study’s findings into relief. I present data and findings from the document analysis portion of this study in Chapter Five.
One major finding from the interviews is that according to participants’ accounts, evangelical undergraduates’ academic writing is shaped by their religious and spiritual identity, but there is no single phenomenon of evangelical identity and, therefore, no single evangelical experience of academic writing. While all but one of the participants experienced their evangelical faith as relevant to the writing they did for college, because these evangelical undergraduates experienced what it meant to be an evangelical in a variety of ways, their faith motivated and shaped their writing in a variety of ways. Despite the important differences in evangelical identities and writing that emerged, this study found that evangelical identity does influence how these evangelicals engage in academic writing. In this chapter, I present a model of how evangelical identity influences rhetorical purposes for academic writing and then show how this model helps us understand three primary ways of approaching academic writing that emerged in the interview data. I describe these patterns as three dynamic evangelical approaches to activism in academic writing: arguing for sanctioned positions, experimenting with academic activism, and enacting integrated values. I also explain how an activist impulse influenced these evangelicals’ experiences as academic writers even when they chose non-activist rhetorical purposes for academic writing.

The second major finding of the study is that evangelicals’ rhetorical purposes and choices for academic writing are dynamic and sometimes evolve over the course of the college experience. The interviews provided evidence that evangelical undergraduates who formed positive relationships with instructors developed rhetorically as they came to see themselves as members of an academic discourse community and become more aware of the genres, purposes, and values of that community; one participant’s approach even evolved from arguing for sanctioned positions to enacting integrated values over time.
The Participants

Ten undergraduate students agreed to participate in this study. At the time of the study, all ten identified themselves as evangelical Christians and were enrolled in a large public university in the southeastern United States. Nine of the ten participants were white; one identified herself as Persian. Six participants were first-year students who had graduated from high school the previous spring. All participants began college immediately after high school and were between the ages of 18-22. Beginning with first-year participants and concluding with a fourth-year participant, below, I briefly introduce the study participants as they described themselves at the time of the study using the pseudonyms they selected for themselves.

James was a first-year student majoring in Biochemistry and Cellular and Molecular Biology who planned to apply to medical school. He characterized himself as a successful student and was enrolled in the university’s honors program. He grew up in a Lutheran (ELCA) church and had not yet found a church near campus or joined a campus ministry. James was in a fraternity.

Joe was a first-year student majoring in Political Science who did not describe specific career plans. He characterized himself as a successful student. He grew up in a nondenominational evangelical church and attended a nondenominational evangelical church while at college.

Leesa was a first-year student majoring in Religious Studies who did not describe specific career plans. She described being a successful high school student and having trouble adjusting to undergraduate level coursework. She grew up in a Southern Baptist church but reported experiencing conversion since coming to the university. She was active in a church and
Michele was a first-year student majoring in Theatre who did not describe specific career plans. She characterized herself as a successful student who had not been fully prepared for undergraduate-level coursework. She grew up in a Southern Baptist church and attended a church affiliated with Sovereign Grace Ministries while at college.

Isabella was a first-year student majoring in Biochemistry and Cellular and Molecular Biology who planned to become a medical doctor. She characterized herself as a very successful student. She grew up practicing Islam until she had a conversion experience during her last year of high school through involvement with Young Life, a non-denominational Christian parachurch organization that engages in outreach to children, adolescents, and young adults. Although Isabella mentioned attending church, she described a campus ministry as her primary spiritual home. She was actively involved with Quest, a Young Life campus ministry that trains and engages college students in outreach to high school students.

Will was a first-year student who had not declared a major or career plans. He characterized himself as a successful student. He grew up in a non-denominational evangelical church. He was actively involved in a campus ministry and church affiliated with Sovereign Grace Ministries.

Jean-Luc was a third-year student majoring in Psychology who hoped to become a principal. He characterized himself as a successful student. He grew up in an interdenominational Christian church and was active with the on-campus United Methodist ministry house.
Rachel was a third-year student majoring in Psychology who planned to apply to doctoral programs in clinical psychology. She characterized herself as most academically successful within her major, but successful as a student overall. She had a mixed religious background: as a child she attended a Methodist church occasionally, though her parents had also explored Buddhism, and had no strong religious affiliations until she had a conversion experience in high school through her involvement with Young Life. Rachel attended a Presbyterian (PCUSA) church and was active in an evangelical campus ministry for fraternity and sorority members. Rachel was in a sorority.

Ember was a fourth-year student majoring in English who planned to attend law school. Ember characterized herself as a successful student and was enrolled in the university’s honors program. She transferred to the university from a community college in another Southern state at the beginning of her third year. Ember grew up in a high-control fundamentalist church and was no longer affiliated with any religious institution.

Morgan was a fourth-year junior who had switched his major from Exercise Science to Engineering and finally to Math and was unsure of his career plans. Morgan characterized himself as an unsuccessful student; he described having taken a semester off from the university during his second year to attend a community college and improve his GPA. He grew up in a Southern Baptist church and attended a Presbyterian (EPC) church occasionally at the time of the study. His primary religious affiliation was with an evangelical campus ministry for fraternity and sorority members. He also attended a Bible study at a nearby Presbyterian (PCUSA) church. Morgan was in a fraternity.
Multiple, Dynamic Evangelical Identities and Rhetorical Purposes

In our interviews, all participants except Joe described their faith as relevant to their academic writing. While participants experienced faith as relevant to the writing they did for college, inductive analysis of the interview data reveals that there is no single evangelical experience of or approach to academic writing. Although all participants identified themselves as evangelicals and their evangelical identities were confirmed by attitudinal and affiliation markers, they experienced being evangelicals in a variety of ways. The differences among participants’ understandings of their faith and experiences of being evangelicals are not minor, but marked and significant. Thus, this study describes multiple evangelical identities rather than a single evangelical identity and found that variations in evangelical identity were connected to differences in the ways these evangelicals engaged in academic writing.

Despite significant diversity, this study found that evangelical identity affects academic writing by constraining interpretations of salience and rhetorical awareness. Even though some participants might not have recognized each other as evangelicals and enacted their faith in academic writing in very different ways, evangelical identity affected their academic writing in predictable patterns. Figure 4.1 illustrates how evangelical identity shaped writers’ rhetorical purposes by influencing what they interpreted as interesting, important, and relevant (interpretation of salience) and constraining their sense of what was possible, appropriate, and effective in a given situation (rhetorical awareness).

In this chapter, I account for the variety of evangelical experiences with academic writing by analyzing three patterns of academic writing experiences through this model of relationships
Figure 4.1 How Evangelical Identities Shape Writers’ Rhetorical Purposes
between evangelical identities and rhetorical purposes. Specifically, I explain how various evangelical identities are connected to three seemingly dissimilar approaches to enacting faith in academic writing: arguing for sanctioned positions, experimenting with academic activism, and enacting integrated values. Before presenting these three patterns, I briefly define key concepts in this model of relationships between evangelical identity and rhetorical purpose.

**Interpretation of Salience**

Students’ purposes for writing are partially determined by how they interpret the importance and relevance of their academic writing to themselves and others. Three patterns of interpreting salience arose from the interview data and can be mapped onto two axes: perceived salience to self and others (see Figure 4.2).

**Low Salience**

Like other undergraduates, these evangelicals frequently interpreted academic writing situations as “just” school: salient neither to themselves nor others (see Figure 4.3). Low salience experiences occurred when participants perceived that the writing they were asked to produce would not affect others and when they felt disconnected from or uninterested in the topic. In these situations, participants were motivated to initiate and persist in the writing process by the desire to earn course credit and/or a good grade. Interpretations of low salience were strongly related to a participant’s perception that the instructor’s interests took precedence over their own. In these experiences, the topic was usually assigned rather than self-selected.

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5 The interviews revealed that other factors, including time management and social events, significantly constrained participants’ academic writing. However, evangelical identity exerted particular influence on writers’ rhetorical purposes at the outset of the writing process.
Figure 4.2 Axes of Salience

Figure 4.3 Low Salience Writing Experiences
High Salience

The second most frequent experience was of highly salient writing situations. This category of experiences includes situations when participants perceived the writing they were asked to produce as connected with their own interests and goals and having the potential to affect someone else (see Figure 4.4). In high salience academic writing situations, participants described an exigence for writing beyond earning credit or a grade and usually described a sense that the issue they were writing about was important for others, not just of interest to themselves.

Mixed Salience

The category of salience reported least frequently was participants’ experience of writing as salient only to themselves. This category of experiences includes situations when a participant perceived that the writing they were asked to produce connected with their own interests and goals but described no sense that this writing was salient to others (see Figure 4.5). When participants recounted mixed-salience academic writing situations, they usually described them as opportunities to learn, grow personally, or explore an interesting topic. Less frequently, participants experienced mixed-salience academic writing as opportunities to argue for their own opinions without any expectation of an audience who could respond to their arguments. In this category of experience, participants frequently commented that their audience was “just my professor.” The interviews did not reveal any experiences of salience to others, even instructors, without personal salience.

Rhetorical Awareness

Undergraduates’ purposes and the specific rhetorical choices they make while composing were also partially determined by their rhetorical awareness: their interpretation of the existence of a rhetorical situation, what was at stake in that situation, their agency and the agency of others.
Figure 4.4 High Salience Writing Experiences

Figure 4.5 Mixed Salience Writing Experiences
in that situation, and options for effective discursive interventions within that situation. More specifically, this study shows that evangelical identities influenced how evangelical undergraduates constructed their audiences and their awareness of what types of appeals were available and effective.

The interviews revealed, too, that factors besides evangelical identity constrained evangelicals’ rhetorical awareness. These evangelicals’ experiences in rhetorical situations on campus influenced their senses of what was possible and which appeals were most effective for audiences at a public university. Additionally, their prior experiences with academic writing constrained their interpretations of what was possible and appropriate within academic genres.

**Rhetorical Purpose and Activism**

Rhetorical purpose refers to a writer’s goals for academic writing or speaking. Participants frequently described multiple goals for the same academic situation, usually earning a high grade and sometimes achieving another, more personally fulfilling goal. Despite the variety of evangelical identities, most participants preferred academic writing situations that allowed them to positively affect others. When describing their experiences of being Christians at a public university, all participants indicated that they felt motivated to “live out” their faith in a variety of ways. I refer to this feeling of being motivated to bring their faith to bear beyond their interior lives and/or outside of their religious enclaves as activism, one of Bebbington’s four attitudinal “hallmarks” of evangelicalism. Evangelical activism has been defined capaciously as “the expression of the gospel in effort” and understood as a dual impulse to “enact one’s faith by working to meet physical needs and evangelize others” (Bebbington 2; Noll, “Future” 422). All participants described behaviors driven by evangelical activism; they described participating in a range of activist activities including relief work aimed at alleviating
suffering (e.g. building houses and serving meals to homeless people), mentoring high school students, and talking to others about their faith.

This study revealed that for these evangelicals, activism became a rhetorical purpose for academic writing. Most (nine out of ten) participants desired to engage in activism through their academic writing, but the ways that they approached academic activism varied widely. While some participants were motivated to write or talk about their faith directly, with the goal of converting others or arguing for their beliefs and faith-motivated positions on social issues, many more were moved to enact evangelical values through rhetorical interventions aimed at social justice or alleviating suffering, and several were motivated in both ways. These evangelicals did have non-activist purposes for their academic writing: they frequently described the purpose of their writing as completing the assignment and earning a high grade. Less frequently, these evangelicals engaged in academic writing to learn and explore. However, most participants desired to engage in activism through their academic writing whenever possible and described activist academic writing as highly satisfying. Their activist impulse influenced these evangelicals’ experiences of academic writing even when they end up choosing non-activist rhetorical purposes.

Evangelical Identity and Academic Writing: Three Patterns

I next describe the three clusters of evangelical identity and academic writing that emerged from the data, focusing on the ways evangelical identities constrain and support engagement in academic writing and speaking situations. Although I categorize participants according to their experiences at the time of the study, participants’ evangelical identities and approaches to academic writing were dynamic, not fixed or static. I present evidence that shows participants bumping up against the limitations of their approaches, failing to accomplish their
goals, and experimenting with new strategies. Throughout, I report findings that emerged strongly in the data but limit examples to a few representative quotations that help readers understand the phenomena being described from participants’ perspectives.

**Arguing for Sanctioned Positions**

I begin by presenting a pattern of evangelical identity and academic composing choices that emerged among first-year participants: arguing for sanctioned positions. Arguing for sanctioned positions is an adaptive practice that allows evangelicals to engage in activism in their academic writing without violating the perceived norms of academic discourse. Isabella and Michele described engaging with academic writing and speaking by arguing for positions within cultural debates that they viewed as the correct view for an evangelical Christian to hold (for example, “pro-abstinence” and “pro-life”) without explicitly invoking or citing evangelical values.6

Patterns in these participants’ experiences revealed that evangelicals who chose to argue for sanctioned positions had a received evangelical identity that was focused on “correct” belief and behavior. As a result, these evangelicals tended to engage in dualistic thinking, judging beliefs, behaviors, and positions as either good/true or bad/false in all contexts, which limited the range of topics that they interpreted as interesting and important (salient). This received evangelical identity, focused on behaving, also discouraged identification with those who believe or behave differently, which limited rhetorical awareness. These evangelicals strongly desired to engage in activist writing for college, so when they interpreted academic writing situations as

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6 While Isabella and Michele fit this pattern at the time of the study, Ember was a fourth-year undergraduate who described having approached academic writing in this way during her first semester yet changing her approach over time. I include Ember in my presentation of enacting integrated values and present evidence from Ember’s accounts at the end of this chapter to support the finding that some evangelicals’ approaches to academic writing evolved over time.
highly salient to themselves and others, they argued for sanctioned positions. When they were not able to write persuasively about their faith-motivated positions on social issues, they sought to earn a high grade and experienced faith as irrelevant to their low-salience writing. These relationships are illustrated in Figure 4.6.

**Received Evangelical Identity & the Salience of Academic Writing**

This group’s stories of composing academic texts suggests that when evangelical identity is focused on behavior, it constrains academic writing by limiting the range of topics that evangelicals interpret as interesting, important, or relevant to themselves and others. The most salient topics for these evangelicals were those connected to their behavioral norms and values. For Isabella and Michele, behavior was paramount to their experiences as evangelicals. Compared with other participants, even other first-year students, Michele and Isabella described holding to limited and prescribed beliefs. For example, Isabella described the content of her faith as “believ[ing] in God” and Michele summarized “what being a Christian means” to her as the “ABCs”:

> I was always taught that you have to say the prayer, the ABCs to be saved.

That’s pretty much what I believe I guess.

> What’s “the ABCs” again?\(^7\)

Admit, believe, confess. Admit to God you’re a sinner, believe that Jesus is God’s son, and confess your faith.

This simplistic formula for becoming a Christian showcases the ideological limitations of this received identity: it offered little theological substance from which these evangelicals could reason or develop ethical frameworks.

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\(^7\) Throughout, I italicize what I said during the interviews to distinguish it from what participants said.
Figure 4.6 Evangelical Identity and Arguing for Sanctioned Positions
These evangelicals assumed that there was a connection between evangelical beliefs and behavioral norms, but they rarely articulated those connections. They believed that behavior distinguished true believers from the rest and that anyone who confessed evangelical beliefs ought to have automatically behaved in ways that likeminded evangelicals sanctioned. Michele explained: “That’s [the ABCs] what I’ve always believed and the thing that I don’t understand is, some people they say the prayer and they end up continuing bad things a week later.” The “bad things” that Michele felt were incompatible with evangelical belief were swearing and drinking, but she did not explain how faith informed her choice not to swear or drink or her discomfort with others’ behaviors. Rather, Michele implied that the relationships between her faith, behaviors, and attitudes were self-evident. Similarly, when I asked Isabella, “What does your faith mean for your daily life?,” she emphasized behavior: “It controls a lot of the decisions I make. I think before I do things.” The “decisions” that were most concerning to Isabella were avoiding drinking and sex. Like Michele, Isabella implied that the relationship between her faith and beliefs about everything from drinking and sex were self-evident.

For evangelicals with limited and received beliefs, behavior is important because it is the primary marker of faith. When I asked Isabella what she thought about the evangelical commonplace that public universities are “dangerous” for young evangelicals, she replied, “If you have faith, you have it. I know a lot of people who have become atheist in college because they have too much fun, and just don’t give a crap anymore… and they’re like “screw it.”” From

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8 The only exception is Michele’s attempt to connect her “pro-life” speech to her beliefs and values, when prompted: *So… in this speech, can you tell me more about how your faith has to do with this speech?* The whole … I forgot what verse it is, but in the Bible, it’s like, “I knew you before I created you in the womb.” So that in itself, okay… so this person was already a person before they were even conceived, so I put it in there, the moment that they are conceived, it’s already a person, it will grow to become a person and every person is special in God’s eyes. We’re all created in God’s image so every person definitely deserves the chance to live. So that’s pretty much why I’m pro-life. I feel like a person is a person, no matter how small or how big.
Isabella’s perspective, rather than beliefs influencing values and behaviors, behavior determined belief and values.

Analysis of this group’s accounts of composing specific academic texts and speeches suggests that an evangelical identity focused on behavior filters interpretations of topics. Topics that these evangelicals could interpret as connected to their behavioral norms and values were frequently interpreted as salient. Table 4.1 lists all of Michele’s and Isabella’s accounts of specific academic writing situations. Michele and Isabella experienced high salience (interpreting their writing as interesting, important, and relevant to themselves and to others) when they selected their own topics and, in most cases, the topics they chose were related to sex (abstinence and abortion). Within these evangelicals’ behavioral focus, sex was not only highly visible but also relevant to themselves and others. Further, because it was central in current public debates, these evangelicals perceived sex-related topics as appropriate academic topics. Abortion and abstinence were also convenient academic topics because evangelical culture supplies authoritatively sanctioned positions for these writers to use.

Arguing for sanctioned positions in social debates connected to sex fulfilled these evangelicals’ desire for activism. At the time of the interview, Isabella was working on a persuasive paper for English Composition I and explained how working to persuade her peers to abstain from sex until marriage accomplished her goal of “spreading my faith”:

I’m abstinent and that’s a big part of my faith, as well. You want to be the person you want to be with in the future. You shouldn’t just do things that you know you’re going to regret in the future, even if you don’t regret it, you shouldn’t be

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9 Table 4.1 only captures participants’ stories of composing specific academic texts and speeches that were shared during the interviews. It does not account for all the writing these participants engaged in during college and does not portray their reflections on the salience of their academic writing in general.
okay with it because of my faith, of course, I believe that. […] I am abstinent because of my faith and my beliefs. That’s one of the reasons because by spreading my belief on abstinence, I feel like I’m spreading my faith because it’s part of my beliefs and it’s part of being a Christian.

Issues pertaining to sex, including abortion and abstinence, were highly salient topics for these evangelicals not only because they were interested in sanctioned and unsanctioned behaviors, but also because they viewed behavior as part of conversion and, therefore, experienced arguing for sanctioned positions as a means of evangelism.

Isabella’s and Michele’s accounts of composing specific academic texts and speeches (see Table 4.1) also reveal that their received evangelical identity did not help them interpret many academic topics as interesting or open for exploration. When evangelicals cannot reason from their theological beliefs, evangelical authorities and culture supply their values and behavioral norms. In the interviews, Isabella and Michele described believing that there was a set of correct, Christian positions on a range of topics and that these sanctioned positions were identical to their opinions and values. For Michele, abortion was one of the issues for which there was a single sanctioned Christian position. Her description of a conversation with her sister about conducting research on abortion captures this experience:

I would never say something against my value. When I was writing for the speech, my sister, she’s pro-choice and so she’s like, “Well you know if you do pro-choice, you can probably get more information on it,” but I’m like, “I don’t want to do something that I don’t believe in,” and so I definitely won’t write something that goes against Christianity […] I’m supporting the Christian side because I just can’t do that.
## Table 4.1 Isabella’s and Michele’s Accounts of Academic Writing Situations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (Frequency)</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Topic Choice</th>
<th>Writer’s Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low Salience: Not Salient to Self or Others</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michele (1)</td>
<td>qualitative research paper</td>
<td>participant did not describe</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>assignment completion and grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabella (1)</td>
<td>lab report</td>
<td>biology experiment</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>assignment completion and grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mixed Salience: Salient to Self, Not Salient to Others</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michele (1)</td>
<td>reading reports</td>
<td>novel about transitioning to college</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>assignment completion and grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabella (0)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High Salience: Salient to Self and Others</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michele (3)</td>
<td>archival research paper</td>
<td>history of women’s coeducation at the university</td>
<td>selected within parameters</td>
<td>raise awareness about history of women’s exclusion from higher education; inspire women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>research speech</td>
<td>abortion</td>
<td>self-selected</td>
<td>persuade undergraduate peers who did not have a position on abortion to oppose it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>persuasive paper</td>
<td>abortion</td>
<td>self-selected</td>
<td>persuade readers that abortion is wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabella (2)</td>
<td>rhetorical contextual analysis</td>
<td>racism on campus and in local community</td>
<td>self-selected</td>
<td>raise awareness about violence and racism that affects university students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>persuasive paper</td>
<td>abstinence</td>
<td>self-selected</td>
<td>argue for beliefs; persuade people to be abstinent and/or that arguments for abstinence are legitimate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Isabella believed that all religious traditions provide a single authorized position on a range of issues and that adherents of each faith adopt those positions:

On the paper I did right there, the [murder] trial. If I was probably of a certain faith, if I was … let me think. I would say if I was Indian [i.e. Hindu] and I had wrote that paper, I probably would have been like “this is a complete sin. We don’t even kill cows and you guys kill another person.” Then again or if I was something else [another faith] and certain people, they stone to death. I would have inputted that, that they should have been stoned to death or they shouldn’t have been let off for even being involved, or they should have been killed.

*You mean that the people who committed the crimes?*

Yes, the punishment. For each faith, punishment and the view of sins are different.

Isabella’s assumption that all religions provide specific moral guidance for any situation authorized her own received evangelical identity, which focused on correct belief and behavior. Her judgments about sexual behaviors were so universalized and strict that during the interview she blamed rape victims for not practicing abstinence, getting drunk, and wearing clothing that invited sexual attention. Although this misogynistic attitude likely derives from multiple sources, binary thinking also probably supported it. For some reason, Isabella’s belief that sex before marriage was universally wrong also implied that anyone who had sex—consensual or not—was blameworthy. Evangelical identity formations like Isabella’s, focused on correct belief and behavior, did not allow open-ended exploration of moral questions or issues.

Intriguingly, arguing for sanctioned positions was strongly correlated with “recycling.” For example, Michele first delivered a speech about abortion for her communications course and
then recycled that topic and research for an English 102 paper. Isabella explained that part of her motivation for choosing abstinence as her English Composition I paper topic was prior experience arguing for abstinence in high school: “for my research paper my junior year [of high school] I did ‘The Importance of Abstinence.’ I already have the background in it. […] I still have that paper. I brought it with me so I could use it for references.” Because arguing for sanctioned positions was correlated with recycling papers, it was also necessarily correlated with low levels of invention. In these situations, Isabella and Michele did not describe writing to explore or to learn more about the debates surrounding abortion or abstinence. Rather than conducting research to learn, they said they looked for research that supported the position they received or established prior to researching and writing.

Michele’s and Isabella’s accounts of high salience writing that did not address “sanctioned topics” suggest that while they preferred to engage with familiar topics, they may have been trying to integrate their faith with unsanctioned topics. Isabella attempted but failed to explain how her faith influenced and motivated her paper about racism on campus in the context of the rape, torture, and murder of two white students at the hands of four black perpetrators from the community. Although she expressed outrage that the university downplayed the frequency and consequences of racist acts on campus, she did not articulate connections between her faith and her sense of injustice. Rather, Isabella weakly connected her faith to a tangential issue raised by her paper: capital punishment for those convicted of murder. It is unclear whether Isabella’s faith was a source of her outrage and arguments about racism or to what extent other values and discourses motivated her activist writing.

Michele also recounted an experience of academic writing when she felt that her position was connected to her faith, but was unable to describe how. She described feeling interested in
her primary research into the history of coeducation at the university and feeling satisfied with 
the experience of writing the paper. Michele attempted to articulate her sense that this paper 
enacted a faith-motivated value:

So I guess how it [my faith] affects my writing, I don’t always put it in, it has … 
like with my co-education, doesn’t really go with that but if it has anything to do 
with my personal beliefs, then it will seep in there a little bit, in between the lines 
so it’s pretty much there most of the time.

*Uh-huh [affirmative], how would you say that it seeped into any of these 
papers?*

Coeducation, like the whole the woman is lower thing, how some men say 
they belong in the kitchen and all that stuff. I sort of pushed it in there a little bit, 
saying with the whole equality and …

*You feel that equality has something to do with what you believe?*

I don’t feel that the male is superior and the woman is on the bottom. I feel 
there is a difference because reading the Bible, it has specifically said that the 
man belongs in this part of the church and the woman in this part and if the Bible 
said that, I’m willing to accept that, okay, so the man is higher in a certain area. 
Okay, that’s fine with me, but in our world like where at school or in jobs, I feel 
equality is definitely a big deal so …

Michele’s unclear attempt to articulate connections between her faith and values was meandering 
and ambivalent but suggests that she was trying to integrate her felt values with a topic that she 
did not perceive as outside the borders of her faith system.
In these participants’ experiences, a received evangelical identity focused on correct behaviors filtered out many academic topics not only because it was narrowly focused on behaviors, but also because in a dualistic perspective very few problems are unsolved or open for ongoing investigation. However, as the next section will show, although Isabella and Michele were limited by their evangelical identity, the interviews did uncover moments when these evangelicals bumped up against the limits of their identities.

**Received Evangelical Identity & Rhetorical Awareness**

Evangelicals who argued for sanctioned positions described low levels of identification with nonevangelicals, which limited their rhetorical awareness. A received evangelical identity cut evangelicals off from those who behaved in unsanctioned ways. Isabella characterized fellow undergraduates negatively: “A lot of the kids here, you go out late at night to get food, you’ll see people walking around, in stripper heels and like just being crazy, people making out in random spots, it’s insane.” Later in the interview, Isabella’s tone became more understanding but she emphasized the tension she experienced between wanting to “fit in” and to distance herself from those who behaved in ways she did not approve of:

*Can you tell me what it’s like being a Christian on campus?*

Not easy at all. I know there’s good people here, but the majority of the time that’s not what you see, unless you talk to them. For the most part, you pay attention to the things that stand out to you, and what stands out to you are the people who do crazy things, the bad things and the funny things that shouldn’t be done. It makes you like “I don’t want to do that” or “Let’s do this.”

*Can you give me an example of the kind of things you’re talking about?*
I know a lot of people who got to college and they sleep around really bad. A lot. It’s like, “What are you doing?” and they think that it’s cool, and it makes them look really bad. A lot of people I talk to, they do that. They don’t think there’s anything wrong with it, but then there will be a few people I know that [say] “no we don’t” and it’s hard to find those.

This interview excerpt captures Isabella’s feeling of otherness, that she was mostly unlike her peers. It also suggests that Isabella’s perception of being surrounded by people who engaged in unsanctioned sexual behaviors motivated her to find peers who shared her behavioral norms.

Isabella socialized with undergraduates in her dorm and on her athletic team, but she also spent a lot of time in Christian enclaves. In addition to attending a worship service on Sundays, Isabella participated in a Bible study on Tuesdays and a campus ministry gathering on Wednesdays.

Michele’s interview also revealed low identification with fellow undergraduates, whom she characterized as troublemakers who antagonize Christians:

*What’s it like being a Christian on campus?*

It sometimes can be hard because, especially there’s a lot of trouble-making around here and a lot of people who like slander the Christian name. I remember seeing a video recently, a couple of days ago where a preacher was on the corner street. He was preaching there, everyone was making fun of him. It was like, “Oh, dear.” I’m proud to say that I’m a Christian and in some cases there are people who just really do not. […] They just don’t like Christians.

*Would you mind telling me a little bit more about the video that you were talking [about] and why you were sort of, a little upset by it?*
The way he was going about it, he was a little wrong because he was shouting and stuff. If he were just … he was saying … I don’t know. People were just laughing at everything he was saying. People were like, “Yes, ha ha. I’m not even going to class.” They were like saying, “Wow, this is hilarious.” Okay. I guess. They were cussing left and right at him.

Many of the study participants brought up the “crazy preacher” who had come onto campus that fall and sparked discussion among students. But Michele was the only participant who was upset by students’ reactions to the preacher rather than the preacher’s actions. Her account suggests that Michele’s identity as a Christian (“I’m proud to say that I’m a Christian”) demanded loyalty to other evangelicals, even an itinerant preacher who offended and shouted at students. In other words, Michele identified more strongly with the visiting preacher than with her undergraduate peers, considered as a group. Michele’s interview responses included little evidence of a social life at the university: she never mentioned friends and did not even describe socialization in a Christian enclave. Although she expressed a positive view of her church, she described only sporadic attendance.

Lacking identification with and experiential knowledge of their peers and instructors, Isabella and Michele worked to appeal to audiences that were more imagined than concrete. These evangelicals described crafting appeals targeted for their imagined peer audience. Isabella related her strategy of arguing for a faith-motivated position without explicitly invoking religious claims or warrants:

I’m going to persuade people by informing them of the STDs they can get and basically if they stay abstinent, that’s the only way they won’t get an STD. Like…honestly, contraceptives, they don’t always help. Pregnancies, they’re
going through the roof. The emotional trauma that comes with it, is it even worth it?

Here, Isabella listed two appeals that she believed would resonate with her imagined peer audience: avoiding sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies. But she did not explore appeals that are not based on avoiding negative consequences. It is possible that fuller identification with her peers would have enabled her to consider other appeals that might motivate non-evangelical undergraduates to delay sex.

Additionally, evangelicals who had low levels of identification with peers and instructors made rhetorical choices that were limited by their strict beliefs about academic discourse. These evangelicals described having learned that faith-based claims are not “allowed” in academic discourse and had developed the practice of arguing for sanctioned positions in order to engage in activism in their academic writing while conforming to perceived norms of academic discourse. Michele’s explanation of the ways her faith affected the writing and speeches she produced for coursework was similar to Isabella’s:

I am careful to not actually put it … actually, say, use the words “God” or “Christianity” in my paper, because my English teacher, she’s like … “Be sure when you write this, don’t put too much Christianity in it because it doesn’t matter to [the university] pretty much, not [university] students because it’s so diverse here” and I guess, don’t want to offend anyone so pretty much just have to talk about the issue itself. So it is hard, but I definitely do put under wraps my Christian values and how I feel just without using those words because I managed to say that speech [arguing against abortion] without using Christianity. I mentioned it once but I was just talking about my example of the teen moms and
their kids who turned out to have Christian values, so that’s the only time I mentioned it. I didn’t use it to back up how I felt on the abortion issue.

For Michele and Isabella, avoiding explicitly faith-based arguments was a means of fulfilling the assignment, a strategy aimed at satisfying instructors rather than persuading the peers they described as their primary audiences. From their perspective, arguing for sanctioned positions was an appropriate and successful strategy, one that was authorized by academic discourse.

**Experimenting with Academic Activism**

The second pattern of evangelical identity and academic composing choices that emerged among first-year participants was experimenting with academic activism. These young evangelicals desired to engage in activism through their academic writing but rarely experienced satisfaction with their attempts. Leesa and Will primarily understood activism as “sharing your faith” (i.e., explaining the tenets of evangelical belief and inviting others to affirm them) and perceived academic genres as ill-suited for that purpose. They also, for the most part, did not recognize other rhetorical purposes as sufficiently activist. As a result, although Leesa and Will were eager to perform their faith in academic writing situations, their approach to activism in academic writing was still inchoate: both were experimenting with a number of rhetorical purposes, trying to “find a way to talk about God” while working within the expectations of academic discourse (Leesa).

This experimentation with academic activism is connected to an emphasis on a private faith experience. Both Leesa and Will primarily experienced being evangelicals as having a personal relationship with God. Because they experienced God as an ever-present friend who was interested in every aspect of their lives, their evangelical identity supported their efforts to integrate their faith and learning. As a result, compared with the previous group, these
evangelicals interpreted a wider range of academic topics as interesting, if not important. Additionally, Leesa and Will were less concerned with changing other people’s behaviors and more interested in nudging others toward supernatural encounters with God. While these evangelicals strongly desired to engage in evangelism, they perceived that this purpose was incompatible with most academic genres and so chose alternative purposes for their academic writing. These relationships between a private evangelical identity and experimenting with academic writing are illustrated in Figure 4.7.

Private Evangelical Identity & Salience of Academic Writing

Leesa and Will’s accounts of composing specific academic texts suggest that a private, relationship-focused evangelical identity does not filter salience as narrowly as behavior-focused evangelical identity. Compared with evangelicals who argued for sanctioned positions in academic writing, Leesa and Will interpreted a wide range of academic topics as interesting. Leesa and Will experienced being Christians as having a supernatural relationship with God that influenced all areas of their lives, including their lives as students. Leesa’s account of her conversion narrated a shift from a familial and institutional experience of Christianity (she was raised in a Southern Baptist church) to an experience she characterized as supernatural:

Well, I became a Christian a couple of months ago. It was one of those gradual things to me. Like, I’m not one of those people who can tell you the exact date and time that it happened.

*Mm-hmm.*

It was just like, I could just feel that Jesus was changing my heart and that I mean I’ve changed a lot since I’ve been here because of that. I think the main changes happened in like, the end of August because I got involved in [reformed
Figure 4.7 Evangelical Identity and Experimenting with Academic Activism
Leesa came to experience faith as a relationship with God that she compared to a romantic relationship in terms of intimacy. From Leesa’s perspective, her conversion experience affected “everything,” including her awareness of God in daily life, interpersonal relationships, behaviors, and sense of purpose and motivation in college.

Will described a similarly relational and holistic experience of being a Christian. The word Will used to describe himself is “disciple,” which he defined as someone who is “following the ways of Christ” and “under the training of Him.” I asked Will to explain how he experienced this relationship on an average day:

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10 When presenting quotations from the interviews, I capitalize pronouns that refer to God. This is a very common convention among evangelicals for showing respect to God; I follow this convention when reporting the interview data out of respect for the participants.
I was going to say something about my actions like the things I do in a day, but being Christian isn’t just about doing certain things.

Every day… I love this time of year. For example, I’m walking outside and I just see the trees… the leaves changing color and every time I see something like that, I thank God for putting that beauty on this earth. I try to be really thankful for the small things. I try to live my day in gratitude and thankfulness just because if you were to dive into everything on this campus that is a gift from God… being able to get this room was a gift, that He even let us get a room that we could do this [interview] in. In my daily life, it’s fun for me to go throughout a day and just try to pick out everything, every small thing that is seemingly insignificant that God has done for me.

Every day I pray for opportunities to serve Him. I pray that I may be given ways to work for Him and do things for Him because I feel like that’s why I’m here on this earth is, again to glorify Him, make Him look good.

For Will, his private experience of a personal relationship with God somehow motivated or was connected to his rhetorical ambitions (i.e. making God “look good”). From Will’s perspective, his experience of being cared for by God motivated him to look for ways to “glorify Him” and “make Him look good” in all domains of his life; some of the specific ways Will described working toward this purpose included treating people with kindness and generosity, excelling as a student, and exploring career goals and majors that would support future activism.

Analysis of Leesa and Will’s accounts of composing specific academic texts suggests that a private, relationship-focused evangelical identity does not filter salience as narrowly as a received, behavior-focused evangelical identity. Compared with evangelicals who argued for
sanctioned positions in academic writing, Leesa and Will interpreted a wide range of academic topics as interesting. Table 4.2 lists all of Leesa’s and Will’s accounts of specific academic writing situations. When compared with data from the previous group (see Table 4.1), these data suggest that Leesa’s and Will’s private evangelical identities supported their engagement with a broader range of academic subjects than the received evangelical identity.

Leesa and Will both described experiences of engaging with assigned topics (experienced as salient to themselves); however, the only assigned topic that Leesa reported as salient to herself was research into her own major and career path for a First-Year Studies Course, not a disciplinary course. Additionally, Leesa frequently narrated experiences of declining salience as her writing processes unfolded. For example, Leesa described initially feeling excited to write about her favorite Beatles’ song for an English Composition I paper, but then admitted that she wrote the paper the night before it was due because she was having trouble managing her time. She reported being unsatisfied with the paper; the finished text was not salient to her. Leesa’s desire to engage in salient writing was sometimes undercut by her struggle to adjust to the demands of undergraduate-level coursework.

Will’s accounts of specific academic writing situations suggest that he only interpreted writing tasks as highly salient when topics that directly engaged religion were available. For example, although Will described satisfaction with his analysis of an opinion piece about poverty and felt that poverty was an important issue, he did not interpret this writing as highly salient and did not articulate an explicit connection between his interest in poverty and faith-motivated values. The only writing situation Will described as highly salient allowed him to engage in

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11 Table 4.2 lists all of the stories Leesa and Will told about specific academic writing situations during their interviews. This list does not describe all the writing these participants engaged in during college and does not portray their reflections on the salience of academic writing in general.
Table 4.2 Leesa’s and Will’s Accounts of Academic Writing Situations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (Frequency)</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Topic Choice</th>
<th>Writer’s Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low Salience: Not Salient to Self or Others</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leesa (2)</td>
<td>rhetorical analysis</td>
<td>argument for veganism</td>
<td>selected from list</td>
<td>completion/grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>persuasive paper</td>
<td>participant didn’t remember</td>
<td>self-selected</td>
<td>completion/grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will (2)</td>
<td>geography report</td>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>selected from list</td>
<td>completion/grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rhetorical analysis</td>
<td>an advertisement</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>completion/grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mixed Salience: Salient to Self, Not Salient to Others</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leesa (2)</td>
<td>contextual rhetorical analysis</td>
<td>song lyrics</td>
<td>self-selected</td>
<td>completion/grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>research report</td>
<td>student’s career aspirations</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>tell conversion experience; completion/grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will (2)</td>
<td>contextual rhetorical analysis</td>
<td>argument about poverty</td>
<td>self-selected</td>
<td>learn about important issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>lab reports</td>
<td>biology research</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>completion/grade; distance self from belief in evolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High Salience: Salient to Self and Others</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leesa (0)</td>
<td>persuasive paper</td>
<td>religious speech at public universities</td>
<td>self-selected</td>
<td>argue against banning religious free speech at public universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
persuasion and to write about a religious topic: religious free speech on public university campuses.

**Private Evangelical Identity & Rhetorical Awareness**

One striking characteristic that set Leesa and Will apart from the other participants was their awareness of a gap between their preferred approach to activism—explicitly talking about their faith—and their beliefs about what was appropriate for academic writing. Leesa and Will characterized the university campus as a “mission field” and desired to engage in service-oriented and evangelistic-oriented activism there. In fact, his activist impulse was the primary reason Will chose to attend a public university rather than a Christian college:

> I do think that at some point, as Christians you have to get out into the world and spread the gospel and serve people who need it. Jesus didn’t come to just save the Pharisees although they were [unclear] as well, but he was with the sinners and the tax collectors. People who need a relationship with the Lord or lack a relationship with the Lord are in dire need of it. I believe that we are called to do all that we can to try to cultivate a relationship like that with people who don’t have that. Being in a little bubble like that, being in a little bubble where you’re secluded from society, you probably would not have any opportunities like that. I think that we’re called to help and serve non-believers, so at some point we’re going to need to get out and do that.

Although Leesa and Will described approaching activism on campus through service and evangelism, they did not describe attempting to serve or evangelize others through their academic writing.
Both desired to write explicitly about their faith in academic situations but admitted that they could imagine few academic writing situations where such an approach would be appropriate. Leesa described sensing a mismatch between her activist goals and academic genre expectations:

I mean if it were up to me, then I would include the fact that I’m walking with Jesus in every paper that I wrote because I mean that aspect of my life is the most prominent. It’s … I try to stay a little cautious about it because I don’t … because I know some people, some teachers probably … they don’t … especially like, in analysis papers, they don’t really want you to talk about yourself.

For Leesa and Will, evangelical identity constrained their academic writing by limiting their interpretations of the salience of academic topics and genres. Because they understood faith as a private, personal experience, they believed it was excluded from academic genres, which they interpreted as not interested in the private or the personal.

The interview data provides evidence that these evangelicals may have interpreted self-exploration assignments as appropriate genres for writing about their faith. Leesa described her decision to write explicitly about her faith in a First-Year Studies paper that asked her to research her major and associated careers:

I wanted to mention that I was a Christian just because when I wrote that paper it was so new to me so I was like so excited and I still am. […] I usually, like if I’m ever writing something like that, I don’t really like to talk about religion that much because like you were saying, majority of teachers aren’t really religious or they’re often not Christians anyway, but I knew that she was a Christian, the
teacher, because she had already said it before. She’s just kind of one of those people that you can just kind of tell.

Okay.

I didn’t really … I wasn’t too cautious about voicing my religion but I kind of kept it to a minimum because I knew that wasn’t what the paper was supposed to be about.

Okay. Do you think you would have written that differently if you didn’t know that about your teacher?

Probably not.

While Leesa’s account suggests that her choice to write about her faith explicitly was partially authorized by her interpretation of the audience’s values, her statement that she would probably not have responded differently even with a different audience suggests that her interpretation of genre is more important than her assessment of the specific audience.

Genre expectations were also significant for Will. Will described the strategy he employed to successfully complete his biology lab reports while distancing himself from their evolutionary content:

Okay, we had a lab that was about phylogenies, which is where the origins of different organisms and where they came from. That’s specifically saying this has a common ancestor with this and essentially this evolved from this and this evolved from this, which obviously is not something that I believe. I think that God created all creatures in the seven days, but … okay I’m getting off track.

No, it’s fine.
People [other students in the class] talking about the phylogenies and things like that, they would just write about and say things like, “well these two organisms share a common ancestor with this. Then that’s where this whale came from was way back along the line there was a single cell bacteria and that eventually adapted and evolved into whatever we have here.” Just like in the beginning of the communication where you’re giving opening information about the topic, I just kind of refrained from saying things like that.

*What would you do instead?*

I say things like … I use the word “supposedly” a lot actually.

*Okay, putting a little distance.*

Right. I’m saying the same words, but I’m adding more to it like saying, “Scientists believe” or “some people think” or “this is supposedly what happened.” Things like that. I know my TA, my lab TA notices that because he’s underlined things before and he’s like, “No, this is true, it’s not supposedly,” but obviously I don’t agree with that. Mostly, I guess, that’s what it is, it’s just me adding little things that are saying this is what some people think, but not what I think.

*I see, yeah. You said your TA notices it? How are your grades, if I can ask?*

They’re not bad. It’s just, I think he … I don’t think that … it’s out of fifteen and I’ve gotten twelve and a half points, which is also one of the higher grades because these things are really hard to do. Yeah, I don’t think that it’s affecting my grade negatively by any means, but I would not feel satisfied, I
would not feel good about turning in a paper that had something like that. Most people probably wouldn’t even think that’s a big deal. You’re just quoting the biology book; this is what its saying. You’re just quoting this but I don’t know, I just don’t feel comfortable. I think that makes sense that I don’t feel comfortable about saying something that is, I don’t know, going against what I believe about God and what He’s done, so yeah.

In spite of his strong rejection of evolution, which he regarded as self-evidently incompatible with evangelical belief, Will chose to work within the framework of a biology lab report. He did not write a polemic, but sought to accomplish the purposes of a lab report while distancing himself from the assumptions guiding the lab. Will’s distancing strategy was simultaneously defensive, a way of protecting his evangelical identity, and activist. Creating distance within the lab report genre allowed him to complete the assignment and earn passing grades, but he never indicated that his purpose was to persuade his TA to reconsider his beliefs.

In addition to exhibiting high awareness of academic genres and conventions, Leesa and Will are sensitive to the campus context. Evangelicals who experience faith primarily as a private relationship with God value the ability to appeal to nonevangelicals more than evangelicals whose faith is organized by behaviors. Leesa and Will described mixed experiences of peer identification; while they both feel put off by nonevangelicals’ behaviors, they believed it was important to socialize with nonevangelicals. Leesa and Will were sensitive to the fact that some evangelicals withdraw into Christian enclaves, solidifying perceptions of evangelicals as aloof and judgmental. Both were immersed in the same Christian enclave but also described intentionally socializing outside of the large campus ministry and church that sponsored it. Will participated in activities connected to this campus ministry and church five days a week: church
on Sundays, a special worship service for college students on Mondays, campus ministry small groups on Tuesdays, campus ministry large group meeting on Thursdays, and church small groups on Fridays. Leesa was involved in many of these activities. However, their faith and the campus ministry and church’s emphasis on evangelism motivated them to build and maintain relationships outside of these enclaves.

One of the ways Leesa identified and socialized with her peers is through football. She described herself as a lifelong fan of the university’s football team and her choice to attend the university was partially motivated by her team pride. She described her mixed experience of peer identification in the context of football games:

Well, it’s hard sometimes because, I mean honestly, there’s not that many Christians in college and it’s just… See, I can kind of understand because I used to be as crazy as the majority of the people here are. Like okay, at the football games, I have a problem with football games because I mean, I’ve always been a huge football fan, right?

_Yeah. Yeah._

Then I go to these games and I’m constantly hearing people like, every other word is like G-D or the F word. It’s like constantly cussing.

_Yeah._

Everyone is plastered and I’m just like, “How can you even enjoy the game if you are so drunk you don’t even know what’s going on?” I don’t know. That’s really hard for me but I guess it’s getting better slowly but surely.

_Tell me what’s hard about that._
It’s … I don’t know. I feel like, it’s just hard for me to put up with it. Like, I want to say something to them really bad and I know that it would just make it worse. It’s because they don’t understand and I don’t know. It’s hard for me to be around that now that I’m not that way. Honestly, I think that’s something that God has gifted me with just because I never would have been that way before. I thought that … because before I thought I was a Christian. I didn’t really understand what being a Christian was.

Okay.

Then after I was saved, I was like, “Wow. This is what it’s really like.” I don’t know. It’s just, because it used to, I wouldn’t be like I’ve always believed in God. I’ve always been … I’ve always prayed and stuff like that but there just wasn’t really that feeling behind it. There wasn’t really that, “I know that this is working,” kind of thing, used to like, I would be around friends that and I was the same way, I used to cuss and drink and everything but I had told myself that if I were to become a legitimate Christian, that I wouldn’t push away my friends that weren’t. It’s hard for me not to because God has changed my heart in that way.

Like Isabella and Michele, Leesa was influenced by evangelical behavioral norms. However Leesa and Will perceived having a supernatural relationship with God as more important than conformity to social norms and they interpreted behavioral change as resulting from a supernatural power, not primarily their own efforts. Unlike Isabella and Michele, Leesa and Will did not expect nonevangelicals to behave according to evangelical norms and they were able to engage and identify more fully with their nonevangelical peers.
Because they were engaged with and sensitive to their peer context, Leesa and Will were aware of the fact that negative stereotypes of evangelicals constrained their ability to be heard and to be rhetorically effective on campus. Like many of the participants in this study, Will talked about the ways that a particularly virulent street preacher was affecting the campus environment that fall:

He was representing Christianity and that’s what sucks because he was making Christians and Christianity and… making it look bad. That just sucks for unbelievers to see that and to get that kind of view and ideology of what Christians are like. That’s, I don’t know, a stereotypical thing. Like preachers yelling at people saying, ‘You’re going to hell and these are all the things you’re doing wrong and you’re horrible people.’ I’ve heard people joke and say things like that before, just about Southern preachers or something, but I’ve never actually witnessed anything like that. This guy was going ballistic. I just really didn’t like that because of how it made us as Christians look and how it made Christianity look. There are people that try to talk to him and were trying to be kind and loving…speak to him, but call him out and say like, ‘Dude, you’re totally off.’

You mean like Christians were trying to talk to him?

Yeah and just by the things they were saying, you could tell these people are Christians and they’re trying to just get this conversation going somewhere. I just really didn’t ... There are videos up on YouTube of it and I’ve watched those. And I walked past it and I watched it for a little bit when it was actually going on during class or going from classes. It was just really… I guess, just because of
that image that it created for Christianity… like that, that just kind of sucked because this thing… pretty much everyone on campus knows about this.

Michele interpreted this same situation through a binary lens, assuming that there was one right side (Christian) and one wrong side (nonchristian), and chose to identify with the street preacher. But Will was more able to separate his judgments about the consequences of the preacher’s rhetoric from his identification with the preacher as a fellow Christian. The differences in the way undergraduates with a received evangelical identity and a private evangelical identity interpreted and responded to this same situation reveal a connection between evangelical ways of knowing and rhetorical awareness. Isabella’s and Michelle’s binary and universalizing thinking was correlated with relatively low levels of rhetorical awareness. Leesa’s and Will’s experience of faith as a personal relationship with God and their sense that their actions and words somehow reflected on God made them more focused on their ethos and more rhetorically aware.

Will was able not only to evaluate the preacher’s rhetorical effectiveness but also to interpret appropriately the street preacher’s presence and ensuing campus controversy as a kairotic moment, a good opportunity to write about something that was important to him:

As I said, especially for non-believers, this is going to make, I don’t know, them not have … people not have a good image or a good perspective. That is kind of why I want to try to write about it and why I thought it was important.

Will took the opportunity of the campus rumblings about the street preacher to write a persuasive English Composition I paper about the controversy over religious free speech at public universities. Will planned to argue in favor of religious free speech but also felt that writing a paper acknowledging that many preachers who visit public university campuses are offensive could, like the Christians who confronted the preacher on the sidewalk, serve to counteract such
negative stereotypes of evangelicals. Will’s English Composition I assignment was the only academic writing situation that he described as highly salient (see Table 4.2). But Will’s experience of highly salient academic writing is significant because it shows an evangelical with an inchoate approach to academic activism accomplishing his activist rhetorical purpose in a way that simultaneously enacted evangelical and academic values.

**Enacting Integrated Values**

The final and most frequently occurring pattern of evangelical identity and academic composing choices that emerged from this study was enacting integrated values, choosing to enact faith-motivated values in ways that also enact the values of a particular academic discourse community. Enacting integrated values is a successful rhetorical practice that allows evangelicals to engage in activism in their academic writing while contributing to academic discourse communities. Half of all participants (five out of ten) described taking this approach to academic writing. Ember, Jean-Luc, Morgan, and Rachel were advanced undergraduates (in their third or fourth years of undergraduate coursework). James was the only one who described enacting integrated values in his first year. And, as we saw in the last section, enacting integrated values was the approach Will took to his persuasive paper about religious speech at public universities.

Patterns in these participants’ evangelical identities and composing choices revealed that evangelicals who chose to enact evangelical and academic values in their academic writing had an individuated evangelical identity that provided an ethical framework for interpreting and responding to experiences in multiple ways. This individuated evangelical identity was flexible and suffused most domains of life. As a result, these evangelicals interpreted a wide range of topics as interesting and salient. This individuated evangelical identity also encouraged identification with others, which supported rhetorical awareness and the ability to make context-
specific judgments. While these evangelicals strongly desired to engage in activist writing and speaking, they engaged in a wider range of rhetorical purposes than the other groups of participants. When they interpreted academic writing situations as highly salient, they enacted evangelical and academic values, but they also were satisfied with mixed-salience writing that allowed them to write to learn, play, or explore. The influence of individuated evangelical identity on rhetorical purposes for academic writing is illustrated in Figure 4.8.

Throughout this section I present data from interviews with Ember, James, Jean-Luc, Morgan, and Rachel to describe the relationship between individuated evangelical identity and enacting values. Although Morgan described wanting and trying to enact values in his academic writing, he emerged as an outlier in this group because he struggled academically and was less successful and less satisfied with his writing. Morgan’s approach might best be characterized as trying but failing to enact integrated values.

**Individuated Evangelical Identity and Salience of Academic Writing**

Like Leesa and Will, this group experienced being Christians fundamentally in terms of a relationship with God that influenced all areas of their lives, including schooling. Importantly, though, for these evangelicals having a direct connection with God was an empowering experience that released them from other authorities and even allowed them to question evangelical norms and sanctioned positions. This ability to question sanctioned positions supported these evangelicals’ ability to engage with many topics and issues and experience a wide range of academic writing as satisfying.

This group strongly contrasted having a relationship with God with participating in evangelical church culture. Rachel’s conversion narrative highlights this distinction:
Figure 4.8 Evangelical Identity and Enacting Integrated Values
I came to Jesus, I guess, my salvation, whenever I was a senior in high school and it’s not that I didn’t grow up in the church, it’s just I didn’t develop a relationship with Christ until then. College has been a huge faith journey for me. […] I feel like there’s a very big difference in striving to know Christ versus striving to know what the church says and really developing what God and Jesus are telling you personally and allowing that faith to grow.

When she distinguished “what the church says” from “what God and Jesus are telling you personally,” Rachel is enacting evangelicalism’s persistent antinomian impulse, which authorizes personal judgments. Rachel had come to see her experiences and choices as valid even without the authorization of church culture. Ember, James, Jean-Luc, and Morgan all echoed Rachel’s experience of having a relationship with God that was individual and not always understood or affirmed by other evangelicals.

Ember’s account of the aftermath of her choice to leave a high-control church, which she characterized as a cult, reveals how a relational faith experience supports the development of an individuated identity:

After leaving [a high-control church], I went through an incredibly difficult time in my faith, because I had come to recognition that my relationship with God depended on me, and not what someone else told me. I did seriously question for months if there was a God, because how could we have gone through this, and taking science class is in studying sociology and psychology, and philosophy especially makes you question of course. Eventually, it kept coming back to the fact that if there wasn’t a God, how could I have this relationship? There is an inescapable relationship and bond that I have with this being, this entity that no, I
can’t tell you what He looks like, or how He expresses Himself and She, I believe there is a serious feminine aspect to God.

I’ve had people tell me, “Well, I don’t believe there is a God because I don’t hear Him speak.” I think He does speak to all of us every day. We just don’t always understand the language. I realized that I do, and every day even when I was in doubt, I would see God speaking to me through that intimate language that only you understand. Of course, I never had that access before because I always tried to go through a pastor to reach Him. […]

After leaving the church, I’ve grown so much closer to God. Instead of depending on prayer to reach Him, or depending on the Bible to reach God, I don’t feel like I have to reach out at all. I feel He is with me every day everywhere I go. I don’t even have to give it a second thought, because He is just there.

For Ember, a relationship with God released her not only from the authority of her controlling pastor, but also from evangelical practices (such as prayer and Bible reading).

A relational faith identity was strongly connected to individuation and development.

Jean-Luc’s critique of a Christian culture that raises children with shallow, received faith explicitly presents this concern with developing and adulthood:

[…] a lot of Christians too blame universities for Christians falling away from their faith and becoming agnostic or atheist or whatever. It’s my experience that we should not be placing blame on universities for converting Christians into non-believers but rather the blame should be on ourselves for not rearing those kids in Christian values that are meaningful and have substance and depth because it has
been my experience that those Christians who have decided to fall away from their faith in college, a lot of those Christians, the values that they grow up with didn’t really have a lot of depth.

What I mean by that is a lot of these Christians who have fallen away from their faiths in college, they were told what to believe as children rather than allowing them the opportunity to think for themselves. They felt like their faith was shoved down their throat and they didn’t really have any options or any choices. They didn’t feel like they had the opportunity or that they were allowed to think for themselves and develop on their own.

While Jean-Luc was among the more articulate in this group, his conceptualization of the differences between received faith and a more considered and individual commitment is characteristic within this group of evangelicals.

These evangelicals perceived themselves as questioning received beliefs, values, and behavioral rules and arriving at their own. They frequently articulated ways their Christian beliefs were connected to their values and guided their behaviors. A common issue that came up across all three groups was drinking. Many participants reported grappling with the received behavioral prohibition against drinking, which is especially prevalent in Southern evangelicalism because of the influence of the Southern Baptist Convention, a denomination that does not allow church members to drink. For example, both Morgan and Rachel, who were members of a fraternity and a sorority and were leaders in a campus ministry for Greek students, considered their ability to make their own decisions about how their faith was relevant to their behaviors (especially drinking and sex) as important to their sense of becoming adults. Morgan’s narrative
of his development emphasized moving away from received beliefs and behavioral guidelines toward arriving at his own faith-informed values:

I started out… I’ve always grown up in church, just like the majority of good Southern boys that do what they’re supposed to do. I grew up in church.

What kind of church?

I grew up in a Baptist church so I was, “Dancing was wrong. Don’t ever drink. Don’t ever do anything.” And that’s not necessarily what I agree with or believe in now. […]

You know, the arguments between denominations where they say, baptizing by dunking or by sprinkling or something like that, that doesn’t make anyone wrong. It just means that they’re worshiping in a different way and that’s fine. There’s places in the Bible where people worship different ways and there’s not a set way to worship and there’s not a set, there’s nowhere in the Bible that says “thou shalt not drink alcohol.” There’s no commandments like that. People have taken those things … I think that once you get to college you have a chance to develop your own ideas. I think there’s definitely people who it’s a sin for them to drink and I think those are the people, when they drink it takes away from their relationship with God.

Morgan chose to drink moderately, which he believed did not detract from his relationship with God, and his account reveals that he had begun to interpret a range of sanctioned positions and behavioral norms as cultural traditions rather than absolute values.

These participants also articulated how their beliefs and values shaped their choices as academic writers. Ember’s account of writing a paper about imprisonment rates and the war on
drugs explicitly connected her rhetorical purpose—to argue for the dignity of people regarded as worthless—with her beliefs about the character and actions of God:

I wrote that paper because I have a very good family friend who is in prison for murdering his wife. […] It’s a strange place to be, because you can love that person despite something atrocious they might have done. I wanted to dignify the prisoner and the inmate. […] I wanted to give some dignity to this man, because I think all too often in certain aspects of our society, we can quote the statistics, and say, “Oh yes. That’s life,” but we don’t really pay attention to what they’re going through. I think God does.

I really think that He wouldn’t mind if their voice was heard. I want their voice to be heard in writing the paper like that. It’s a dark and serious paper, but you are expressing, you are opening your mouth for the dumb, and the voice of those who cannot speak. You’re trying to communicate something that someone else can’t. I think that’s what God does for us. That’s what Jesus did for us by dying for us, and so the idea of giving God credit for being loving is that same idea. Exposing brutality and opening your mouth for people who can’t is doing what Jesus did.

Resisting a simplistic, binary view of convicted criminals as bad, Ember’s paper interpreted criminality as a social phenomenon cultivated through widespread racism rather than the result of an individual’s bad character. Ember’s perspective departs from the individualism that some evangelicals take as a given and allowed her to interpret the Christian gospel as authorizing a critique of racism as a systemic sin.
This ability to question sanctioned positions supported these evangelicals’ ability to engage with topics and issues that other evangelicals might interpret as settled and clear. Analysis of this group’s accounts of composing specific academic texts (represented in Table 4.3) revealed that participants who engaged in activism by enacting values had a wide range of satisfying academic writing experiences.\(^\text{12}\)

Overall, this group experienced higher levels of salience (interpreting their writing as salient to themselves and to others) when they selected their own topic. However, the data suggest that Ember, James, Jean-Luc, and Rachel, who described themselves as academically successful and took the enacting integrated values approach, were satisfied with writing situations that they interpreted as having low salience because they valued successfully completing the assignment and earning high grades. The participants in this group for whom low salience writing was their most frequently reported experience were James (a first-year student) and Morgan (who described himself as an unsuccessful student).

All five participants in this group described experiences of being able to engage with assigned topics or topics selected from a list provided by an instructor as salient to themselves, suggesting that they were interested in or became interested in course-related topics. This group’s accounts of mixed-salience writing demonstrate that these evangelicals were curious; they frequently described writing to learn as an appropriate and satisfying purpose for writing.

These evangelicals’ curiosity and interest in academic topics was connected to their evangelical identity. Evangelicals in this group described being Christians as an experience that suffused many, if not all, domains of life. Rachel succinctly described a holistic experience when

\(^{12}\) Table 4.3 lists all the stories that Ember, James, Jean-Luc, Morgan, and Rachel told about specific academic writing situations during their interviews. Table 4.3 does not account for all of the writing that these participants engaged in during college or their reflections on the salience of their academic writing in general.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (Frequency)</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Topic Choice</th>
<th>Writer’s Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low Salience: Not Salient to Self or Others</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ember (0)</td>
<td>anthropology field notes</td>
<td>undergraduate hookah smoking culture</td>
<td>self-selected</td>
<td>completion/grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>discussion post</td>
<td>experience conducting field research</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>completion/grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rhetorical analysis</td>
<td>argument against bottled water</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>completion/grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>letter of introduction</td>
<td>personal experiences</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>extra credit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>lab report</td>
<td>experiment on skulls</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>completion/grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James (5)</td>
<td>midterm essay exam</td>
<td>business ethics</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>completion/grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>article review</td>
<td>the educational paths of sports agents</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>completion/grade</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>primary source analysis</td>
<td>a historical primary source</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>completion/grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>article review</td>
<td>a historical primary source</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>completion/grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>literature review</td>
<td>advertising and marketing ethics</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>completion/grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean-Luc (0)</td>
<td>book report and response</td>
<td>feminist qualitative study of working mothers</td>
<td>selected from list</td>
<td>completion/grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>persuasive argument</td>
<td>general education requirements</td>
<td>self-selected</td>
<td>completion/grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>book report</td>
<td>a novel</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>completion/grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>book report</td>
<td>Holocaust photography</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>completion/grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel (4)</td>
<td>analysis speech</td>
<td>a non-profit’s ad campaign</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>competition</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>informative speech</td>
<td>a non-profit</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>competition</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>literary analysis</td>
<td>a short story</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>challenge self, understand another perspective</td>
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<td>Mixed Salience: Salient to Self, Not Salient to Others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ember (3)</td>
<td>contextual rhetorical analysis</td>
<td>female genital mutilation</td>
<td>selected from list</td>
<td>completion/grade</td>
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<td>James (1)</td>
<td>research paper</td>
<td>prayer in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity</td>
<td>self-selected</td>
<td>learn about other faiths</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>case study</td>
<td>ethical dilemma in a novel</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>enact and integrate value (love) with academic content</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jean-Luc (2)</td>
<td>article review and class presentation</td>
<td>whistleblowing</td>
<td>selected from list</td>
<td>learn about ethics; completion/grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant (Frequency)</td>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Topic Choice</td>
<td>Writer’s Purpose</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rachel (2)</td>
<td>personal response to video</td>
<td>living art depicting the Holocaust</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>learn about important topic</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>short position papers (4)</td>
<td>religious studies topics</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>enact values (family); learn about own faith and other Christian traditions</td>
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<td>Ember (4)</td>
<td>persuasive speech</td>
<td>genetically modified food</td>
<td>self-selected</td>
<td>raise awareness about issue; enact value (caring for environment) by arguing against GMOs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>literary analysis</td>
<td>a poem</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>enact values by providing alternate interpretation of poem; motivate professor to reconsider poem’s meaning</td>
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<td>research paper</td>
<td>incarceration rates and the “war on drugs”</td>
<td>self-selected</td>
<td>enact values by “bringing dignity” to those with less power in society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>literary analysis</td>
<td>a poem</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>enact values by “bringing dignity” to victimized woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James (2)</td>
<td>discussion posts</td>
<td>current class topics</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>contribute to class conversations; help continue positive discourse about controversial issues</td>
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<td>debate</td>
<td>health care reforms</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>promote deliberation about healthcare policy; promote values (relief and equity) by exploring ways to improve healthcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean-Luc (2)</td>
<td>persuasive argument</td>
<td>same-sex parenting rights</td>
<td>self-selected</td>
<td>enact values by arguing for same-sex parents’ rights</td>
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<td></td>
<td>position paper</td>
<td>the debate over same-sex parents’ rights</td>
<td>self-selected</td>
<td>enact values by raising awareness about discrimination; learn more about an important issue</td>
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<td>Morgan (0)</td>
<td>persuasive paper</td>
<td>organic food movement</td>
<td>self-selected</td>
<td>persuade people that the benefits of organic food are over-hyped and costs are unreasonable</td>
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<td>Rachel (3)</td>
<td>research proposal</td>
<td>salivary habituation</td>
<td>self-selected</td>
<td>learn about existing research on eating disorders and design study; enact values by improving eating disorder treatments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IRB application</td>
<td>proposed study of salivary habituation</td>
<td>self-selected</td>
<td>receive approval to begin research project on salivary habituation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
she said, “[I]t [faith] affects everything I do.” Importantly, her faith not only affected her schooling, but motivated it. Activist career goals helped Ember, James, Jean-Luc, and Rachel integrate faith and schooling and develop integrated identities. All four described professional aspirations (as a lawyer, a doctor, a principal, and a clinical psychologist) that fulfilled evangelical activism by helping others. Even Morgan, who had not decided on a career path and was struggling academically, was hoping that finishing college would help him get a job that would allow him to financially support activism if not directly engage in it. Rachel described the integration of values and career goals as a feeling of “calling” that motivated her academic work:

I really have always had the desire to help people. Now, what does that mean? Everyone wants to help people. I have had this thought process of helping people with eating disorders, whether that be binge eating, bulimia or anorexia, I’ve just always had this want to do that. The more I looked into it, the more I realized we just don’t know anything about these. These are so new. Anorexia has been around for a while, but binge eating disorder and some of the other ones, there’s not a lot of research and if I could help come up and define therapies to help these individuals with these disorders that are potentially really harmful and destructive to their lives, I feel like that could be a fulfillment and a role that I could help set the milestone for further research and to help people along the way within counseling.

I like the three dynamics of it, teaching, research and counseling with Clinical Psych that I get to do. I’ve been working with a professor on obesity interventions before the lap band surgery and I feel like I’ve grown so much. I’ve
learned so much and it’s a way that I can use what my God-given talents […] I do like academics and I do like to study and to learn and to be in school. By her third year of undergraduate coursework, Rachel had developed a strong academic identity. She was motivated not only to pursue Clinical Psychology as a career, but also to apply for an opportunity to work with one of her professors on a research project. At the time of the interview, Rachel was revising her proposal for the Institutional Review Board. Ember and James also demonstrated strong academic identities and spoke as members of disciplinary discourse communities.

While Rachel’s evangelical identity motivated her to become deeply immersed in a scholarly discourse community, Jean-Luc’s motivated him to become part of a campus discourse community that focused on social issues: the LGBTQ community and allies. Jean-Luc cited the “greatest commandments” to summarize how he interpreted the nature of his faith and described why his faith affected many areas of his life:

To me, being a Christian … A lot of has to do with just love because that’s the first and greatest commandment kind of a thing is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself. With those two in mind, that to me would be what it really means to be a Christian, is just to love one another because, especially in a world that we live in today, I think that we could definitely, as a society do a lot better job of loving one another.

Jean-Luc’s description of Christian priorities emphasizes the way that loving God engages all aspects of the self—heart, soul, mind, and strength—as well as a person’s relationship with others. For Jean-Luc, and the other evangelicals in this group, the call to “love one another” had
personal as well as political meanings and motivated him to become an LGBTQ Ally. Jean-Luc’s evangelical and Ally identities were intertwined and the campus LGBTQ community became the primary discourse community he engaged with through his academic writing (see Table 4.3).

Analysis of this group’s stories of specific academic writing experiences (Table 4.3) also revealed that enacting integrated values occurred most frequently when academic writing was interpreted as highly salient and when topics engaged ongoing public debates (environmentalism, “the war on drugs,” healthcare reform, LGBTQ rights). High salience writing was also less strongly correlated with topics that circulate primarily in disciplinary communities (e.g. literary studies and abnormal psychology). The fact that Morgan was the only participant in this group who did not report an experience of engaging in highly salient academic writing suggests that the ability to enact values in academic writing may be connected to academic success and an academic identity that allows writers to engage in academic writing as a member of an academic discourse community, whether a disciplinary community, a classroom community, or a student organization.

**Individuated Evangelical Identity and Rhetorical Awareness**

Evangelicals who enacted integrated values described high levels of identification with others, which supported their rhetorical awareness and ability to write as members of an academic discourse community. These five participants all strongly identified with nonevangelicals and saw themselves as more like others than unlike them. James, Jean-Luc, Morgan, and Rachel strongly identified with their peers, relating feelings of closeness with and experiences of being part of a group of peers both in high school and college. Morgan’s description of himself and his friends on campus captures this sense of being typical college students:
Being a Christian doesn’t mean that you’re going to make the right decisions all the time. […] We’re not by any means any kind of like religious or moral standards or beacons at the university. I just think for the most part, we’re normal kids.

Although Ember did not recount any specific stories of peer socialization outside of the classroom, she strongly identified with her classmates and instructors. After relaying several examples of how college instructors demonstrated care and kindness toward her, Ember concluded, “Christians don’t have the patent out on love.” These evangelicals also identified with people in other religious traditions. For example, James described his experience meeting a more diverse group of people at the University as confirming similarities among them:

When you go to college, especially from a small town like I am, everybody has the same viewpoints, ideas, it’s very conformed. At [the University] when you get people from everywhere and not just other forms of Christians but other religions and stuff you’re not accustomed to. You begin to see just overruling principles that everyone has. It’s just like everyone is to a certain extent a very good person.

Like James, these evangelicals welcomed encounters with diverse people and points of view and left these encounters with a sense of shared values.

Because these evangelicals identified with others, they were able to identify values that were relevant to themselves and others. Table 4.4 lists the faith-motivated values that participants in this group believed they had successfully enacted in academic writing.¹³

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¹³ While these participants articulated additional values that they believed motivated their academic writing generally, Table 4.4 presents data only from participants’ stories of writing specific papers. Morgan does not appear on this table because he did not describe any specific experiences of successfully enacting faith-motivated values in writing.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faith-Motivated Value</th>
<th>How Participants Enacted Value in Academic Writing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sexual innocence (Ember)</td>
<td>• arguing for an alternate interpretation of a poem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>caring for the environment (Ember)</td>
<td>• arguing against GMOs</td>
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<tr>
<td>human dignity (Ember)</td>
<td>• exposing social factors that influence incarceration of black men</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• arguing that a poet victimizes a women in his portrayal of her</td>
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<tr>
<td>respectful deliberation (James)</td>
<td>• respectfully contributing to debates on class discussion forums</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• encouraging peers to enact positive discourse about controversial issues on class discussion forums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relieving suffering (James and Rachel)</td>
<td>• researching ways to improve healthcare policies (James)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• designing and conducting research study aimed at improving eating disorder treatments (Rachel)</td>
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<tr>
<td>love (Jean-Luc)</td>
<td>• arguing for same-sex parents’ rights</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• raising awareness about discrimination against LGBTQ community</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• researching LGBTQ points of view about same-sex parenting</td>
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In some cases, evangelicals enacted faith-motivated values that were identical to the values of their academic discourse communities. For example, relieving suffering is not only an evangelical impulse (activism), but also an explicit value of medical and psychological research. Sometimes these evangelicals enacted faith-motivated values that were not identical with academic values but which they believed were compatible. For example, Jean-Luc articulated his faith-motivated value as “love,” which was compatible with the LGBTQ community’s values of tolerance and acceptance. Even though Ember attempted to enact her value of “sexual innocence” by resisting a dominant interpretation of a poem, she worked to appeal to her instructor’s disciplinary values by also arguing for multiplicity and relativism.

Strong identification with others not only helped these evangelicals identify audience values, but also increased their awareness of the ways their own evangelical identity limited their rhetorical effectiveness. The enacting integrated values approach to activism is connected to rhetorical awareness and reflection. Ember, James, Jean-Luc, Morgan, and Rachel described being aware of negative stereotypes of evangelicals and frustrated with evangelicals who create negative perceptions of Christians.

James emphasized the way stereotypical evangelicals negatively affected his experience as a Christian on campus:

*What’s it like being a Christian here at UT?*

It just becomes difficult when you see people on the streets that aren’t part of the University coming in and yelling at students about Christianity and a lot of people begin to start thinking that they’re representatives of our faith and it’s not really that way but you can’t really stand up to them and tell them no because then you’re just as bad as them because you’re a hypocrite and you’re not supposed to
pull the plank from another’s eye before you pull the splinter from your own. Or something.

_You’re talking about the guys who stand out on the walkway?_ 

I’m not super crazy about them. I don’t support them very much. That reflects badly. It makes you embarrassed to say that you’re associated with them and you get really defensive and you’re like they do not represent all of us…

For James and the others in this group, enacting faith rather than proclaiming it allows them to counter negative perceptions of Christians:

To me being loud about your faith means nothing. I was an FCA officer in high school.

_What does that mean?_

It’s Fellowship of Christian Athletes. I had to do the speeches on several occasions …] I didn’t prefer to get up there and speak. […] The first time was at the beginning of the year and everyone is pumped up and everyone is like, “Let’s go to FCA meeting. Get out of the class for a little bit.” Everyone was there. I didn’t enjoy that very much. People knew I was being honest about what I was talking about because of how I acted outside of that atmosphere. […]

To me you don’t prove your faith through your words. You prove it throughout how you act. I guess at times I acted like, maybe a reason I don’t have much [explicit] religiousness or much faith based parts of my writing is because I feel like how I act on a daily basis as a person should be enough to build it up. I feel like if you’re acting like a good person and you’re being humble and not as
condescending and all the stereotypes that are generated, negative stereotypes are generated around Christianity, that your professors actually respect you for. […]

I can’t tell my atheist friend that she needs to go to church. I can say, “I would like you to come to church with me and see that it’s all not like a power struggle and old women being mean to people.” Like she thinks it is. You cannot tell a person they are wrong when part of faith is having no evidence and believing at the same time. They have no evidence for what they have, but they’re believing in it. You need to respect that, but also if you’re acting a certain way it’s going to help change their mind, in my opinion. That’s part of, going back to your actions are stronger than your words.

These evangelicals prioritized enacting the values connected to their faith over explicitly talking about their faith in part because such enactment served to legitimize evangelicals and worked against negative stereotypes.

This group also described attempting to balance their goals with the needs and expectations of their academic audiences in order to be rhetorically effective. The following excerpt from Jean-Luc’s interview illustrates this concern about balance and effectiveness and ways that these evangelicals tried to resolve it:

*Do you think your faith is relevant for the writing and speaking that you do in college?*

Yeah, it’s interesting because there is a balance because I do want my faith to affect what I say and how I write so that I might be able to reach out to others, so that others may be able to draw nearer to God in their own journeys, in their own voyages, but at the same time, I don’t want to be too overbearing in the
things that I say […] because if I’m too overbearing, if I really talk about my faith in a way that’s kind of in your face then… It’s been my experience that can detract people from drawing nearer to God and from loving God. That’s kind of counterproductive.

These evangelicals chose to enact integrated values in their academic writing because they believe this approach was more rhetorically effective than making more explicit arguments. Jean-Luc described his frequent choice to enact love as a subtle rhetorical approach: “I consider myself to subtly be influencing other people with my faith, every time I talk about love just because love is such a central component of our faith.” Ember also emphasized the implicit nature of her approach and described how enacting values accomplishes evangelical activism:

I always tried to promote God, because to me promoting God is promoting love and promoting goodness. They’re the same thing, so I’ve always tried … I could too just as easily say I’ve always tried to promote love. I’ve always tried to promote kindness. It’s all the same.

Once I made that disconnection … I know so often people say, “You can’t have this promotion of morality without God, because it’s destructive, because they’ll feel like good people, but they won’t go to heaven.” I think that’s nonsense. I think when someone is drawn to goodness, they’re drawn to God. They might not be drawn to your understanding of God, but they are drawn to God.

This excerpt clarifies the connection between evangelical identity and rhetorical choices. Ember’s goal of “promoting God” resonates with Will’s desire “make God look good,” but is less explicit. Ember’s individuated evangelical identity, which embraced multiplicity and
pluralism, informed her choice to enact values implicitly rather than explicitly evangelize others. For these evangelicals, enacting integrated values was an academically successful and satisfying approach to activism.

**Dynamic, Evolving Evangelical Identities & Academic Writing**

The second major finding of this study is that evangelical undergraduates’ identities and approaches to activism are dynamic and that as evangelicals accumulate experiences in college their approaches to academic activism can change over time.

**Hints of Development**

Interview data from all three groups of participants suggest the dynamic relationship between evangelical identities, rhetorical choices, and academic experiences. For example, even when Isabella and Michele failed to articulate how their faith informed their perspectives on gender and racial equality, they revealed that these issues were important to them and that they felt gender and racial equality were incompatible with evangelical values. Coursework in their first-year of college was prompting them to at least consider issues that were not yet highly visible from their inherited evangelical perspective.

Leesa and Will’s interviews also provided hints of dynamism and the possibility that their rhetorical approaches might change over time. Importantly, both Leesa and Will had an emerging individuated identity. While less individuated and more immersed in Christian enclaves than participants who took the enacting integrated values approach, Leesa and Will were critical of aspects of evangelicalism such as the hypocrisy of church leaders and church cultures that seemed to be shaped more by corporate values than Christian values. It seems likely that Leesa and Will would become increasingly individuated and that this development would include their faith identity. Additionally, Leesa and Will both described partial integration of
their faith and academic identities. Both described their relationships with God as a resource for dealing with academic stress. Leesa and Will had been successful high school students, but in their first semester of college both were worried about their academic performances as they balanced busy involvement with their campus ministry and church with coursework. Will described how his faith-informed perspective on time and his spiritual practices helped him cope:

> It can be very difficult to not let school take over your life and the school work just become the only thing that matters in your life because it can, man … its already kind of happened to me a few times, but it can just destroy you if you just let yourself stress out about all these. I’m a very goal-oriented person and it’s difficult for me to relax, truly be at peace, if I have something to do. There’s always … I’m always going to have assignments to do, I’ll always have papers to write, always have homework to do. I’m never not going to have anything to do, so, for me, specifically, it’s been hard to not let school consume me and the academic workload to take over my life.

> That’s been very difficult, and to set aside time each day for spiritual disciplines and to be in prayer and to read my Bible and to go the things like Community Group and the VFC meetings on Thursdays. It’s hard for me to set aside the time to do that, but God is helping me work on my time management and helping me … giving me passages and things in His scripture and I’m just commanded to not be anxious and to not worry about anything.

At that time, Will’s faith was a resource for handling academic stress. Although his integration of faith and schooling was limited, it was a conscious and intentional attempt to integrate faith and schooling.
Unlike the evangelicals who enacted integrated values in their academic writing, Leesa and Will did not describe academic experiences that had positively informed their religious experiences. However, Leesa had recently declared Religious Studies as her major and seemed to be assuming that the coursework would at least complement, if not contribute to, her faith experience. At the time of the interviews, faith was a resource for schooling, but it was unclear to what extent schooling would become a resource for Leesa and Will’s faith and how further integration of faith and schooling might transform their academic writing.

**Evolving Evangelical Identity & Academic Writing: A Case Study**

Ember’s story provides a case study of how an evangelical’s approach to performing faith in academic writing shifted dramatically over time. Although this study was not longitudinal, Ember’s retrospective descriptions of her approach to academic writing before she left a high-control church provide evidence that as her evangelical identity developed, her approach to performing faith in writing developed as well. Her story also highlights the positive roles that coursework and faculty can have in undergraduates’ academic and personal development.

Because Ember left a church that she said “meets all the requirements of being a cult,” she relayed an especially dramatic story of developing an individuated faith that allowed her to experience a direct relationship with God, rather than one mediated by an authority:

> As far back as I can remember I believed there was a God. I believed that I knew Him, and He was very near and dear to me. However, the church that I was in believed in teaching God through a man. I mean the core beliefs of Christianity is that when Jesus died, there is that symbol of that veil in the temple being split, and the holy of holies is now becoming accessible to the common man.
The core identity of someone who believes in Jesus Christ is that they no longer have to go through a person. They don’t have to go through a priest or shaman, or anything else. They can just go directly to God themselves. This church preached that, but they did not live by it. The pastor was the voice of God in your life. […] He interpreted God to you. He told you God’s will for your life, and you say, “I want to go to college,” and he would say, “That doesn’t sound like God’s will for you,” then you wouldn’t do it. […]

After leaving, I went through an incredibly difficult time in my faith, because I had come to recognition that my relationship with God depended on me, and not what someone else told me.

Although Ember described always having an experience of a personal relationship with God, her early experiences resonate with Isabella’s and Michelle’s in that she and her family literally “received” sanctioned beliefs and behavioral norms from her pastor. In many ways, this is Ember’s narrative of transformation from a received evangelical identity to an individuated evangelical identity.

Ember left the high-control church that she grew up in during her first semester of undergraduate coursework. She described a confluence of events that prompted her family to leave, but insisted that her decision to leave was confirmed by a supernatural experience. Throughout the interview, Ember described her college instructors as integral to her development of a different religious identity. Ember’s accounts of interactions with an English instructor demonstrate the important role faculty played in her personal development:

[I]t wasn’t until I got to college that I realized I also had a deep-seated conditioning mentally, because the leader of the church I went to at one point, I
mentioned to him how much I love writing in one of those rare conversations that the peon could have with the master. He said, “Well, that’s good [Ember]. Just remember that men are better writers. Just remember, [Ember], that men are better writers than women, and so no matter how much you want to be a good writer [interruption]… I’m sure you’ll be a good writer, but you’re not going to achieve that level of mastery that a man would have, so don’t be intimidated by them when you start writing.”

Wow! What did you think about that? Did you believe him?

I believed him. I did because I didn’t know any better. He was god. I had to believe him, because he was the be all and end all of opinion, and for as much free will as I had, there was that area of blindness. Having left, I didn’t realize I had forgotten about that conversation.

I didn’t realize the part it had played in who I was until one day I was sitting down talking to a professor. It was [professor’s name]. She was amazing too. I’ve had… my writing and my person has been so shaped by the professors I have met over the years. I have the utmost respect for the university professors and their ability to encourage and empower their students.

She would listen to things I would say like that. I’m just spitting out rhetoric without even realizing that it’s been burned into me saying, “Yeah I know, women probably aren’t…” As I’m saying it, I was like, “Wait a second. I’m just an 18-year-old girl finally questioning things for the first time in her life.” I didn’t rebel until I turned 20. I’m not really even in my rebellious state right now. She said, “Well [Ember], that [the belief that women cannot write as well as
men] might not be true. Just like your notion that feminism is an evil word might not be true either.” She opened up vistas for me.

Over and over, Ember described positive interactions with professors as important in her development: “I could go down the list of professors who disagreed with me on so many levels, but still treated me with respect and dignity far more than any pastor every had. They sat down and took hours to listen to my concerns.” She explained: “My most valuable experiences in college didn’t come from studying, and didn’t come in just the classroom lecture setting. They came when there was give and take, whether it was in classroom conversation or after class in the professor’s office.”

In addition to positive relationships with instructors, coursework played an important role in Ember’s personal development and recovery after leaving the high-control church. During the interview, Ember explained her notion of an “organic life,” which she developed since leaving the church:

When I was in this church, growth was something that you set a goal, and you said, “I want to be more of this,” whether it be humble or confident. Or you would look at yourself, and say, “I’m horrible in this area. God, change me in this area.” Then you pray, and you’d fast until you would sufficiently purge yourself of that sensation. I understand that that’s a very effective technique when it comes to having goals in life. […] but you can’t apply that technique to your own personal condition. It’s not healthy. You will dramatically increase all senses of condemnation.

If you’re in a state and you want to get out of it, you can’t force it. That’s a lesson I learned from being in that place for so many years. These past three
years, what I’ve done to grow is nothing. I’ve just lived. [...] I let life change me.
I trust that I’m living with God, and that being exposed to the environment that
He’s put me in and that I’ve put myself in, that would works together to create
around me … A healthy environment will influence me on its own, and it has.

I had to go through periods of great confusion. I’d read literature, and I’d
get more confused, so instead, I said, “I’m not going to pursue solving this
problem. As life comes, I’ll learn from what comes in my way by coincidence, by
having this experience.” That’s what happened. Things that I would try and read
to fix me, to ease my confusion, to answer my questions wouldn’t, but if I just
read the materials assigned to me in class, they would.

I think that it’s that idea of me having an organic life. That’s really how
I’ve grown is trusting that I am capable of learning and getting a greater
understanding of who I am and who God is by living instead of by forcing it, and
trusting that God is a good enough friend. That He is going to say, “I think this is
a good idea. You should do this.”

Ember’s concept of an “organic life” not only entails a more natural and gentle process of
personal development, but also implies diffusion. Rather than targeting specific attitudes or
behaviors that needed to be brought in line with her theological beliefs, Ember came to see all
experiences and domains of her life as sources of personal and spiritual nurture. For Ember,
coursework was a resource for personal development: during this period of transition, Ember
experienced her reading of assigned course texts as more helpful to her than the books she sought
out to relieve her confusion.
Ember’s approach to activism in academic writing evolved in tandem with her sense of herself as a person in a relationship with God. In the interview, Ember contrasted her current approach to academic writing (enacting integrated values) with the explicit approach she took in high school and her first semester of college:

Every essay I wrote had to be about a Christian topic. If it wasn’t, I had to find ways to direct it back to God. It was actually very freeing in college to realize that that’s not healthy, because that’s one of the ways that I love my understanding of God now is that He’s subtle. He is not proud. He is not arrogant, and He doesn’t demand to be the center of attention, so you can write a paper that doesn’t mention Him at all, and yet He can be in it and all over it. People can read it, and still feel comforted, and then beauty from it, and learn from it.

Ember attributed her shift from an explicit to an implicit approach to changes in her understanding of God and growing rhetorical awareness.

During the interview, Ember described how her first-year composition instructor helped her become more aware of her off-putting approach:

Those first two months, I had the mission of shoving God down everyone’s throat, but trying to find the right way to do it. In my first day of class, I sit down in my first class of the semester. It’s an English class. I will not forget this experience ever again. The professor walks in. He throws open the door. He is this […]

He was a solid to the bone atheist. Everything I wasn’t. I was your typical hardcore conservative, seven-day creationist, sacred Bible, go to the church five days a week. He was the exact opposite. What baffled me is I loved him. Within
the first week, I thought, “This guy is … He’s brilliant. He is funny. He was so caring about his students.” He’s one of the most intelligent people I’ve ever met. He had his doctorate from Harvard, but he is teaching at the community college in [Texas] because he cares about the needy people. He could have worked anywhere he wanted to, but he cares about the needs of the people. He really blew my mind.

That first day, he was asking questions about … he asked the question about a Bible verse. He asked a question about history, because he is just testing general knowledge. Five minutes into class, I’d answered them. He said, “[Ember], are you home … were you by any chance homeschooled?” I was like, “What? Is it painted on my face?” He made me realize just how obvious Christians can be and unhealthy in how obvious they are.

How do you think he knew that about you?

He told me. I asked him, “How did you know that?” He said, “Well, you sit in the front row. You’re eager. You’re interested in what I have to say. You know quotations from the Bible. You recognize references to history,” but I knew what he wasn’t saying, later on I came to realize, was that I was clearly judgmental of the people around me. I had a sneer painted on my face anytime anything I disagree with came up. I was extremely uncomfortable with any hot topic of sexuality came up, which is something that’s very interesting to watch the progression and how that’s developed over time.

He made me realize how dangerous it is to let your every belief hang out on your shirtsleeve and how much I did it. That first semester of college was me
learning to pull back a little, because if you want to communicate with someone about God, you can’t have it just painted all over you, “I’m a judgmental harsh Christian,” because they’ll sense that. If you have an agenda going into a relationship, people know it, and it’s not genuine for them and it’s not genuine for you. I was basing all of my relationships that I would develop with kids in my classes based off with, “How can I get you to heaven?” for those two months. Then it shifted to, “What the heck is going on?”

Ember’s story suggests that her instructor’s gentle and indirect prodding contributed to her ability to develop a faith she experienced as healthier and prompted her to reevaluate her rhetorical approach to activism.

Ember reconsidered not only her approach to academic writing, but also her rhetorical activism more generally. She described increasingly valuing dialogue about God over arguing for God:

I’ve realized that when you debate and argue God, you tend to dirty Him. You’re... too much of our humanity gets involved when we’re debating and arguing about something. Yeah we can do it about topics that are important to us, but when it comes to God, you can’t argue Him into someone else’s head. When you try to, you end up making Him warped, because you’ll get frustrated, and then you see you start to change your approach, and so people will only perceive Him as harsh, because you are coming across wrong.

The idea that you can talk about God, converse instead of debate, yeah, great, absolutely. Just express your opinion, your understanding of God. Ask someone else about theirs. A dialogue is far more important. In my papers,
because you don’t have that dialogue option when you’re writing a paper, I tend
to not talk about God explicitly or directly. What I do is I just tend to take an
approach that I feel does Him justice, gives Him the credit He deserves.

In contrast to her characterization of her younger self as a “harsh judgmental Christian” who was unaware of the effect of her self-presentation, here Ember revealed herself to be extremely sensitive rhetorically. She was aware, for example, of the benefits of a dialogical, non-persuasive rhetorical approach but also aware that such an approach is often not supported by academic genres, which tend to be argument-driven. Ember spoke as a skilled rhetor, surveying the available means of persuasion as well as the constraints of academic writing situations and choosing an approach—enacting integrated values—that would best accomplish her rhetorical purpose.

**An Outlier: Joe’s Evangelical Identity and Academic Writing**

Both of the major findings from the interview study reveal the dynamic influence of evangelical identities on academic writing. Most participants believed their faith was relevant to their schooling and were motivated to engage in activism through their academic writing. In this final section, I present a negative case that emerged and demonstrate how it confirmed the study’s major findings.

**Low Evangelical Identity & Activism**

Nine out of the ten participants in this study experienced evangelical identity as relevant to writing for college. The one outlier was Joe, who responded to my question, “Do you think that your faith affects any of your writing or speaking for college?” negatively:

Not a whole lot, no. I mean when I’m given an assignment, I don’t think about …

I don’t think, “How can I spread my faith in this assignment?” I figure I’ve got a
job. I should do it, and I just think of the best way to do it. [...] Yeah, I don’t really feel like my religion changes … I mean I’m not going to go off and write something that’s blasphemous or do a speech on how religion is dead or anything, but on the other hand, it’s not like a key, instrumental thing that I think about when choosing topics.

In the interview, Joe not only expressed no impulse toward evangelical activism in academic writing, but also no activist impulse in any context.

Joe also evinced low evangelical identity. He described his faith system only briefly: “What does being a Christian … To me, it means trying your best to try to actually live out the way that Jesus Christ lived and believing that he’s your Lord and Savior and that stuff.” Despite evoking a mentor/disciple relationship, Joe did not describe any specific ways that he attempted to “live out the way Jesus Christ lived.” For Joe, evangelical identity was an inherited and cultural experience: he grew up in an evangelical church and family and accepted that as a part of his life and a part of his identity.

Joe primarily identified himself as a university student. His account of the “crazy preacher” demonstrates that he identified wholeheartedly with his peers:

Did you hear about the guy, the crazy preacher at [the university] on Monday?

*No, tell me about it.* […]

Well, this guy, he kind of showed up, and he had nothing to do with … Like he didn’t have a permit or anything, which you’re supposed to have. He goes off preaching that we’re ungodly people doing ungodly deeds and how we have all these STDs because we’re sex-crazed, college-stereotypical kids, [incorrectly pronounced the University’s football team], and calls our football team
whoremongers and the cheerleaders whores. Then, this one girl—she’s actually an RA in my dorm—she shows up and says that not all Christians are like that and that Jesus loves everybody. Then this preacher says, “That’s what masturbation does to you.”

*Wow.*

[sarcasm] Because apparently masturbation makes you think that Jesus loves everyone.

What do you think about that guy?

Oh, my gosh. Okay, I think that it’s terrible, because some of the worst things that have been done have been done in the name of God, and some people just go out and completely misrepresent. He just pretty much went out there to try to turn off … or he didn’t try to do this, but in order to preach to the stereotypical college student, he becomes this stereotypical, hateful preacher. That just turns everyone off of religion and makes us just look bad. […]

*How does that affect you being a Christian here? Does it affect you at all?*

*What do you think?*

It doesn’t really affect me. It doesn’t change how I live my life or what I do.

While Joe pointed out that the preacher’s actions made “us look bad,” implying some identification as a Christian, his concern was less intense than that of the other participants who felt constrained by and even sought to counteract such negative exemplars.
Low Evangelical Identity & Salience of Academic Writing

Analysis of Joe’s stories of composing specific academic texts and speeches, represented in Table 4.5, revealed that his experiences of salient academic writing were not connected to faith-related topics or faith-motivated purposes. Joe’s interpretation of salience was connected to whether the writing topic was self-selected: he experienced higher levels of salience when he selected his topic. Joe never selected a topic that was connected to his faith. For example, Joe described non-religious motivations for his argument against illegal music downloading in his persuasive Composition I paper: Joe’s father was a musician and he felt well-positioned to raise awareness about the ways that illegal downloading hurts middle-class musicians. This negative case supports the study’s major finding by confirming that identity shapes interpretation of salience. Because Joe’s evangelical identity was familial and cultural, not individual, it did not seem to shape his academic writing in the same ways that evangelicals who had a strong individual evangelical identity reported.
### Table 4.5 Joe’s Accounts of Academic Writing Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Topic Choice</th>
<th>Writer’s Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low Salience: Not Salient to Self or Others</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>rhetorical analysis</td>
<td>song lyrics</td>
<td>self-selected</td>
<td>completion/grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>contextual rhetorical analysis</td>
<td>music played at drugstore</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>completion/grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mixed Salience: Salient to Self, Not Salient to Others</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>persuasive paper</td>
<td>illegal downloads of music</td>
<td>self-selected</td>
<td>completion/grade; argue against illegal downloading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>informative speech</td>
<td>education rights in Europe</td>
<td>self-selected</td>
<td>completion/grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High Salience: Salient to Self and Others</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>persuasive speech</td>
<td>declining comic sales</td>
<td>self-selected</td>
<td>persuade peers to buy comic books</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter V: Characteristics of Evangelicals’ Academic Writing

The purpose of the document analysis study was to describe the characteristics of the academic writing of the evangelical undergraduates who participated in this study. The document analysis study took a systematic and somewhat naturalistic approach to investigating the characteristics of participants’ academic writing, seeking to describe as wide a range of evangelicals’ actual writing for college as possible. Most rhetoric and composition studies of religious students’ writing rely on anecdotal evidence from instructors about writing that noticeably breaches academic conventions by attempting to convert its audience or by citing religious texts to authorize faith-motivated claims. This qualitative study adds empirical evidence to the discussion by collecting and analyzing a wide range of academic writing.

Of the 195 writing samples submitted by participants, this study analyzed a representative sample of 66 papers that captured as much diversity (participant, year in college, discipline) as possible. This sample was analyzed deductively, using participants’ descriptions of their experiences as well as themes in the existing rhetoric and composition literature to focus coding and analysis. I used analytic memoing, along with code mapping, and consulting with experienced qualitative researchers to explore relationships within the data until axial categories emerged.

This chapter first describes the composition of the representative writing sample. Then, I present the three major findings from this document analysis study. Document analysis of a representative sample of evangelical undergraduates’ academic writing revealed that: 1) these evangelicals usually composed texts that were fitting responses to academic writing situations, 2) some evangelicals significantly developed as writers over time as they gained discourse community expertise, and 3) participants’ perceptions of the extent to which their faith
was visible in their writing and the nature of their academic activism did not always correspond with what their texts actually did.

The Sample of Evangelicals’ Academic Writing

The writing analyzed in this study was composed by ten self-identified evangelical undergraduates enrolled at a large public university in the southeastern United States. After our initial meeting to discuss the study and Informed Consent, participants submitted electronic copies of texts they had written for college. I invited participants to share any and all writing they had produced for college to that point, and most participants sent me electronic copies of as many papers as they could find on their computers. I read each participant’s writing samples prior to their interview, in order to make our discussions about their academic writing as specific and naturalistic as possible. In some cases, participants sent me additional writing samples after our interview. The number of writing samples submitted by each participant varied depending on the number of years they had been in college, whether they had retained copies of their academic writing throughout their college careers, and the amount of writing required in their coursework.

Table 5.1 portrays the variety and quantity of writing samples submitted by participants. Each writing sample was sorted by participant, the year of coursework in which the participant composed the text, and type of course. Courses were categorized according to the university’s general education categories: Arts and Humanities (AH), Natural Sciences (NS), and Social Sciences (SS). Two additional categories were created for writing samples not encompassed by the university’s general education umbrellas: Extracurricular (EC) and First Year Studies (FYS).

Because of the wide range of total writing samples each participant submitted, a smaller representative sample of 66 documents was selected for analysis. This sample retains all of the writing submitted by participants who provided ten documents or less (eight out of ten
<table>
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<th></th>
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</tbody>
</table>

Total Collected Documents: 195
participants). For the two participants who submitted more than ten documents, Ember (43) and Jean-Luc (106), a representative sample of ten documents per participant was selected. Representative samples of Ember and Jean-Luc’s writing were selected first by excluding extracurricular (EC) texts such as competitive speeches and sermons. Because Ember and Jean-Luc were the only participants who submitted extracurricular texts, excluding them allowed for comparison of more similar texts. Ember’s and Jean-Luc’s documents were then purposively sampled to provide a diversity of year and discipline. Table 5.2 represents the composition of the final document sample, sorted by participant, year, and disciplinary category.

Half of the sample (33 of 66) is comprised of writing composed during participants’ first year in undergraduate coursework. Over 60 percent of this sample (41 of 66) is comprised of texts produced for credit in Arts and Humanities courses, which represent disciplines including Philosophy, English, History, Religious Studies, and Speech Communication. Less than 20 percent of this sample (12 of 66) is comprised of texts produced for Social Science courses, including Anthropology, Education, Geography, Political Science, Psychology, and Sociology. Fifteen percent of this sample (10 of 66) is comprised of texts produced in Natural Science courses, which included only Ecology and Evolutionary Biology courses. Nearly five percent of this sample (3 of 66) is comprised of writing submitted for credit in First-Year Studies courses.

Appendix D summarizes the representative sample of academic writing in clusters of courses with similar curricular purposes or disciplinary content (i.e., First-Year Composition courses, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, etc.). By grouping the data according to course or discipline, I was better able to read each writing sample in context and compare texts within comparable contexts. For each writing sample, I have provided a summary, in my own words, of the text’s main topics (What is it about?), its primary arguments (What is the main point?), and
Table 5.2 Representative Sample of Documents Analyzed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AH</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>SS</td>
<td>AH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ember</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabella</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean-Luc</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
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<td>Leesa</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michele</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Morgan</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Sample 66
its rhetorical purposes (What is it trying to accomplish?). Throughout the rest of this chapter, I report findings that emerged strongly in the data but limit examples to a few representative summaries, details, or quotations that help readers understand the phenomena being described.

**Fitting Responses to Academic Writing Situations**

Analysis of the representative sample of participants’ academic writing revealed that the texts produced by evangelical undergraduates were usually fitting responses to their specific rhetorical situations, even as their writing samples varied in strength and effectiveness. More specifically, the document analysis reveals that in their academic writing these evangelical undergraduates took up topics and cited sources that were appropriate for the assigned genre and the course’s disciplinary focus or curricular goals, while the strength of their arguments and rhetorical purposes varied depending on the writer’s discourse community expertise.

**Topics for Academic Writing**

In their academic writing, evangelical undergraduates took up topics that were appropriate to discipline and/or to the assignment goals. During the first year of undergraduate coursework, students at this university (like most American undergraduates) take required writing and communication courses. According to the university, the primary aim of such general education courses is not introducing students to a specific discipline, but “building basic skills” that students can draw from in future coursework and personal and professional contexts (2011-2012 Undergraduate Catalog).¹⁴ For example, the university’s catalog describes English Composition I as: “Intensive instruction in writing, focusing on analysis and argument. Strategies for reading critically, analyzing texts from diverse perspectives, developing substantive

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¹⁴ Throughout this chapter, I refer to University of Tennessee documents from the 2011-2012 academic year during which the interviews were conducted. In order to protect Ember’s confidentiality, I do not identify the community college she attended or include documents from it in the list of works cited.
arguments through systematic revision, addressing specific audiences, integrating sources, and expressing ideas with clarity and correctness.”

At the time of data collection, English Composition I students were required to compose four major texts: two analysis papers (using rhetorical theory to describe and analyze the effectiveness of a text’s rhetorical strategies and the way contextual factors shape a text’s composition or reception) and two argumentative papers (using sources to outline the major positions in a debate and “take a stand” in that debate). Figure 5.1 lists the topics addressed by participants’ analysis-oriented papers and by argument-oriented papers for English Composition I.

As Figure 5.1 shows, participants’ writing for the composition course did not address scholarly composition texts or disciplinary debates. Rather, many instructors constructed course units around themes (e.g., environmentalism, music and culture, etc.) and participants’ topics fit within those themes. The appropriateness of a topic for the university’s “basic skills” courses depends on the extent to which it allows the student to accomplish the assignment and course goals. In English Composition I, then, a topic is appropriate if it allows the student to demonstrate the ability to analyze the rhetorical effectiveness of a text or use sources to argue for a position within a debate, rather than its direct connection to the disciplinary topics of rhetoric and composition. When given the option to select the focus of their writing, participants chose texts and wrote about topics that were appropriate for accomplishing the goals of English Composition I and its major assignments.

Participants also chose topics that were appropriate for accomplishing the goals of two other general education “basic skills” courses, English Composition II and Public Speaking, as
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis-Oriented Topics</th>
<th>Argument-Oriented Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assigned by Teacher</strong></td>
<td><strong>Selected by Participant</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• popular book, <em>Bottlemania</em></td>
<td>• body spray advertisements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Amnesty International’s media campaign against female genital mutilation</td>
<td>• car care product advertisements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• drugstore music</td>
<td>• local newspaper editorial about racism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <em>Slate</em> article, “Consider the Oyster”</td>
<td>• local newspaper editorial about poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Apocalyptica song, “Not Strong Enough”</td>
<td>• Beatles song, “Revolution”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• religious speech at public universities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.1 English Composition I Paper Topics
well as a range of First Year Studies courses, which seek to “help students transition—personally, socially, and academically” to university life (First Year Studies website).

The texts participants composed for disciplinary content courses address topics that were clearly connected to disciplinary concerns. Figure 5.2 provides examples of paper topics addressed by participants’ writing for a range of disciplinary content courses along with description of the courses (see Appendix D for a complete list).

Of the 66 documents analyzed in the representative sample, seven (11%) explicitly addressed religious topics, all of which were appropriate for the assignment. Table 5.3 summarizes, in my words, the topics of these seven papers. Of these seven papers whose primary topics are explicitly religious, five were produced in courses focused on religion: Jean-Luc and Rachel both wrote papers addressing religious topics for their Religious Studies courses. Additionally, Jean-Luc’s review of a scholarly article about clergy attitudes toward denominational statements about homosexuality was produced in the context of an upper-division Psychology course focused on the Psychology of Religion.

Only two papers in the representative sample (3%) explicitly addressed religious topics when religion was not a primary focus of the course; however, in both cases the religious topic was appropriate to the assignment genre and course goals. Ember’s paper, “Days of Light and Days of Darkness: The Life of David Brainerd,” was composed for a required historical survey course focused on “United States history from the exploration of America through 1877” (from course description). Ember did not provide an assignment sheet with this writing sample and did not discuss it during our interview; however, her topic, the life of an eighteenth-century American missionary, fits within the focus of the course. Additionally, Ember’s paper, which draws on archival sources including Brainerd’s biography as well as academic journal articles,
Example Topics of Papers Composed for Disciplinary Content Courses

Anthropology
• race and ethnicity
• privilege and discrimination in Greek rush week

Ecology and Evolutionary Biology
• biodiversity in wooded and grassy soils
• molar width and diet of herbivores and carnivores

Education
• decimals; 4th-grade math

English
• Beowulf
• rhetoric of/about child brides

Ethics & Philosophy
• determinism & free will
• corporate whistleblowing

Geography
• human geography of Nigeria and South Africa
• globalization

History
• the battle of Waterloo
• Nazi propaganda

Political Science
• Afghan democracy and elections
• Socrates’ critique of democracy

Psychology
• clergy attitudes toward denominational statements about homosexuality
• salivary habituation and eating disorders

Religious Studies
• biblical treatments of suffering
• early Christian attitudes toward Judaism

Sociology
• ethnographic study of domestic work in marriages

Figure 5.2 Example Topics of Papers Composed for Disciplinary Content-Courses
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Discipline (Year)</th>
<th>Topic Choice</th>
<th>Topic(s)</th>
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<td>History (2)</td>
<td>participant did not describe</td>
<td>life of David Brainerd</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jean-Luc</td>
<td>Religious Studies (4)</td>
<td>self-selected</td>
<td>biblical treatments of suffering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean-Luc</td>
<td>Psychology (4)</td>
<td>participant did not describe</td>
<td>academic journal article about clergy attitudes toward denomination statements about homosexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Religious Studies (3)</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>early Christian attitudes toward Judaism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>differences in New Testament accounts of Christ’s birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will</td>
<td>English Composition (1)</td>
<td>self-selected</td>
<td>the “messianic secret”; unity of New Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>religious speech at public universities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
accomplishes one of the History Department’s four core goals for student learning: to “construct historical arguments using primary and secondary sources” (Department of History website).

Likewise, Will’s Composition I position paper arguing for religious free speech on public university campuses takes up an appropriate topic inasmuch as it allowed Will to fulfill the goal of the assignment: to use sources to argue for a position within a debate and use rhetorical skills to persuade an audience.

In addition, two papers analyzed in the representative sample (3%) contained religious themes that were secondary to the paper’s primary topic. Table 5.4 summarizes, in my words, both papers that secondarily addressed religious content. Leesa’s First-Year Studies report about why she was considering declaring a Religious Studies major, its degree requirements, and her career goals included the disclosure of her recent conversion experience and described how her experience of being a Christian motivated her choices and interests. In her introduction, Leesa explained why she was “seriously considering” declaring a Religious Studies major:

> Before I came to [the university], I was completely lost as to what I was supposed to do with my life. At the time, I had made my life purpose to satisfy myself. All I wanted was to have a job that was not boring, one that I was good at, and I wanted to be financially stable. But it was not until I got involved with [a campus ministry] that I realized I wanted to help people. I have never been much of a people person, but my heart has been changed by the grace of God. I am not going to preach throughout this entire paper, but my change of heart and newfound faith is the most significant reason for me choosing to write about this major.

Although Leesa disclosed her faith explicitly in this paper, she was careful “not […] to preach” in the rest of her paper and her paper moved on to describe the requirements for the Religious
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Discipline (Year)</th>
<th>Topic Choice</th>
<th>Topic(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leesa</td>
<td>First-Year Studies (1)</td>
<td>assigned</td>
<td>how she selected her major, its degree requirements, and her career plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabella</td>
<td>English Composition (1)</td>
<td>self-selected</td>
<td>two advertisements for body spray; (secondary) sex appeals in advertising</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Studies major and possible careers she could pursue. More importantly, Leesa’s self-disclosure about her conversion experience was included to describe the exigence for her choice of major and interest in career options, both tasks required by the assignment.

Isabella’s rhetorical analysis of two advertisements, submitted for credit in English Composition I, also contained a secondary religious topic. The Axe Body Spray ads that Isabella analyzed were part of a campaign titled “Even Angels Will Fall,” which drew on the trope of a fallen angel. In her analysis of the advertisements, Isabella described the rhetorical effects of the angel trope but quoted from the texts of the advertisements to supply the trope’s meanings, rather than interpreting the image through a specific religious tradition. Although Isabella’s analysis of the ads engages with religious imagery, religion itself did not become a primary topic.

**Sources for Academic Writing and Biblical Citation**

In the academic writing analyzed in the representative sample, these evangelical undergraduates cited or mentioned 191 sources. Participants cited nearly equal numbers of scholarly articles and books (54); literary, artistic, or historical primary texts (53); and contemporary popular texts (50). Less frequently cited were tertiary texts such as encyclopedias, dictionaries, and anthologies (23) and statistical data and government reports (11). Figure 5.3 depicts the proportion of types of sources cited in the representative sample.

Of the 191 sources that participants cited or engaged with in the representative sample, four were citations of biblical texts, comprising two percent of all citations in the sample. These instances of biblical citation were counted within the category “Literary, Artistic, and Historical Texts” in Figure 5.3 because the writers (Jean-Luc and Rachel) were analyzing biblical texts as historical texts in the context of a Religious Studies course (see Table 5.3 for a summary of Jean-Luc’s and Rachel’s Religious Studies paper topics).
Figure 5.3 Types of Sources Cited or Mentioned

- Scholarly Texts: 28%
- Literary, Artistic, & Historical Texts: 28%
- Contemporary Popular Texts: 26%
- Tertiary Texts: 12%
- Statistical Data and Government Reports: 6%
In sum, analysis of the representative sample of academic writing found that these evangelical undergraduates rarely cited biblical texts in their academic writing and only did so when biblical citation was called for by the course content. The document analysis found no biblical citation outside of Religious Studies courses.

**Rhetorical Purposes for Academic Writing**

I have demonstrated that evangelical undergraduates in this study uniformly chose topics that were appropriate in the context of their academic writing situations, either by allowing them to accomplish assignment goals or by directly connecting to disciplinary topoi. In addition to addressing topics fitting specific academic writing situations, participants also pursued rhetorical purposes and made arguments that were fitting in their situations (see Appendix D for summaries of all documents analyzed in the representative sample). Analysis of the representative sample revealed three primary clusters of rhetorical purposes for evangelicals’ academic writing: 1) performing disciplinary tasks, 2) summarizing, synthesizing, and taking positions, and 3) persuading. Below, I summarize each of these categories of rhetorical purposes, describing frequently occurring subcategories and providing a range of more and less effective examples of each from the representative sample of participants’ academic writing. This analysis reveals that although participants’ writing samples enact varying degrees of expertise, the arguments that evangelical undergraduates make and the rhetorical purposes that they pursue in their academic writing are fitting responses to academic rhetorical situations.\(^{15}\)

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\(^{15}\) A majority of the writing samples analyzed were argument-driven; of the 66 samples analyzed, approximately 12 did not make a clear argument or claim. In most cases, a non-argumentative approach was appropriate within the context of the assignment genre and course goals. Non-argumentative samples included self-introductions, pre-writing notes, reports that summarized assigned reading, proposed discussion or exam questions, ethnographic field notes, and a lesson plan. In such cases the lack of argument was appropriate to the writers’ rhetorical purposes including introducing themselves to their peers, keeping track of main ideas while reading, demonstrating completion and comprehension of assigned reading or a disciplinary task, contributing to class conversations, and earning extra credit.
Performing Disciplinary Tasks

In their academic writing, these evangelical undergraduates were most frequently performing disciplinary tasks. In these academic situations, students were asked to do something that disciplinary experts do and their texts work to provide evidence that they engaged in a disciplinary task and drew from the knowledge, methods, and perspectives of that field. A few examples of disciplinary tasks include conducting lab research and interpreting results (Biology), analyzing texts or situations to describe how they function persuasively (Rhetoric), or researching and describing the economic and social ties between two cities (Geography). Table 5.5 provides a range of examples of academic texts that performed and reported on disciplinary tasks.

Summarizing, Synthesizing, and Taking Positions

In addition to performing or reporting on a disciplinary task, participants frequently used writing to summarize individual texts, synthesize multiple perspectives, and take positions in a disciplinary debate. In such writing tasks, students were often asked to read texts connected to a course theme or disciplinary content, and their writing seeks to provide evidence that they comprehended the content or that they understood how various texts or ideas were related. Often, after reviewing and synthesizing a debate or disciplinary literature, participants located their own position within that debate or field. Table 5.6 provides examples of the writing that participants engaged in order to summarize, synthesize, or take a position.

Persuading

Most of the academic writing samples analyzed were aimed at performing disciplinary tasks or summarizing, synthesizing, and taking positions. Less frequently, participants’ rhetorical purpose for academic writing was persuasion: changing an audience’s emotions, attitudes, and
### Table 5.5 Examples of Performing Disciplinary Tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analyzing Texts</th>
<th>Main Point/Argument</th>
<th>What Text is Doing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leesa’s rhetorical analysis of <em>Slate</em> article, “Consider the Oyster” (Composition, yr. 1)</strong></td>
<td>Article effectively persuades vegans to reconsider their criteria for choosing food and non-vegans to consider veganism.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary reading of a text; personally responding to an assigned text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ember’s analysis of a character in <em>Measure for Measure</em> (English, yr. 4)</strong></td>
<td>Like all humans, Isabella is influenced by those around her, but ultimately capable of making decisions for herself, both unwise and wise.</td>
<td>defending character as a human whose motivations and actions are always mixed; arguing against dichotomies of women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Joe’s rhetorical analysis of Apocalyptica’s “Not Strong Enough” (Composition, yr. 1)</strong></td>
<td>This song contains rhetorical elements.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary reading of a text; reaching required word count</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reporting &amp; Interpreting Research</th>
<th>Main Point/Argument</th>
<th>What Text is Doing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Michele’s research paper on university’s history of coeducation (Composition, yr. 1)</strong></td>
<td>little: presents itself as a history secondary point: Women’s efforts to be admitted were beneficial for women and the university.</td>
<td>constructing a local history of coeducation based on archival research; celebrating women’s achievements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Isabella’s lab report on species traits and feeding (Biology, yr. 1)</strong></td>
<td>Hypothesis that carnivores have shorter snouts and herbivores have more molars than carnivores is supported by lab results.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary task; arguing that lab findings are reliable by describing methods and providing data from lab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>James’ field notes describing student groups on campus (Anthropology, yr. 1)</strong></td>
<td>none: Field notes report James’ observations of university students.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary task; justifying choice not to conduct interviews or collect data about intended population (hookah smokers)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interpreting Cases/Data</th>
<th>Main Point/Argument</th>
<th>What Text is Doing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Will’s case study report on globalization (Geography, yr1)</strong></td>
<td>The complex interdependence of Kyoto, Japan, and Longhua, China, illustrate positive and negative consequences of globalization; both cities can take steps to mitigate negative consequences of industrialization or urbanization.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary task; demonstrating comprehension of course material by using key concepts to explain a case study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jean-Luc’s case study of Afghan elections (Political Science, y 2)</strong></td>
<td>Despite evidence of some corruption, Afghanistan is not a nominal democracy but a young, emerging democracy.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary reading of a recent event; offering sympathetic interpretation of Afghan democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ember’s analysis of rhetoric surrounding Nujood Ali’s case (English, yr. 4)</strong></td>
<td>The case of Nujood Ali changed the rhetoric surrounding child brides.</td>
<td>explaining how and why public rhetoric about child brides changed; performing disciplinary reading of a current event; celebrating a young woman’s activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarizing</td>
<td>Main Point/Argument</td>
<td>What Text is Doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel’s review of sociology study of women’s lives, <em>The Second Shift</em></td>
<td>primarily a summary of <em>The Second Shift</em>; weak argument at the end that women’s second shift will remain until norms for masculinity are changed</td>
<td>summarizing an academic book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Sociology, yr. 3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James’ discussion blog post about the definition of “nation state”</td>
<td>none: summarizes definitions of “nation state” and contrasts with other types of social orders</td>
<td>demonstrating comprehension of assigned reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Anthropology, yr. 1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Synthesizing</th>
<th>Main Point/Argument</th>
<th>What Text is Doing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jean-Luc’s review of an academic journal article about clergy attitudes toward denominational statements about homosexuality (Psychology, yr. 4)</td>
<td>little argument: summarizes recent study and offers only minor critiques of the study</td>
<td>summarizing an academic journal article; performing disciplinary reading of academic journal article and situating it in an ongoing academic conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan’s essay exam on professionalism and ethics for researchers (Ethics, yr. 2)</td>
<td>in each of four questions, summarizes positions on an issue and then evaluates the arguments</td>
<td>demonstrating comprehension of disciplinary concepts and assigned reading</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Taking a Position</th>
<th>Main Point/Argument</th>
<th>What Text is Doing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morgan’s literature review about the ethics of advertising (Ethics, yr. 2)</td>
<td>Advertisements should be appealing without being deceptive.</td>
<td>summarizing ongoing debate about advertising and deception; arguing for a middle position that allows for appealing advertisement but not intentional deception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel’s literature review/position paper about early Christian attitudes toward Judaism (Religious Studies, yr. 3)</td>
<td>Seemingly anti-Semitic portions of the New Testament should be read in their historical contexts and understood as efforts to legitimize Christianity.</td>
<td>arguing against interpreting New Testament as anti-Semitic; critiquing anti-Semitic attitudes among Christians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ember’s literature review/position paper on the debate over free will and determinism (Philosophy, yr. 2)</td>
<td>Free will is a more helpful perspective than determinism.</td>
<td>explaining why it is difficult to prove or disprove freewill or determinism by surveying the historical debate; suggesting that free will benefits humans more than determinism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
beliefs or calling for action. Table 5.7 provides examples of academic writing that aimed to change its audience’s emotions, attitudes, or beliefs or that called for action.

Often, persuasion seemed to be secondary to another rhetorical purpose; in many cases, this “added on” persuasion took the form of epideictic rhetoric: praising or blaming, celebrating or critiquing. Much less frequently, participants’ primary rhetorical purpose for writing was to persuade their audience to change their behaviors or policies.

**Fitting Responses Along a Spectrum of Writing Expertise**

Analyzing the writing samples in clusters of similar rhetorical purposes not only illuminated common patterns of rhetorical purposes for academic writing, but also allowed for comparison of the effectiveness of academic texts with similar rhetorical purposes. Tables 5.5, 5.6, and 5.7 include examples of texts within each subcategory that exhibit varying levels of situated writing expertise. Take, for example, the range of writing samples that analyzed texts (summarized in Table 5.8).

Leesa’s rhetorical analysis of the *Slate* article, “Consider the Oyster,” is representative of this type of writing. It took an appropriate disciplinary approach to analyzing a single text; in this case, Leesa competently used Aristotelian rhetorical theory to describe the rhetorical appeals of “Consider the Oyster” and to support her positive evaluation of the article’s rhetorical effectiveness. Leesa’s rhetorical analysis did not seek to intervene in any specific public or disciplinary conversation, but it demonstrated comprehension and appropriate application of concepts central to the disciplinary task of rhetorical analysis as well as a personal connection to the paper’s topic. In this, Leesa’s rhetorical analysis is a representative example of many similar papers, competently drawing on disciplinary terminology and perspectives to analyze or interpret a text.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Celebrating/Critiquing</th>
<th>Paper Description</th>
<th>Main Point/Argument</th>
<th>What Text is Doing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Isabella’s rhetorical analysis of a local newspaper editorial; racism (English Composition, yr. 1)</td>
<td>A violent crime against two white university students by black perpetrators prompted racist acts on campus.</td>
<td>(unsuccessfully) performing disciplinary reading of an editorial; persuading readers that not talking about racism makes it worse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel’s literature review/position paper concerning early Christian attitudes toward Judaism (Religious Studies, yr. 3)</td>
<td>Seemingly anti-Semitic portions of the New Testament should be read in their historical contexts and understood as efforts to legitimize Christianity.</td>
<td>arguing against interpreting New Testament as anti-Semitic; critiquing historical and persistent anti-Semitic attitudes within Christianity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ember’s analysis of Antigone and civil disobedience (English, yr. 2)</td>
<td>Antigone engaged in civil disobedience and is praiseworthy.</td>
<td>celebrating civil disobedience as moral action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calling for Action</th>
<th>Paper Description</th>
<th>Main Point/Argument</th>
<th>What Text is Doing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ember’s historical research paper about American incarceration rates (History, yr. 3)</td>
<td>Current over-incarceration of black Americans results from political campaigns and poorly researched policies of 1960s-1980s.</td>
<td>persuading readers to reconsider stereotypes of black men; countering beliefs about criminality; arguing for reconsideration of sentencing policies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel’s IRB application for study of salivary habituation (Psychology, yr. 3)</td>
<td>Proposed study will contribute to field’s understanding of stimulus for eating and improve eating disorder research.</td>
<td>persuading Institutional Review Board to approve her proposed research study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michele’s persuasive speech about abortion (Speech, yr. 1)</td>
<td>Abortion is morally wrong, bad for women, and there are good alternatives.</td>
<td>persuading classmates that abortion is morally wrong and that there are good alternatives to abortion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper Description</td>
<td>Main Point/Argument</td>
<td>What Text is Doing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leesa’s rhetorical analysis of <em>Slate</em> article, “Consider the Oyster” (Composition, yr. 1)</td>
<td>Article effectively persuades vegans to reconsider their criteria for choosing food and non-vegans to consider veganism.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary reading of a text; personally responding to an assigned text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ember’s analysis of a character in <em>Measure for Measure</em> (English, yr. 4)</td>
<td>Like all humans, Isabella is influenced by those around her, but ultimately capable of making decisions for herself, both unwise and wise.</td>
<td>defending character as a human whose motivations and actions are always mixed; arguing against dichotomies of women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe’s rhetorical analysis of Apocalyptica’s “Not Strong Enough” (Composition, yr. 1)</td>
<td>This song contains rhetorical elements.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary reading of a text; reaching required word count</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The relative strength of Leesa’s rhetorical analysis is striking when compared to Joe’s rhetorical analysis of a heavy metal song, Apocalyptica’s “Not Strong Enough.” The conclusion of Joe’s rhetorical analysis sums up the extent of his engagement with rhetorical theory:

In conclusion the rhetor, exigence, and message can most definitely be found in this song. Even though this song’s lyrics were more to the point and less metaphorical with meaning than others, with some education on the subject of rhetor and enough searching one can easily find rhetor, exigence, rhetorical audience, and message can be found in any work of art or writing.

While Leesa drew from rhetorical theory to explain how the article she analyzed works persuasively, Joe’s essay used rhetorical terms to identify and label elements of the song. Joe’s conclusion that “rhetor, exigence, rhetorical audience and message can be found in any work of art or writing” suggests his comprehension of key concepts, but does not display the discourse community expertise that would allow him to understand why and how rhetoricians make use of those concepts. After his concluding paragraph, Joe recorded the word count for his essay—“1003 words”—, a move that underscores the rhetorical purpose of his writing: to complete the assignment and earn course credit. Importantly, even if one is more skilled, both Leesa’s and Joe’s papers are common responses to this kind of rhetorical analysis assignment and both represent “fitting responses” inasmuch as they responded in some way to the assignment’s task.

While rhetorical analyses comprised a large percentage of the representative sample (the university’s English Composition I course required two rhetorical analysis assignments), many texts composed for History and upper-division English courses were similarly focused on analyzing texts. Ember’s analysis of Isabella, from Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*, was, appropriately, an analysis of a literary text from a disciplinary (literary) perspective. Ember’s
literary analysis explicitly participated in a disciplinary debate. In the essay’s introduction, Ember described this disciplinary debate as an exigence for her analysis:

The character of Isabella in Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* is both a complex and compelling one. Of primary interest to the student of her character is the question of her motives. Is Isabella the manipulated or the manipulator? Is she a saint or a self-righteous sinner? Is she acting to aid others or to protect herself? Critics have argued a great deal for both sides of her dichotomous nature.

Throughout the essay, Ember engaged threads of this debate about Isabella’s nature, quoting literary scholars to illustrate various points of view. Ember ultimately staked out a middle ground in this debate, siding with neither of the critics she cited. She argued, “Isabella is not an angel, nor is she a calculating vixen. She is simply a woman, influenced by those around her, but ultimately capable of making decisions for herself, both unwise and wise.” Ember elegantly supported this claim by providing textual details throughout the body of this essay.

Unsurprisingly, Ember’s prose is more polished and her claims are more painstakingly supported than Joe’s and Leesa’s: she wrote this essay in her fourth year of undergraduate coursework, while Joe and Leesa’s rhetorical analyses were composed during their first semesters. But in addition to a more developed prose style and argumentation, Ember’s analysis of *Measure for Measure* stands out from more typical papers in this category because it explicitly presented itself as an intervention in an academic debate. Ember prefaced her thesis by asserting that “the resolution of this debate lies in the fact that humans are dichotomous creatures.” Throughout this analysis, Ember performs a disciplinary identity; she engages the critics she cites, joining in the disciplinary debate. In short, what distinguishes this essay is Ember’s positioning of herself as an insider in a scholarly discourse community. (Later in this
chapter, I trace Ember’s development as a writer, showing how a disciplinary identity and expertise transformed her rhetorical purposes.)

My purpose in comparing Joe’s analysis of song lyrics, Leesa’s analysis of a popular article, and Ember’s analysis of a literary text is to demonstrate that this study’s primary finding, that the texts evangelical undergraduates compose for coursework were typically fitting responses to their academic writing situations, holds true across a wide spectrum of writing expertise. While some participants had developed more expertise as writers in some situations and many participants had different levels of writing expertise in different situations, all of the texts in the representative sample can be seen as fitting responses to academic writing situations. These evangelical undergraduates’ topics, sources, and rhetorical purposes for academic writing were usually contextually appropriate, despite variations in situated writing expertise. In the strongest writing samples, participants constructed concrete rhetorical situations within a text by naming an exigence, invoking a discourse community (by referring to or citing other people’s ideas and discourse), identifying as a member of that community, and appealing to the values of audience members within that discourse community.

**Developing Academic Writing Expertise**

A second major finding of the document analysis is that participants’ writing expertise was not static or fixed. Rather, some of the evangelical undergraduates in this study developed significantly as writers over time. In the next two sections, I present data from the representative sample to demonstrate the significant development of two writers over time: one over the course of a semester and another over the course of four years.
Development in Weeks: Will’s Lab Reports

Will’s writing for his biology course he took during his first semester of undergraduate coursework revealed his developing expertise over the course of the semester. His sequence of lab reports demonstrated not only increasing mastery of genre conventions, but also Will’s adaptation of disciplinary ways of thinking. Table 5.9 provides summaries, in my words, of Will’s three Biology lab reports in chronological order.

The differences in Will’s first and third lab reports are stark. His first lab report was two dense paragraphs. The first chattily narrated how his lab team arrived at a research question and their hypothesis:

My group watched both Confused and Tribolium beetles for some time, making observations. Some of the things we noticed were […] One final observation we made was that the Confused seemed less active than the Tribolium, and the Tribolium moved around a lot, especially around the perimeter of the petri dish. This last observation led us to our question that we asked: Does the structure of the flour affect the speed of the different species? One factor we could have explored was if overall size of the two species made a difference in speed. Some more things we could’ve looked into were […] Our hypothesis was: Beetles will move faster when there is flour in the dish compared to when there is no flour.

The second paragraph detailed the steps Will’s lab team took to test their hypothesis, but noticeably missing from this first lab report is a presentation of their findings and a statement about whether their hypothesis was supported by the lab results.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Main Point/Argument</th>
<th>What Text is Doing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1(^{st}) lab report</td>
<td>two species of beetles</td>
<td>none: seems to be incomplete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2(^{nd}) lab report</td>
<td>nasal width and palate length of herbivores vs. carnivores</td>
<td>Hypothesis that herbivores have wider nostril cavity and longer palate length was supported by lab results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3(^{rd}) lab report</td>
<td>biodiversity in wooded and grassy soils</td>
<td>Hypothesis that rates of biodiversity in soils from woods and grass would be approximately equivalent was not supported by lab results.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The omission of a presentation and discussion of the lab findings demonstrated not only Will’s lack of genre knowledge at the beginning of his Biology course (he did not know what a lab report looks like), but also his lack of disciplinary discourse community expertise (he did not know the purpose of a lab report). Given the content Will did include in his first lab report, it seems likely that at the outset of his Biology course, he viewed the assignment as asking him to prove that he participated in the lab.

In contrast, Will’s third lab report recognizably enacted conventions of the genre and demonstrated greater disciplinary expertise. It began with a general introduction to the topic (“bacterial biodiversity”), a clear research question (“We set out to investigate if bacterial biodiversity differed in soils gathered from wooded areas and grassy areas.”), and a statement of the team’s hypothesis (“we investigated the null hypothesis, ‘There is no difference between the amount of bacteria colonies grown in the soil from the wooded area and soil from the grassy area.’”). The second paragraph briefly summarized the lab’s methods (“we compared the mean diversity and the average number of the bacteria from the woods and grass that grew in the two different media. We had three different replicates for this experiment.”). Will then provided a graphic representation of his team’s findings, interpreted those findings, and discussed why he was not able to reject the null hypothesis based on his findings (“If the p-value is less than .05, then the null hypothesis is rejected. The p-value for the null hypothesis is .7836, which means I am nowhere near being able to reject the null hypothesis and say that there is… [a] difference between the amount of bacteria colonies grown between the soil sample from the wooded area and the grassy area.”) This lab report concluded with a discussion of possible research questions and methods for future research.
Over the course of a semester, Will did not become an expert biologist or science writer, but he began to take up disciplinary questions, methods, and genres. In a relatively short period of time, Will made large gains in his writing expertise in one discipline.

**Development in Years: Ember’s Writing in and Beyond her Major**

When examined chronologically, Ember’s academic writing samples chronicled her developing writing expertise in multiple domains over four years. Like Will’s lab reports, Ember’s writing within her major, English, demonstrated increasing mastery of genre conventions and disciplinary ways of thinking. But Ember’s English writing also displayed other dimensions of rhetorical development, especially shifts in how she constructed the rhetorical situation of her own writing. By her fourth year in undergraduate coursework, Ember’s arguments were constructed as direct interventions in academic debates and Ember constructed herself as an insider in a scholarly discourse community. Table 5.10 summarizes, in my words, seven samples of Ember’s writing for courses in her major over four years.

In the following pages I describe her development more fully, tracing the persistence of an activist impulse from her novice writing in her first year through her more expert writing in her fourth year.  

**Year One**

Ember’s writing within the discipline of English began in her very first semester in a Composition I course. Unlike the other participants in this study, Ember began her undergraduate career at a community college, but her composition course took a similar approach to writing instruction. The required composition course that Ember took emphasized “analysis of literary, expository, and/or persuasive texts,” “critical thinking,” and developing “techniques” for

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16 Throughout my analysis of Ember’s writing, the reader will notice mechanical, syntactical, and grammatical errors; I do not comment on them because they are not the focus of my analysis.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Main Point/Argument</th>
<th>What Text is Doing</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>literacy in Frederick Douglass’s <em>Narrative</em></td>
<td>Prohibition against slaves’ literacy helped Douglass realize the importance of literacy.</td>
<td>performing close reading of primary text; celebrating education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Machiavelli’s <em>The Prince</em></td>
<td>none: summarizes Machiavelli’s theory of governing</td>
<td>summarizing a primary text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>civil disobedience in <em>Antigone</em>; Cal State protests; Robert F.</td>
<td>Antigone engaged in civil disobedience and is praiseworthy.</td>
<td>celebrating civil disobedience as moral action</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kennedy speech</td>
<td></td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>heroism in <em>Beowulf</em> and <em>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</em></td>
<td>While Beowulf and Gawain operate under different social codes, they both are exemplars of courage.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary reading of two texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Blake’s two “Chimney Sweeper” poems in <em>Songs of Innocence</em> and *Songs</td>
<td>Blake’s <em>Innocence</em> poem is more effective in arguing against child labor than the <em>Experience</em> poem.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary reading of texts; celebrating innocence and ambiguity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>of Experience*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Isabella in Shakespeare’s <em>Measure for Measure</em></td>
<td>Like all humans, Isabella is influenced by those around her, but ultimately capable of making decisions for herself, both unwise and wise.</td>
<td>defending character as a human whose motivations and actions are always mixed; arguing against dichotomies of women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>rhetorical theory; the rhetoric of child brides</td>
<td>The case of Nujood Ali changed the rhetoric surrounding child brides.</td>
<td>explaining how and why public rhetoric about child brides changed; performing disciplinary reading of a current event; celebrating women’s activism</td>
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</table>
written, expository, and persuasive composition” (course catalogue). Given the focus of Ember’s writing, her section of the course seems to focus on analyzing historical texts such as Machiavelli’s The Prince and Douglass’s Narrative. Her earliest paper, “Strange Motivating Factors: What Inspired a Slave to Desire an Education,” offers a close reading of one passage in Douglass’s Narrative, Mr. Auld’s prohibition against his wife’s efforts to teach Douglass to read. Ember’s paper primarily summarizes the plot leading up to Auld’s speech, but does draw a conclusion from her reading:

In convincing Mrs. Auld how important it was that Frederick did not learn to read he [Mr. Auld] also unintentionally convinced Frederick that it was something of extreme importance to learn. Mr. Douglass had discovered from his master’s communication the source of the invisible chains that bound him to slavery. It was the lack of education that kept him under the man’s foot. His master’s brutal words played a key roll in stirring Frederick to learn, no matter what the cost.

In her first paper, Ember was not quite managing the conventions for writing about texts (for example, she alternated between “Mr. Douglass” and “Frederick” throughout the text) and she did not reach any conclusions about Douglass’s experience that were not drawn for her in the Narrative, but her prose is passionate. In this paper, we can observe Ember looking for an exigence for her writing beyond completing the assignment. A secondary rhetorical purpose of this text is to celebrate Douglass’s pursuit of education; Ember described Douglass’s Narrative as a record of “what feats can be accomplished when a person is empowered by the proper motivation coupled with determination.” Many of Ember’s writing samples analyzed share this impulse toward persuasion and perform this celebratory move.
Given Ember’s title for her next English paper, “Manipulating Those Blind: Machiavellian Thought on the Prince and His Subjects,” I anticipated that this paper would critique Machiavelli for advocating manipulation. However, this paper made no argument at all and merely summarizes the major strands of Machiavelli’s thoughts about deception and ruling. In many ways, Ember’s second English paper is weaker than her first. Perhaps because it does not advance any argument, Machiavelli’s words take over Ember’s paper; she quotes extensively from Machiavelli throughout, including a 15-line block quote that is dropped into the middle of the paper without any analysis. For some reason in this paper, Ember’s persuasive impulse is not visible and, without disciplinary expertise to guide her analysis, Ember’s paper is ultimately a summary.

**Year Two**

“Liberty and Death: An Essay On When Laws Should Be Broken,” an essay Ember produced for Composition II the next year, shows development in terms of Ember’s ability to harness the task of textual analysis toward her own rhetorical purposes. Throughout this essay, Ember weaves analysis of *Antigone* with more recent discussions about civil disobedience: Robert F. Kennedy’s 1966 “Day of Affirmation Speech” and the 2010 Cal State student protests against tuition increases. This weaving of rhetorical purposes and topics is not neat or linear; in the first half of the paper, for example, it is unclear whether Ember will use *Antigone* to analyze the California protests or vice versa. What ends up happening in the text is chaotic, but interesting from the perspective of watching Ember grapple with her teacher’s purposes for writing—to analyze *Antigone*—and her own.

Ember incorporates the California protests to carve out an exigence for her writing and help her audience consider the protestors’ actions in a favorable light. She ultimately weighs in
on the side of the protestors and Antigone, comparing the university officials to Creon. Ember argues, “Just as Antigone broke the law to do what she deemed right the student protesters were also risking official wrath to bring attention to their problem […] If the students didn’t speak out they wouldn’t receive any attention, and thus the officials would have no motivation to lower the tuition. As a result poorer individuals would simply have to give up the idea of going to a good college.” To add additional pathos, Ember quotes Kennedy, arguing that Antigone “lives out Kennedy’s words. ‘Those who seek to change a world’ must ‘brave the disapproval of their fellows, the censure of their colleagues, the wrath of their society’ (Kennedy).” Here, Ember is fully in celebration mode, reveling in the opportunity to exhort her audience to join her in praising the courage of Antigone and the student protesters.

But then, Ember’s Antigone paper takes a sharp turn: “As a rebel she is intimidating and masterful. As an individual she is pitiable.” Having valorized Antigone’s courage as an exemplar for a contemporary and public audience, in the second half of her paper Ember focuses on her disciplinary task and audience by taking up the debate about Antigone’s motivations. Alluding to the fact that some readers consider Antigone’s actions suicide, motivated by “depression and despair,” Ember’s participation in a disciplinary conversation is faint, but it is happening. If in her first year, Ember’s ability to engage in disciplinary tasks was limited to summarizing texts and drawing basic conclusions from them, in her second year Ember was aware of disagreements about a text and working to weigh in on a disciplinary debate. She concludes that Antigone’s “depression and despair do not discredit her actions. Instead these weaknesses prove that in spite of her humanity she was still capable of doing what is right.”

In this one paper composed during Ember’s second year of college, so much development is visible. On the one hand, it’s chaotic, rather passionate, and a bit unorganized. But we can also
observe Ember working to align activist rhetorical purposes that are salient to her with
disciplinary purposes for her writing. In this regard, her disciplinary expertise and her integration
of rhetorical purposes are more developed than both of her first-year papers. Importantly, while
Ember is celebrating the California protesters and Antigone, she is also affirming the complexity
of their situations and motivations. In sum, this paper displays Ember’s increasingly ambitious
purposes for writing and her increasing interest in and embrace of complexity and ambiguity.

**Year Three**

The writing within her major during Ember’s third year extends these developmental
trajectories. Both samples from Ember’s third year are comparative analyses of two literary texts.
The first, “The Warrior and the Knight: The Contrasts of Beowulf and Sir Gawain,” describes
the ways both heroes exemplify bravery and adventurousness in two distinct social and historical
contexts. In this essay, Ember demonstrates her ability to situate and interpret a text in a
particular context and to compare two texts relativistically. Rather than weighing in on which
figure is a better hero, Ember works to show both Beowulf and Gawain acting heroically in their
contexts and to celebrate the heroism of both: “When the differences are stripped away[,] the
timeless concept of the warrior remains, transcending time and culture. There are always
Grendel’s and Green Knights, and the poems offer the reassurance that there will always be
Beowulfs and Sir Gawains to triumph over them.” In addition to performing relativistic analysis,
this essay also showcases Ember’s increasing exposure to disciplinary conversations. For the
first time in her writing for English courses, Ember cites scholarly disciplinary sources, not only
to authorize her interpretations but also to provide disciplinary exigence for her writing.

The other sample of Ember’s third-year writing in her major, “Innocence vs. Experience:
A Comparison of Blake’s Two Chimney Sweepers,” also showcases increasing complexity as
well as her growing control over disciplinary genre conventions. In contrast to her analysis of
Antigone, Ember’s analysis of Blake a year later is more clearly organized and its argument is
more transparent. At the end of her introduction, after setting up the premise of Blake’s paired
volumes, Ember articulates her main argument: “Obviously Blake is using both poems to make
the same point about the evils of child labor; however, the narrator from Songs of Innocence is
far more effective in making said point.” From there, Ember eloquently analyzes the rhetorical
effect of Blake’s Experience poem, deftly incorporating quotes from the poem with her analysis
of their intended and actualized effects. She concludes:

In his effort to slam the reader with the truth, Blake’s dramatic approach detracts
from his message. Putting the eloquent words of accusation into the mouth of the
“thing among the snow” (line 1), spoils the effect. Yes, society’s evils should be
pointed out, but not in the preachy and frankly unbelievable manner that this
poem employs. By using the voice of experience to explore a child robbed of
his/her innocence, the idea looses its potency. As valuable as experience is, it is
not the best way to explore the concept of the “Chimney Sweeper.” Far more
powerful, is the poem “The Chimney Sweeper,” from Songs of Innocence.

Intriguingly, although Ember’s analysis of Blake’s chimney sweeper poems valorizes innocence,
a value she described advocating for many times in academic writing situations, it also returns to
the theme of ambiguity and complexity that she worked on in her analysis of Antigone. As she
rejected an entirely positive or entirely negative interpretation of Antigone, so she rejects the
dichotomizing of innocence and experience in Blake’s work. She argues that by simultaneously
embracing “innocence and experience in every person,” we are better able to remember that
“distasteful individuals to have redeeming qualities” and that “no matter how innocent someone
may seem, they should not be underestimated.” While Ember insists on holding both, she pauses to advocate for innocence. Returning to her argument that “‘The Chimney Sweeper’ from *Innocence* packs more of a punch than the one from *Experience,*” she argues that this observation might be “extended” more universally “it could be argued that the power of innocence to capture the mind is often underestimated, and society should focus less on the allure of experience and more on the simple appeal in the longing to ‘wash in a river and shine in the Sun’ (line 16).” Here Ember is pushing her celebration of innocence, a rhetorical purpose she has taken up for three years, into more overtly persuasive territory.

**Year Four**

In my comparison of Leesa’s, Joe’s, and Ember’s “textual analysis” samples, I have already demonstrated some of the relative strengths of Ember’s writing in her major by her fourth year. Ember’s essay “Living a Double Life: A Character Study of *Measure for Measure*’s Isabella,” explicitly constructs itself as intervening in a scholarly debate and Ember as an insider in a scholarly discourse community. Further, like her analysis of *Antigone* and Blake’s chimney sweeper poems, Ember’s character study of Shakespeare’s Isabella celebrates the character’s moral ambiguity and complexity. In this case, however, Ember’s celebration of ambiguity and complexity is not a secondary purpose, but her main argument. Ember concludes her analysis:

Isabella’s dichotomy can be resolved by accepting that a human can commit good and bad acts because one person can be both good and evil. In *Measure for Measure* Isabella is both a saint and a sinner. She is manipulated, but she also has a free will. She is, ultimately, both the temptress and the tempted. In a word, she is a woman.
It is striking how many of the themes that Ember takes up in this paper are recurring threads that have appeared and developed through multiple passes. In addition to the recurring celebration of multiplicity and ambiguity, this text returns to Ember’s interest in the paradox of human choice, which was the topic of a Philosophy paper she wrote during her second year in college. In that paper Ember reviewed the longstanding debate about freewill and determinism and came down on the side of free will. However, two years later, her position has shifted; rather than taking a “side” in the debate, Ember insists that people make their choices and have their choices determined. In short, this paper not only demonstrates Ember’s ability to hold onto paradox, but also is aimed at persuading others to resist strict moral judgments.

Ember’s activism, the evangelical impulse to work toward social justice or relief, is most fully realized in her paper, “When the World Rejoices at Divorce: An Analysis of the Rhetorical Situation Resulting from Nujood Ali.” Written for an upper-division Rhetoric course, this paper has a different disciplinary context than most of Ember’s English papers, which were composed in Literature or Composition courses. Despite being a newcomer to the field of rhetoric, though, Ember’s analysis of the discourse surrounding a ten-year old Yemeni girl’s request for a divorce is not only an appropriate application of a key rhetorical theory, but a compelling contribution to our understanding of women’s activism and rhetorical ecologies. Ember uses Lloyd Bitzer’s rhetorical situation theory to analyze ever-widening ripples of discourse that Ali’s request for a divorce called forth. She also demonstrates that Ali’s actions not only influenced her own situation and brought attention to the phenomenon of child marriages and rape, but also changed the rhetoric used to discuss it. In her conclusion, Ember summarizes the accomplishments of her analysis: “I have explored how one girl’s demand has been transformed by the media into a sob
story, a victorious tale, and ultimately a spark for educators and human rights activists. No more will any reporter dream of romanticizing the child bride.”

Looking across four years, from Ember’s summary-heavy readings of Machiavelli and Douglass to her extensively researched and theoretically informed case study of the rhetoric of child brides, Ember’s development is unmistakable. Especially compelling is how her developing disciplinary expertise complemented her activism. Her writing demonstrates that adopting an academic identity does not invariably mean tempering or compromising activist rhetorical purposes. On the contrary, for Ember, disciplinary ways of thinking and disciplinary writing expertise provided more resources for intervening in issues that mattered to her and to the world around her.

Concurrent Development: Ember’s History Writing

While Ember’s writing development is clearly borne out in the writing she produced within her major, her writing for history courses displays concurrent development of writing expertise outside her major. Table 5.11 summarizes, in my words, two samples of Ember’s writing outside her major during her second and third years of undergraduate coursework.

Ember’s history papers display thematic connections to her writing in English courses and seem to follow a similar developmental arc. Interestingly, her biographical paper on missionary David Brainerd makes an argument similar to ones she made about Antigone and Isabella: that human behavior and motivations are always morally mixed. And, like Ember’s English writing, her history writing becomes more overtly persuasive over time: while her reading of Brainerd is sympathetic and invites the reader to take a new view of the missionary, her research paper about the causes of disproportionate rates of incarceration is explicitly deliberative, calling for reconsideration of attitudes and policies. While there is less data from
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<th>Main Point/Argument</th>
<th>What Text is Doing</th>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>the life of David Brainerd</td>
<td>Brainerd was “just a man.”</td>
<td>using archival research to resist hagiographic readings of Brainerd while offering a sympathetic reading of Brainerd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>American incarceration rates</td>
<td>Current over-incarceration of black Americans results from political campaigns and poorly researched policies of 1960s-1980s.</td>
<td>persuading readers to reconsider stereotypes of black men; countering beliefs about criminality; arguing for reconsideration of sentencing policies</td>
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which to draw conclusions, Ember’s history writing offers some evidence of writing development that is concurrent with and complementary to her development as a writer within her major.

I have included this analysis of Ember’s writing over time in order to demonstrate *that* some evangelicals develop significantly as writers during their undergraduate career and to examine *how* that development happens. Ember’s case study shows that development is gradual and that a writer may return to the same theme repeatedly in the process. But Ember’s writing demonstrates that returning to themes is not a form of paper recycling, but rather a working through of knotty issues by taking multiple passes at them, each time bring a few more resources to bear on the problem.

By focusing on Ember’s writing and development, though, I do not intend to give the impression that her writing or development are representative of the other participants in this study. This long-term pattern of development was visible only in Ember’s writing samples. Neither Morgan nor Rachel provided enough writing samples to look longitudinally at their writing within a single discipline. While Jean-Luc provided a large number of writing samples, very few of his writing samples came from courses within his major. However, the transformation in Will’s biology writing in the course of a semester also confirms the finding that evangelicals can and did develop as writers over time as they gained discourse community expertise.

**Academic Activism: Perceived and Performed**

In their interviews, the participants indicated that they were aware that their teachers were unlikely to be impressed by explicitly faith-based arguments and appeals and often contrasted themselves to peers (some imagined and some specific) whom they had seen being “loud” about
their faith in their high school and college classrooms. All described themselves as wanting to avoid such missteps and intending to write papers that were appropriate for academic situations (see Chapter Four). While this study finds that participants typically wrote papers that were fitting responses to their academic writing situations, document analysis revealed some gaps between participants’ perceptions of their writing and the texts they actually produced. In particular, some participants overestimated and others underestimated the extent to which their faith-motivated attitudes and values were visible in their writing. Additionally, document analysis revealed that the characteristics of participants’ activism as it appeared in their academic texts were different from their perceptions of it.

**Loud: The Rhetorics of Morality and Personal Responsibility**

A comparative analysis of participants’ academic texts and their interview data revealed that participants who underestimated the visibility of their faith were those identified in the previous chapter as arguing for sanctioned positions. In particular, Isabella and Michele described themselves as “careful” about making sure their faith was invisible in their academic writing, but in both of their writing, claims about “morality” stood in for evangelical norms. During our interview Michele explained how she worked to make her faith less visible in her academic writing:

I am careful to not actually put it … actually, say, use the words God or Christianity in my paper, because my English teacher, she’s like […] “Be sure when you write this, don’t put too much Christianity in it because it doesn’t matter to [the university] pretty much,” not [university] students because it’s so diverse here and I guess, don’t want to offend anyone so pretty much just have to
talk about the issue and itself, so it is hard but I definitely do put under wraps my Christian values and how I feel just without using those words.

For Michele, keeping her “Christian values” “under wraps” was primarily a matter of finding the right words—not explicitly appealing to God or the Bible. In her academic writing, Michele did avoid biblical citation, claims grounded on appeals to religious authorities, and personal disclosure of her faith. In her interview, Isabella described a similar approach to avoiding offending others by not making explicit appeals to her own faith tradition.

However, in their academic writing, Isabella and Michele deployed the rhetoric of morality to stand in for explicit arguments about faith-motivated values and religious authority. For example, in her reading journal response to the novel *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, Michele disagrees with the author’s characterization of the main character, whose first experience of sexual intercourse occurred while she was drunk, as innocent:

That fact that Charlotte even goes to the party in the first place shows a little drop in the “innocent figure” for me personally. She knew there would be drinking, and she knew she hated being around drunken people. Then there’s the fact that she raised the hem of her dress to show off her legs, which she knew would attract the attention from drunk guys who she doesn’t even like to begin with. […] Then, even when she knows she doesn’t want to drink, she allows Hoyt to bring her wine to look cool in front of the party-goers. […] While it is true that she refused him in other areas, I think her whole situation could have been avoided if she just refused to go to the party. It’s a college campus, there should be many other things to do than partying that are well within walking distance. I’m not trying to
I just feel that Charlotte’s character could have been stronger in keeping to her morals.

Michele seems aware that her perspective might not be widely shared because she works to soften her critique of Charlotte by emphasizing her subjectivity and partiality (“for me personally” and “I just feel”). She also attempts to locate the moral judgment within Charlotte, rather than herself when she writes, “I’m not trying to shoot her down. I just feel that Charlotte’s character could have been stronger in keeping to her morals” (emphasis added). Yet, the reading journal entry offers no evidence that Charlotte betrayed her own morals; more likely is that Charlotte violated Michele’s behavioral norms. While her inclusion of an argument deriving from her religious-motivated sexual values is more visible than Michele seemed to realize, it is possible that such a response was appropriate if the assignment was primarily aimed providing accountability for completing the assigned reading or a basis for in-class discussion. Michele did not provide an assignment sheet for her reading response journals, but described the assignments as informal. During the interview, Michelle reflected that she “wrote them a little more informally than [she] should have. They should have been a little more…I didn’t write them quite as neatly, but….?” Her reflection on her reading journal responses suggests some awareness that they did not represent her best work, but Michele described the problem more in terms of correctness (formality and neatness) than the source and focus of her arguments.

Michele’s reading journal makes almost the same argument about sexual behaviors that Isabella articulated during our interview. Isabella described her motivations for writing a paper urging college students to abstain from sex before marriage as a mixture of her faith and personal responsibility. On the one hand, she explains that abstinence is “a big part of my faith. […] You shouldn’t just do things that you know you’re going to regret in the future, even if you don’t
regret it, you shouldn’t be okay with it because of my faith, of course, I believe that.” In her explanation, we see the extent to which Isabella’s value of abstinence came from religious authority. Being abstinent was about doing what her faith tradition told her. But, like Michele, Isabella turned to a more neutral sounding rhetoric to displace faith-motivated values. For Isabella the rhetoric of personal responsibility stood in for religious authority:

I know you’re in college and you get drunk, you hook up with dudes. I never drank in my entire life and then I got here and I drank for the first time. I had dudes come unto me, but even though I was drunk for the first time, I knew better. You can’t be drunk to the point where you’re going to end up sleeping with a guy. If you really believe that you’re against that, you’re not going to do it. I believe that. People who say, “I got raped because I was drunk” … “No, you’re an idiot. You should have got your priorities straight or had a friend with you or something.” I’m one of those people who, like, I think you should take blame for what happens, and take accountability for your actions, even if you mess up, quit blaming others because you don’t get anywhere like that.

When Isabella explained why abstinence was so important to her, she also revealed how tightly intertwined her religious convictions about sexual behavior and her beliefs about “personal responsibility” were.

Isabella’s actual paper about abstinence displaces explicit arguments from religious norms or authorities with intertwining rhetorics of morality and personal responsibility. Notice the way this operates in her introduction:

From the moment a person wakes up, until their last thought before they go to sleep at night, decisions are being made. Some decisions are thought out, while
others are made upon a quick impulse. In our contemporary world the decision on choosing abstinence is an important issue that is continuously overlooked. Unfortunately, because of this a majority of teens and college students fail to make the right decisions concerning their virginity and abstinence, and often have regrets. Although abstinence is not as common in today’s society as it once was, it still exists and is the only guarantee to prevent unwanted pregnancies and have a STD free life.

Isabella’s thesis, that abstinence “still exists” and is the best way to “prevent unwanted pregnancies” and avoid contracting sexually-transmitted infections, is tonally different than the preceding sentences of her introduction, which conflates morality and personal responsibility through the language of “making the right decision.” This pattern of subordinating arguments about morality under pragmatic arguments continues throughout Isabella’s paper. While her faith-motivated arguments are implicit, they are nevertheless present, functioning as warrants.

Additionally, the religious motivations of Isabella’s argument are visible in her diction, which draws from evangelical and religious tropes. For example, Isabella not only argues that her peers should practice abstinence (“be abstinent”) but also believe in abstinence: “Becoming a teen parent increases the chances of dropping out of school and decreases the teen’s social life and mental stability (Barnett 264+). If more people believed in abstinence, these rates, amounts, and numbers would undoubtedly decrease.” The language of “believing in abstinence” and adopting abstinence as “a way of life” draws from religious discourse and betrays Isabella’s pragmatic-sounding thesis.

This conflation of perceived evangelical norms and the rhetorics of morality or personal responsibility is always present in Isabella’s and Michele’s academic writing that addresses
sexual behaviors: Michele’s *I Am Charlotte Simmons* reading response journals and speech arguing against abortion as well as Isabella’s rhetorical analysis of Axe Body Spray ads and position paper arguing for abstinence. Given that both Isabella and Michele described working to avoid offending others and letting their faith become visible in their writing, it seems likely that they did not perceive how thoroughly and visibly the rhetorics of morality and personal responsibility replaced explicitly faith-based arguments in their actual writing.

**Muted: Invisible Resistance**

If certain evangelical undergraduates underestimated the visibility of their faith in academic writing, others overestimated it. In their interviews, Rachel and Will indicated their faith-motivated values and attitudes might be visible in their academic writing that engaged with topics they found objectionable: feminism and evolution. However, these evangelicals’ resistance to their topics was not visible in their actual academic writing samples.

In our interview, Rachel described her lack of enthusiasm for the subject matter, feminism, of an upper-division sociology course. She explained, “I just had a hard time getting into it. I’m not really a feminist and a lot of the topics I wasn’t interested in, which is not to say that it’s bad or anything. It just wasn’t interesting.” Her final paper required her to review a book-length sociology study related to the theme of the course, and she chose Arlie Russell Hochschild’s *The Second Shift* because it was the only one she “could stand.” This is how Rachel summarized the book during our interview:

> The book was about ten different couples that the sociologist interviewed and was trying to show… I guess her main argument was to show that the women would still not be viewed as an egalitarian in their relationship and that she was always the one that ended up quitting the job… even if they both worked, she would be
the one that would pick up the kids. There’s still this stigma throughout the U.S. that women would come home and have a second shift with the kids and the husbands were not really expected to do that, was her main point. And to me, the whole time, I’m just thinking, “what if the woman wanted to do that?”

I found it silly, which I tried to really take those biases out when I wrote the paper, because I didn’t have a choice. I needed to get a good grade, but I’m sure it wasn’t my best, just because my heart wasn’t in it. I couldn’t understand the argument. I didn’t get where she was coming from and that made it difficult.

In light of Rachel’s perception that her “heart wasn’t in it” and that she “couldn’t understand the argument,” her actual paper is surprising. Rachel’s paper provides a chapter-by-chapter summary of *The Second Shift* and synthesizes the study with sociological concepts she learned throughout the course, such as the construction of gender and gender oppression. Her book review is not particularly eloquent and does not provide a new perspective on the study or the issues it raises, but it does not betray any of the difficulty Rachel described in terms of understanding Hochschild’s argument.

More surprising, though, is the position Rachel takes in the paper’s conclusion. Although Rachel insisted that she was not “really a feminist,” her conclusion seems to call for new constructions of masculinity that would provide more parity in domestic labor:

> Overall, Hochschild’s book opened the eyes of many couples across America. The work for most of the couples was prominently [sic] the woman’s job and the wage earner was often the male. However, since we live in a time where both the husband and the wife must earn money, the wife’s income was essential to most families. Economically, a couple cannot have the “American lifestyle” with just
one paycheck. Culturally, women tend to be the ones who get stuck doing the second shift as well as working a full time job, but as in Jessica and Seth’s case, the husband’s career comes first. Why is this the case? Why do women [sic] have to put in the most of the effort at home even though they work a full time job?

Women do tend to care more about the “right pre-school” to attend more than men or like Nancy Holt “fear” divorce more than men. These arguments do not stand for women to be “supermom”. [sic] But, until the gender of a male becomes socially acceptable to help out at home, nothing will change.

While this excerpt contains several errors, it also reveals a lack of discourse community expertise. For example, the awkward construction of the final sentence—“until the gender of a male becomes socially acceptable to help out at home”—is more likely the result of Rachel’s struggle to describe the social construction of gender than insufficient proofreading. Strikingly, far from resisting the feminist content of the course, Rachel seems to be calling for a new culture of masculinity that would bring more parity to working couples.

A second example of this phenomenon of over-reporting the visibility of faith-motivated values and attitudes in academic writing comes from Will. As discussed previously, Will’s lab reports demonstrated significant writing development over the course of the semester, transforming from basically informal participation reports to effective lab reports. In his interview, Will described using strategies to distance himself from the content of his lab reports.

You probably can’t really tell if my faith has affected the lab communications, but a lot of what we … the last event we’re writing about has been things specifically saying … like denouncing Christianity, like how all the time science just disproves or says that it disproves creationism and things like that. Okay, what
I’m saying is most people in their lab communications wrote about things like that saying things or quoting and citing scientific sources and things like that. If that’s what the assignment kind of revolves around or I do my be-. I don’t really say things like that. It’s difficult to explain.

*Do you feel yours [lab reports] are different than your classmates’?*

Yeah.

*How would they be different? Yeah, do you want to look at it?*

[…]. Okay, we had a lab that was about Phylogenies, which is where the origins of different organisms and where they came from. That’s specifically saying this has a common ancestor with this and essentially this evolved from this and this evolved from this, which obviously is not something that I believe. I think that God created all creatures in the seven days, but … okay I’m getting off track.

*No, it’s fine.*

People talking about the Phylogenies and things like that, they would just write about and say things like, “well these two organisms share a common ancestor with this. Then that’s where this whale came from was way back along the line there was a single cell bacteria and that eventually adapted and evolved into whatever we have here.” Just like in the beginning of the communication where you’re giving opening information about the topic, I just kind of refrained from saying things like that.

*What would you do instead?*

I say things like … I use the word supposedly a lot actually.
Okay, putting a little distance.

Right. I’m saying the same words, but I’m adding more to it like saying, “Scientists believe or some people think or this is supposedly what happened,” things like that. I know my TA, my lab TA notices that because he’s underlined things before and he’s like, “No, this is true, it’s not supposedly,” but obviously I don’t agree with that. Mostly, I guess, that’s what it is, it’s just me adding little things that are saying this is what some people think, but not what I think.

I see, yeah. You said your TA notices it? How are your grades, if I can ask?

They’re not bad. It’s just, I think he … I don’t think that … it’s out of fifteen and I’ve gotten twelve and a half points, which is also one of the higher grades because these things are really hard to do. Yeah, I don’t think that it’s affecting my grade negatively by any means, but I would not feel satisfied. I would not feel good about turning in a paper that had something like that. Most people probably wouldn’t even think that’s a big deal. You’re just quoting the biology book; this is what its saying. You’re just quoting this but I don’t know, I just don’t feel comfortable. I think that makes sense that I don’t feel comfortable about saying something that is, I don’t know, going against what I believe about God and what he’s done…

Without comparative data, it is not possible to confirm whether Will’s lab reports are different from those of his peers. Analysis of his writing samples confirms that none of Will’s lab reports include explicit references to evolutionary processes. However, the document analysis also finds no evidence of the distancing strategy Will described.
The Nature of Academic Activism

In addition to revealing differences between participants’ perceptions of the extent to which their faith-motivated attitudes and values are visible in their academic writing, the document analysis revealed some differences between participants’ perceptions of their activism and the rhetorical purposes of their actual texts. While several participants did not describe activist purposes for their writing (James, Joe, Leesa, and Morgan), others indicated that activism was a goal in some situations (Rachel and Will), and still others frequently described their purpose as activist (Ember, Isabella, Jean-Luc, and Michele). Comparative analysis of participants’ perceptions of their activism and the rhetorical purposes of their actual texts showed that evangelical undergraduates’ activism was typically more understated than they perceive, usually performed as a secondary rhetorical purpose and presented as epideictic, rather than deliberative, rhetoric.

Approximately fifty-percent of the documents included in the representative sample engage in some form of moral judgment, discriminating between good or bad, right or wrong, etc. Strikingly, however, none of these texts make moral judgments from explicitly religious grounds. In order to understand how these texts engage in activism, I categorized the 33 texts that make explicit moral judgments according to how moral judgments showed up in their rhetorical purposes. When participants’ academic writing offered moral judgments, they were most frequently presented as celebrating or critiquing (25 samples); much less frequently they were calling for action (5 samples) or taking positions (3 samples). In the remainder of this section, I examine the phenomenon of academic activism via celebrating and critiquing and describe how variations in evangelical identity are correlated with patterns of how participants’ deployed these moves.
Often celebrating or critiquing was secondary to another rhetorical purpose (such as performing a disciplinary task). Table 5.12 lists the range of values and actions that participants celebrated and critiqued in their academic writing. As this list shows, these evangelicals frequently celebrated widely-held values such as activism, education, and social equality. Not surprisingly, then, they also frequently criticized practices that contradict widely-held values including social injustice and discrimination. But Table 5.12 also reveals that those who argued for sanctioned positions, Isabella and Michele, also frequently engaged in critique of behaviors that they perceived as unsanctioned by evangelical norms—such as premarital sex, sexual explicitness, and drinking. Such critiques enact values that are less widely-shared within American culture.

In addition to the epideictic topics listed in Table 5.12, this analysis also revealed a recurring theme related to celebrating and critiquing: embracing. Ten documents analyzed in the representative sample (15%) argue for embracing ambiguity, complexity, and/or multiplicity. Embracing is related to celebrating and critiquing, because it typically involves both, but in addition to making moral judgments, texts that embrace ambiguity, complexity, or multiplicity argue against overly simplistic moral judgments and rejection of people who have been critiqued. Table 5.13 summarizes participants’ “embracing” arguments. Several of Ember’s papers—for example, her analyses of Antigone and Blake’s “Chimney Sweeper” poems as well as her historical research on race and American incarceration rates—are exemplars of this type of argument.

Papers that made arguments in favor of accepting ambiguity, complexity, and multiplicity were authored by participants categorized in the previous chapter as aiming to enact integrated values. This suggests that that one of the primary moves of enacting integrated positions is
Table 5.12 Topics of Celebration or Critique

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Celebrating</th>
<th>Critiquing</th>
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<tr>
<td>activism</td>
<td>social injustice and discrimination</td>
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<tr>
<td>• civil disobedience (Ember)</td>
<td>• child marriage (Ember)</td>
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<td>• peaceful protest (Leesa)</td>
<td>• lack of government transparency (Isabella)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• women’s activism (Ember; Michele)</td>
<td>• racism (Isabella; James)</td>
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<td>• deliberation (James)</td>
<td>• ethnocentrism (James)</td>
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<td>education</td>
<td>unsanctioned behaviors</td>
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<td>• equal access to education for women (Michele)</td>
<td>• premarital sex (Michele)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• education (Ember; Michele)</td>
<td>• drinking (Michele)</td>
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<td>• academic inquiry (Rachel)</td>
<td>• explicit sex appeals in advertising (Isabella)</td>
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<td>equality</td>
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<td>• racial equality (Ember; Isabella)</td>
<td>• generosity (Will)</td>
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<td>• gender equality (Ember; Rachel)</td>
<td>• humility (Jean-Luc)</td>
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<td>character</td>
<td>• cooperation (Jean-Luc)</td>
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<td>• generosity (Will)</td>
<td>• innocence (Ember)</td>
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<td>• humility (Jean-Luc)</td>
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*Table 5.13 Arguments for Embracing Ambiguity, Complexity, and Multiplicity*
arguing for ambiguity, complexity, and multiplicity; the correlation between having an 
individuated, adult evangelical identity and making “embracing arguments” also suggests the 
integrity of the category “enacting integrated values.”
Chapter VI: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to better describe and understand the academic writing and experiences of evangelical undergraduates at a public university. Previous composition studies have drawn attention to undergraduate diversity and the role of religious rhetorics in writing classrooms. However, because much of the existing scholarship identifies evangelical students by their “problematic” writing, the field has focused on writing that does not conform to academic expectations and is obviously faith-motivated. Additionally, because most studies of religious students’ writing report on classroom anecdotes, they prioritize instructor experiences, rather than student experiences. In contrast, this dissertation used qualitative interview methods to understand how ten self-identified evangelical undergraduates experienced academic writing situations and how their experiences shaped their rhetorical choices and used qualitative document analysis methods to describe the characteristics of the academic writing of these evangelicals. The interview data revealed that there is no single phenomenon of evangelical identity and, therefore, no single evangelical experience of academic writing, but that evangelical identities did exert pressure on academic writing by significantly shaping participants’ rhetorical awareness and interpretation of the salience of their writing. Based on the interview data, this dissertation presents a model of how evangelical identities influence rhetorical purposes and uses that model to explain three primary patterns of faith-motivated writing that emerged. The document analysis revealed that participants’ academic writing was usually a fitting response to an academic writing situation. This study also found that participants’ rhetorical purposes and choices for academic writing were dynamic and that some evangelicals significantly developed as writers over time as they gained discourse community expertise.
In this chapter, I discuss these findings, putting them in dialogue with existing research, theories, and pedagogical practices related to the academic writing of evangelical undergraduates. I then reflect on the study’s methodology, considering how the study’s methods may have influenced the findings. I discuss the implications of these findings for undergraduate rhetoric and writing pedagogy and curriculum design and conclude by making recommendations for future research.

**Discussion of the Findings**

On the whole, these findings do not support dominant characterizations of evangelical undergraduates or their academic writing in the rhetoric and composition literature and suggest that writing instructors and scholars may be misreading this growing undergraduate population.

**Secular, Academic Texts**

One of the study’s most significant findings was that the academic texts produced by these evangelical undergraduates were usually fitting responses to their specific rhetorical situations, even as their writing samples varied in strength and effectiveness. This finding calls into question the common wisdom of the field and the assumption running through much of the existing composition scholarship that evangelicals’ academic writing often explicitly expresses evangelical identity and violates norms for academic writing (Anderson; Carter; Dively, “Poststructuralist”; Downs; Goodburn; Miller and Santos; Montesano and Roen; Peters; Neuleib; Perkins, “Radical”; Rand; Ritz; Smart; Trapp; Worth). Even recent studies that have argued that evangelical academic writing does not violate norms for academic writing tend to characterize the academic writing of evangelical undergraduates as easily recognizable and obviously faith-motivated (DePalma; Ringer).

Unlike the student writing described in teacher anecdotes or examined in several case
studies, the academic writing of the evangelicals in this study was not obviously faith-motivated and did not explicitly enact evangelical discourses. Throughout the literature, compositionists characterize evangelical student writing as performing religious discourse (Anderson; Carter; DePalma; Dively “Religious”; Goodburn; Neulieb; Rand; Ringer “Consequences”; Ritz; Williams; Worth). Anderson describes one student’s topic and style as derivative: “‘Cathy’ writes about her call to join a new church and how God has guided her every step of the way. The language is the language of the fundamentalist, of the testimonial, of Guideposts magazine and Sunday morning television” (19). Similarly, Goodburn characterizes one fundamentalist student’s writing as “reflect[ing] a fundamentalist discourse” and frequently “shar[ing] his religious beliefs” (337).

However, this document analysis revealed that participants rarely selected topics that were obviously faith-motivated; rather, these evangelical undergraduates took up topics that were appropriate for the assigned genre and the course’s disciplinary focus or curricular goals. In contrast to the field’s conventional wisdom that evangelicals frequently write about religious topics, this study found that, when given a choice, these evangelicals rarely chose to write about religious topics. Only two of the writing samples analyzed (3%) addressed religious topics when religion was not a primary focus of the course. In both cases, the writers chose religious topics that were appropriate in the context of the course content and/or assignment goals. Additionally, contrary to the field’s characterization of evangelicals as likely to “share their faith” in academic writing, these evangelicals almost never described their own religious experiences in their academic writing: only one writing sample analyzed (1.5%) included a description of the writer’s religious experiences. Importantly, that student’s disclosure of her recent conversion experience was appropriate in the context of the assignment, which asked her
to describe why she chose her major and to outline her career goals.

This study’s findings about the infrequency of biblical citation also contradict prevailing characterizations of the academic writing of evangelical undergraduates. The composition literature asserts that evangelical undergraduates are prone to biblical citation and argument from religious authority; biblicism, one of Bebbington’s four “hallmarks” of evangelicalism, is assumed to be an essential feature of evangelical identity that significantly shapes evangelical academic writing (Anderson; Carter; Daniell “More”; Dively “Religious”; Edwards; Goodburn; Perkins “Attentive”; Perkins “Radical”; Ritz; Williams; Worth). For example, Dively draws on a previous study to describe a direct influence between evangelical biblicism and evangelical student writing:

As Anson has recognized, this perception of the world leads its followers to cite dogma from scripture (and presumably from other texts as well) as “incontrovertible truths” (335). (“Religious” 94)

Carter also describes evangelical students as having “deep knowledge of the Bible” and engaging in “Bible-based reasoning” (574; 576). This study’s document analysis found that participants rarely cited biblical texts in their academic writing and only did so when biblical citation was called for by the course content (in Religious Studies courses). The evangelical undergraduates in this study cited sources that would be expected for undergraduate academic writing: scholarly articles and books (28% of citations); literary, artistic, or historical primary texts (28%); contemporary popular texts (26%); tertiary texts such as encyclopedias, dictionaries, and anthologies (12%); and statistical data and government reports (6%). The infrequency of participants’ selection of explicitly religious topics, disclosure of religious experiences, and
biblical citation strongly counters prevailing characterizations of the academic writing of evangelical as obviously enacting a religious identity.

Additionally, the study’s findings about participants’ rhetorical purposes do not match much of the existing literature describing the academic writing of evangelical undergraduates as seeking to convert the audience or resisting objectionable course content (Anderson; Carter; Edwards; Goodburn; Perkins “Attentive”; Perkins “Radical”; Rand; Ritz; Trapp; Vander Lei and Hettinga; Williams; Worth). For example, Rand examines the phenomenon of “witnessing-talk,” or “declaration of faith in Jesus,” and Carter describes her evangelical students’ rhetoric as trying to “convert the listener to the speaker’s ways of knowing and living” (Rand 359; Carter 572). This study’s document analysis revealed that participants’ writing for college rarely engaged in the actively persuasive moves that witnessing, conversion, or resistance entail. Most frequently, participants’ academic writing worked to perform disciplinary tasks; the second most frequently occurring cluster of rhetorical purposes of participants’ academic writing was summarizing, synthesizing, and taking positions. In fact, persuasion—working to change an audience’s emotions, attitudes, and beliefs or calling for action—turned out to be the least frequently occurring rhetorical purpose of participants’ academic texts. Importantly, none of these evangelicals’ academic texts had a primary purpose of witnessing, declaring faith, or persuading its audience to convert to evangelical Christianity. Likewise, this study found that even when participants experienced resistance to course content (such as evolution or feminism), their resistance was not evident in their actual academic writing.

One of the most striking findings of the document analysis was that when these evangelicals made arguments of value judgments, not only did they not argue from explicitly religious grounds but also they usually engaged in epideictic rather than deliberative rhetoric.
Conversion is a thoroughly deliberative rhetorical purpose. For Aristotle, deliberative rhetoric included the personal or, to put it in modern categories, the private:

Deliberative advice is either protreptic [“exhortation”] or apotreptic [“dissuasion”]; for both those advising in private and those speaking in public always do one or the other of these. […] for the deliberative speaker [the end] is the advantageous [sympheron] and the harmful (for someone urging something advises it as the better course and one dissuading dissuades on the ground that it is worse), and he includes other factors as incidental: whether it is just or unjust, or honorable or disgraceful[.] (48-49)

Conversion is an advantageous action, something the audience is urged to do for their good. But in these evangelicals’ academic writing, conversion was never the telos of their deliberative rhetoric; in fact, of the 66 writing samples analyzed, only five were primarily deliberative and none were calling for the reader’s conversion.

Of these five primarily deliberative writing samples, only one explicitly engaged with a religious topic: Will’s persuasive argument paper called on his audience to support religious free speech at public universities, arguing that religious free speech was advantageous for public universities because it helped to protect diversity. So, although he was arguing about a religious issue, he argued for it by demonstrating how his recommended action would support a widely shared value: diversity. Two additional writing samples used deliberative rhetoric to argue for faith-motivated positions but replaced explicitly religious arguments with arguments from morality and personal responsibility. Isabella enjoined her peers to support and practice abstinence, arguing it was advantageous because it helped them avoid unwanted negative consequences of sexual activity; Michele asked her peers to reconsider their position on abortion,
arguing that abortion is harmful to unborn children and the women who have abortions. Again, these faith-motivated writers were arguing from widely shared values—personal responsibility, protection of children and women—rather than from religious authority or explicitly religious values. The other two writing samples that primarily engaged in deliberative rhetoric were James’ First Year Studies blog post, which exhorted his peers to engage in deliberation about healthcare reform, and Ember’s historical research paper about incarceration rates, which asked readers to reconsider stereotypes about black criminality and called for changes to sentencing policies. All five of the writing samples that engaged in deliberative rhetoric made value judgments and framed those judgments in deliberative terms: advantage and harm. Additionally, all five deliberative writing samples made value judgments in secular terms, appealing to widely shared values in American culture rather than values particular to their faith communities. The infrequency with which participants engaged in deliberative rhetoric challenges dominant characterizations of evangelical student writing, which is often accused of drawing from religious authority to coerce its audience into thinking, believing, or behaving like the writer.

Much more frequently, when these evangelicals made value judgments they engaged in epideictic rhetoric. According to Aristotle, epideictic rhetoric entails “praising and blaming,” though in this study academic epideictic rhetoric took the more specific forms of celebrating and critiquing, and its telos are “virtue and vice and honorable and shameful” (49; 75). Making value judgments is inherent to all species of rhetoric, but in this study 25 of the 33 writing samples that made value judgments were epideictic (75% of writing samples that made moral judgments; 38% of all writing samples analyzed). I am not arguing here that because these evangelicals tended to engage in epideictic rather than deliberative rhetoric their discourse was necessarily not coercive; epideictic rhetoric, though it does not call for action, can be demagogic and support violence
Rather, my point is that these evangelicals’ academic writing is much less overtly persuasive or interested in controlling other people’s actions than assumed and much more adapted to the conventions of academic discourse than assumed, which supports similar findings from DePalma’s and Ringer’s studies. “Celebrating and critiquing” is a variety of epideictic rhetoric that is well-suited for academic discourse, which prioritizes inquiry over overt persuasion. Indeed, the document analysis found that in these evangelicals’ writing celebrating or critiquing was often secondary to another rhetorical purpose, most frequently performing a disciplinary task.

Further, I would argue that this study’s findings about the characteristics of the academic writing of evangelical undergraduates—particularly their topics, sources, and rhetorical purposes—warrant characterizing them as secular, academic texts. The texts are academic in the sense that they are fitting responses to academic rhetorical situations: they address topics within the scope of academic courses and accomplish the goals of academic assignments. These evangelicals’ texts can also be understood as secular inasmuch as they operate within “the immanent frame,” treating cosmic, social, and moral phenomena “as if God would not exist” (Casanova 58; Taylor). Importantly, it is not that these evangelicals do not believe in supernatural or transcendent causation or phenomena or that their academic writing is not motivated by other-worldly concerns. Rather, the texts themselves operate within an immanent frame, or, to put it another way, they “make sense of things entirely or mainly in terms of this-worldly causality” (Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, and VanAntwerpen 10).

Evangelicals & Inquiry

While most of this study’s findings about the characteristics of evangelicals’ academic writing are unique within the existing literature, the finding that some evangelicals made
arguments for embracing ambiguity, complexity, and/or multiplicity resonates with other studies
of evangelical undergraduates (Bryant; DePalma; Dively “Censoring”; Ringer). Ten documents
analyzed in the representative sample (15%) argued for embracing ambiguity, complexity, and/or
multiplicity. Embracing ambiguity was related to celebrating and critiquing, because it typically
involved both, but in addition to making value judgments, these texts argued against overly
simplistic judgments and rejection of people who had been critiqued. This finding that
evangelicals engaged in arguments in favor of embracing ambiguity, complexity, and/or
multiplicity resonates with findings documented in previous studies, such as Dively’s empirical
study and DePalma’s and Ringer’s case studies, which highlight the sophistication of some faith-
motivated undergraduate writing.

Recognition that evangelical students value academic inquiry is still rare. Downs has
characterized evangelical student writing as participating in the “Discourse of affirmation,”
which “affirms given knowledge and overtly resists critical inquiry into it” rather than the
academic “Discourse of inquiry,” which “favors questioning, pursuit of new knowledge and
understanding, desire to analyze and synthesize, curiosity, and ‘negative capability’” (42).
Naïveté is a frequently recurring theme in the composition literature about evangelical
undergraduate writing (Carter; Downs; Montesano and Roen). Compositionists characterize this
strident position-taking and argumentation as “dualistic” or reductive (Anderson; Dively;
Downs; Miller and Santos; Smart; Rand; Worth). Dualism is a problematic term to bring into this
context because in philosophy and theology it has quite another meaning. But in the composition
literature dualism is used to denote binary, reductive, and simplistic thinking and argumentation.
Anderson introduced this use of the term and its connection to naïveté:
It’s not just the simplicity and superficiality of the writing that bothers me. I’m bothered more by [the evangelical student’s] assumption of authority, however mild, which is what I think most bothers all of us—not foolishness, but foolishness that is unaware of itself, superficiality that is either/or, dogmatic, unexamined. (20)

Goodburn uses this understanding of evangelical thinking as reductive to explain why some of her students resisted course content; she explains, “fundamentalists do not view texts as offering multiple readings—there are correct or incorrect readings of a text and those with moral authority have the ability to discern which reading is true” (339).

Dively initially accepted this premise when she conducted a systematic teacher-research study that “tested a pedagogy for responding to the unique problems that composition instructors face when intellectually and rhetorically unsophisticated religious texts do cross their desks” (“Censoring” 58). She admits being “surprised, however by the large number of drafts…which clearly disproved [her] hypothesis” that inviting students to write about religion would result in unsophisticated writing (“Censoring” 59). According to Dively, however, approximately half of her students composed first drafts that were thoughtful, respectful and balanced; among these “accomplished writers” were Christian students who “critiqued” their own religious tradition, highlighting the negative stereotypes of Christians that had been supported by the hypocrisy of high-profile Christians or “reflect[ing] upon the complex and tenuous nature of religious belief” (59; 61-62). Dively argued that many of her students who wrote about their own religious experiences demonstrated a penchant for questioning the doctrine and/or the seemingly simplistic answers that had been handed to them by parents, ministers, and
religious institutions. Their texts reveal inquisitive, questioning personae that are easily distinguished from the judgmental, reductive, dogmatic personae of the texts that [previous composition studies] characterize. (“Censoring” 63)

Dively’s findings about some Christians’ inquisitiveness largely match this study’s finding that some evangelicals argue for embracing ambiguity, complexity, and/or multiplicity. Rachel’s three Religious Studies papers that investigate apparent problems in the New Testament are strong exemplars of this finding. Rather than resisting the assignment, which highlights variations, contradictions, and troubling implications in biblical texts, Rachel embraced the challenge. Her papers acknowledge the interpretive problems the biblical texts pose for contemporary Christians, but argue that Christians should not ignore scholarly criticisms of biblical texts. In Downs’s terms, Rachel’s Religious Studies papers enact the “Discourse of inquiry” (42).

DePalma reported similar findings about the sophistication and complexity evident in faith-motivated writing from his case study of Thomas, an evangelical undergraduate student. Although Thomas’s writing was obviously enacting a religious identity by making his beliefs and commitments the primary topic and engaging in biblical citation, DePalma argues that his writing performed “the kind of sophisticated praxis that is often sought after in academic writing” (234). DePalma describes Thomas’s use of biblical citation as dialogic, rather than dogmatic: “There is a generative dialogue created in the essay between the experiences Thomas constructs and the biblical texts he cites that is consistent with the “they say/I say” structure taught in many undergraduate writing contexts” (234).

This study’s finding that some evangelicals frequently argued for embracing ambiguity, complexity, and/or multiplicity also resonates with findings from studies of young evangelicals.
In her studies of evangelicals at an elite public university, Bryant found that many evangelical undergraduates affirmed the notion of “absolute Truth” but practiced pluralism because they sensed that “their knowledge was incomplete” and subjective (“Evangelicals” 13). Bryant argues that this dissonance provided space for intellectual curiosity and inquiry within an “absolutist” framework (“Evangelicals” 14). Other studies of evangelicals confirm this phenomenon of simultaneous belief in “absolute truth” and the practice of pluralism (Bielo; Bryant “Developmental”; Carroll; Smith Christian).

Many of the evangelicals in this study call to mind the notion of “humble dogma” theorized by Ringer (“Dogma”). Drawing from readings of Augustine and the twentieth-century Christian theologian and missiologist Lesslie Newbigin as well as evangelical students in his own courses, Ringer demonstrates that “certain forms of dogma might serve as the foundation for inquiry” (“Dogma” 351). Ringer argues that the field of rhetoric and composition has a “trained incapacity that limits our ability as writing teachers to recognize and value how belief informs the writing of religiously committed students—and how our own basic beliefs, religious or otherwise, shape our inquiries” (“Dogma” 351). The faith-based values of some evangelicals in this study seem to function as “humble dogma” that motivates academic engagement and inquiry. In particular, Rachel’s thoughtful writing about problems in biblical texts was probably supported by her commitment to biblical authority; importantly, her dogma—belief in the authority and value of those texts—did not preclude critical examination of their problems. Jean-Luc described similar experiences of being drawn to writing about topics that were contested within his faith tradition, especially LGBTQ rights and issues, not in order to advocate or denounce a position, but simply to learn and better understand what was at stake for the various communities concerned with these issues.
Evangelical Student Identities

As discussed in Chapter Two, dominant characterizations of evangelicals’ academic writing are connected to the field’s assumptions about evangelical identity. The prevailing model is to understand “problematic” texts as arising directly and almost inevitably from evangelical identity, ideology, or discourse (Carter; Downs; Goodburn; Miller and Santos; Perkins; Smart). In this view, evangelical identity is primary and totalizing, nearly determinative of academic writing. Dively articulates this deterministic relationship, arguing that religious conservatives “who conceive of themselves as unified, coherent beings are prone to view their worlds through the narrow gaze of the belief system with which they identify” (“Religious” 96). As a result, “[t]he voice of the ideology to which they subscribe subsumes their own voices, so one cannot identify in their discursive expressions any quality that would identify them as separate from that authority” (Dively “Religious” 96). Goodburn applies this logic to her reading of one student’s essay about Kristine Beatty’s poem “Lot’s Wife”:

Fundamentalist discourse […] values individual salvation over community affiliation. Given that Luke views individual salvation as every person’s main priority, it is not hard to see why he would be unwilling to consider the wife’s response to the pagan community in positive terms. David Bleich suggests that the ideologies of individualism and religious values often work to promote sexism (or at least veil the ideologies which support it) because salvation requires individual acts in relation to God, not others. […] Luke’s reading of the wife’s actions can only be considered negative because, in his eyes, she privileges human connection over God’s will. While one could argue that the wife’s actions of caring for her community embodies God’s will to love others, Luke reads her
actions through the biblical authority he has been taught, an authority which condemns the wife. All issues of difference, like gender, are temporal and thus secondary to eternal salvation. (Goodburn 340)

Composition studies frequently link evangelical discourse to foundationalist ontologies and epistemologies, attributing evangelical students’ reductive treatment of complex social phenomena or universal moral claims to foundationalism (Carter; Downs; Goodburn; Perkins).

However, one of this study’s major findings—that because these evangelical undergraduates experienced what it meant to be an evangelical in a variety of ways, their faith motivated and shaped their writing in a variety of ways—challenges the deterministic perspective that views evangelical identity as a significant constraint to academic writing. By analyzing participants’ descriptions of their own evangelical identities and accounts of their actual experiences writing for college, this study uncovered a diversity of evangelical identities and evangelical academic rhetorics, and in doing so departed from previous scholarship on the academic writing of evangelical undergraduates. This study’s findings clarified the connection between evangelical identities and academic writing, showing that evangelical identities influenced how participants’ interpreted the salience of their writing and their level of rhetorical awareness. However, this study found that there is no single phenomenon of evangelical identity and, therefore, no single evangelical experience of academic writing. Rather this study described how four varieties of evangelical identity—received, private, individuated, and low—influenced academic writing in different ways.

The two evangelicals in this study who argued for sanctioned positions are most similar, though not identical, to the evangelicals described in the existing composition literature. Patterns in Isabella’s and Michele’s experiences revealed that evangelicals who chose to argue for
sanctioned positions had a received evangelical identity that was focused on “correct” belief and behavior. As a result, these evangelicals tended to engage in binary thinking, judging beliefs, behaviors, and positions as universally good/true or bad/false, which limited the range of topics that they interpreted as interesting and important. In terms of their binary thinking, Isabella and Michele were not unlike the evangelicals described by Goodburn who believed “there are clear cut positions that one can take on every issue and thus a research paper is an exercise in persuasion” (344). Isabella and Michele described engaging with academic writing and speaking by arguing for positions within cultural debates that they viewed as the correct view for an evangelical Christian to hold (for example, “pro-abstinence” and “pro-life”) but without explicitly invoking or citing evangelical values. Additionally, the interview data suggests that even if Isabella and Michele did have foundationalist ways of knowing, their foundation was most likely evangelical cultural norms, not literalist interpretations of the Bible. Isabella’s and Michele’s perceptions and accounts of their experiences do not support the prevailing assumption that evangelical biblicism provides an ontological and epistemological foundation for evangelical undergraduates.

Isabella’s victim-blaming resonates with Carter’s claim that evangelical discourse is “openly hostile to already marginalized groups (homosexuals, women, those of non-Christian faiths, for example)” (573). What makes Isabella different from the evangelicals described by Carter, Goodburn, and others is that her actual paper did not contain any of the misogynistic attitudes that she expressed in her interview. Isabella and Michele also faintly resembled the common characterization of evangelicals as rhetorically unaware. Analysis of their self-perceptions and experiences at the university revealed that Isabella’s and Michelle’s received evangelical identity, which was focused on correct behavior, discouraged identification with
those who behaved differently and limited rhetorical awareness. Lacking identification with and experiential knowledge of their peers and instructors, Isabella and Michele worked to appeal to audiences that were more imagined than concrete. Nevertheless, these evangelicals were not wholly “unaware”: both described having learned that faith-based arguments are not “allowed” in academic discourse and had developed the practice of arguing for sanctioned positions in order to engage in activism in their academic writing while conforming to perceived norms of academic discourse. It is unlikely that Isabella or Michele would have been recognized as evangelicals by instructors expecting evangelical students to write obviously faith-motivated texts.

Eight of the ten participants described in this study—those who were experimenting with activism and enacting integrated values or who evinced low evangelical identity—are almost wholly unrepresented in the existing composition literature. Two participants in this study were experimenting with academic activism. Leesa and Will, both first-year students, experienced faith as having a personal relationship with God. Because they experienced God as a friend interested in every aspect of their lives, their evangelical identity supported the integration of faith and learning. As a result, compared with Isabella and Michele, these evangelicals interpreted a wider range of academic topics as salient. Analysis of the interviews revealed that Leesa and Will strongly desired to engage in evangelism, but perceived that this purpose was incompatible with most academic genres and so chose alternative purposes for their academic writing. Although Leesa and Will were eager to perform their faith in academic writing situations, their approach to activism in academic writing was still inchoate: both were experimenting with a number of rhetorical purposes, trying to “find a way to talk about God” while working within the expectations of academic discourse (Leesa).
Leesa’s and Will’s accounts of adjusting to undergraduate coursework also highlight the ways in which they are typical undergraduates. Leesa narrated experiences of declining interest in her academic writing: for example, she described initially feeling excited to write about her favorite Beatles song for an English paper but admitted that she wrote the paper the night before it was due because she was having trouble managing her time. Accounts like these tell us that evangelical identity is never the only factor, or even the most significant factor, influencing evangelicals’ academic writing. Leesa’s and Will’s struggles to adjust in their first year of college resonate strongly with research on novice writers and basic writers, which emphasizes that writing performance and development are affected by many extracurricular factors. Writing studies researchers consistently find that material, social, and institutional contexts shape writing development to a greater degree than teachers might imagine (Leki; Sternglass). For example, Sternglass found that financial realities significantly influenced writing performance and development, as many students work full-time jobs to put themselves through college. These evangelicals’ accounts of going through breakups, juggling multiple courses, and working on the weekends match findings from previous studies and suggest that, when it comes to academic writing, evangelical undergraduates have much in common with their nonevangelical peers.

The largest group of participants in this study approached academic writing as an opportunity to enact integrated values. These five participants’ perceptions of their faith and accounts of their experiences revealed that they had more individuated evangelical identities than other participants. For Ember, James, Jean-Luc, Morgan, and Rachel, evangelical identity was individuated and flexible, suffused most domains of life, and provided an ethical framework for interpreting and responding to experiences in multiple ways. As result, they interpreted a wide range of academic writing topics as interesting and salient. These evangelicals’ individuated
identities also encouraged identification with others, which supported rhetorical awareness and the ability to make context-specific judgments. When they interpreted academic writing situations as highly salient, they enacted evangelical and academic values, but were satisfied with mixed-salience writing that allowed them to write to learn, play, or explore. Enacting integrated values—that is, enacting faith-motivated values in ways that also enact the values of a particular academic discourse community—is a successful rhetorical practice that allowed these evangelicals to engage in activism in their academic writing while contributing to academic communities.

Strikingly, these evangelicals composed all of the writing samples that argued for embracing ambiguity, complexity, and/or multiplicity, suggesting that this variety of individuated evangelical identity is compatible with academic inquiry. While compositionists assume that evangelicals feel embattled in public universities and experience “the academy to be openly hostile to their faith-based ways of knowing, being, and expressing themselves,” in some cases, evangelicals experience academic ways of knowing, being, and expressing themselves as resources for enacting their faith (Carter 573). Further, this group comprised fully half of all participants in this study, suggesting that this is not an infrequent phenomenon. Yet such evangelicals and their academic writing are nearly invisible in the existing composition literature.

The only composition studies that resonate with this finding are of nonevangelical Christian students (Daniell “Question”; Perkins “Attentive”; Pugh, ongoing dissertation; Stenberg). For example, Perkins’s most recent study contrasts Tina, an evangelical student, with Sarah, a mainline Christian student. But Perkins’s description of the ways Sara’s faith influenced her writing corresponds with an enacting integrated values approach: “Sara explored her
Evangelical Lutheran tradition, which she saw emphasizing the dignity of all humans, through the refracting lens of historical relativism” (“Attentive” 82). Perkins lauds another of Sara’s papers for inviting an audience that included an evangelical peer and many nonchristian peers to reexamine Christian uses of the Hebrew scriptures with regard to homosexuality: “she encourages her readers, literalist and otherwise, to reflect both on Christian priorities as Christians frequently see them projected in the Jewish Bible and on her readers’ own desires to create the ‘common good’ of a tolerant community” (“Attentive” 83). These evangelicals who enact integrated values may be part of what Daniell has theorized as the Christian “middle,” those Christians who fall in between the Christian/secular binary (“More” and “Question”). Daniell acknowledges that in this “redrawn” map of American Christianity, the Christian “middle” would include some evangelicals as well as the emerging church movement (“More” 257).

In addition to these largely unrecognized varieties of evangelicals, this study found a fourth: a cultural evangelical. Cultural evangelicals are individuals who do not engage in characteristically evangelical practices like church attendance, witnessing, or prayer, but who remain embedded in evangelical culture and discourse (Eskridge). While most of the participants believed their faith was relevant to their schooling and were motivated to engage in activism through their academic writing, Joe evinced low evangelical identity and expressed no impulse toward evangelical activism in academic writing situations. For Joe, evangelical identity was an inherited and cultural experience: he grew up in an evangelical church and family and accepted that as a part of his life and as a part of his identity. Joe’s perceptions of his evangelical identity and his accounts of the limited ways that it influenced his rhetoric in and beyond the classroom correspond with Eskridge’s description of “cultural evangelicals” and Engelke’s concept of
“ambient faith.” Joe’s compartmentalized evangelical identity also corresponds with Bryant’s finding that for some evangelical undergraduates, evangelical identity was very fluid and context-dependent; some consciously performed evangelical identity in enclave situations (“Developmental” 8-9; 19).

Although the diversity of evangelical identities uncovered in this study is unique within the composition literature, it is echoed and supported by ethnographic and sociological studies of contemporary American evangelicalism. Balmer’s ethnographic study of American evangelicalism highlighted its diversity by visiting a wide variety of sites of evangelicalism; he attributes the heterogeneity of evangelicalism to its American willingness to adapt to competition and draw on celebrity-appeal (Mine Eyes 338-9). Christian Smith describes American evangelicalism as “thriving” and, like Balmer, attributes its success to its adaptability. Because evangelicalism is “less an organization than a vast, loose network,” evangelicalism is “structurally wide open for inventive leaders to emerge and launch new initiatives” and highly competitive in the religious marketplace (Smith 86). Webber attributes some of this diversity to generational shifts as the evangelical subculture adapts to dominant culture.

The phenomenon of evangelicals who have largely assimilated the norms of the academy is also unique in the composition literature but corresponds with findings from recent studies of evangelical undergraduates and evangelical public engagement. All of the participants in this study described experiences of evangelical identity at a public university that were similar to some of Bryant’s participants for whom “their Christianity identity was not a liability, but simply one perspective among many in the ongoing classroom dialogue” (“Evangelicals” 17). The participants who successfully enacted integrated values in their academic writing share much in common with Lindsay’s category of “cosmopolitan evangelicals.” A few participants, Ember and
Jean-Luc, also seemed to fit within Bielo’s characterization of “emerging evangelicals.” Most of these participants, particularly those who were experimenting with academic activism or enacting integrated values, perceived a relationship between their faith and learning that resonates with evangelical scholars’ defenses of evangelical intellectualism (Blamires; Hunter; Marsden; Noll).

I believe the evangelical undergraduates in this study can also be understood as secular evangelicals. What I mean is not that they are “not really evangelicals,” but that being secular and being evangelical are not mutually exclusive: “[d]eclaring oneself an unbeliever is different from accepting an order of society in which religion matters prominently in some affairs and does not in others” (Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, and VanAntwerpen 11). Jose Casanova points out the varieties of conceptions of the secular by highlighting differences between European secular societies, which have seen a decline of religious identification and practice, and the United States and South Korea, which “are fully secular in the sense that they function within the same immanent frame and yet their populations are also at the same time conspicuously religious” (58). In fact, Christian beliefs and secularism may be mutually constitutive (Asad). The secular “emerged first as a theological category of Western Christendom” as “one of the terms of a dyad, religious/secular, that served to structure the entire spatial and temporal reality of medieval Christendom into a binary system of classification separating two worlds, the religious-spiritual-sacred world of salvation and the secular-temporal-profane world” (Cassanova 56). Importantly, the category of the secular served to support Christian engagement in the world. During the medieval period, “secular priests” were called to “live in the world” and intervene in it, while “religious priests” were primarily called to “specific liturgical practices” that often kept them separated from “the secular world” (Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, and VanAntwerpen 13). The role
of the secular priests is evocative of these evangelicals’ self perceptions; “the secular”—or in their words, “the world”—is a necessary concept for the evangelical impulse of activism.

These evangelicals fall within Casanova’s description of “mere secularity, that is, the phenomenological experience of living in a secular world and in a secular age, where being religious may be a normal viable option” (60). The evangelicals in this study rarely used the terms secular or secularism, but their beliefs about the appropriateness of explicitly religious discourse in a variety of contexts suggests that they have assimilated and work from concepts of the secular and the religious. Participants’ conceptions of the university largely echo theorists’ understandings of the public university as a secular institution:

Much of social life is organized by systems or ‘steering mechanisms’ that are held to operate independently of religious belief, ritual practice, or divine guidance. […] Schools, welfare agencies, armies, and water-purification systems all operate within the terms of what might be called a secular imaginary. Of course, some people’s actions may be shaped by religious motives, and religious bodies may organized worldly institutions in ways that serve their own purposes. But even for those who orient their lives in large part toward religious or spiritual purposes, activities that take place within and in relation to such institutions are widely structured by this secular imaginary. (Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, and VanAntwerpen 10)

The evangelicals in this study are just such people: their “actions may be shaped by religious motives,” but their actions are also shaped, constrained, by a “secular imaginary.”
Evangelicals & Development

This study’s findings regarding the development of evangelical undergraduate students are unique and relevant to the field’s ongoing conversation about pedagogies that are effective with this student population. While some researchers have sought to understand how students’ faith commitments change during college and Bryant’s longitudinal research has shown that some evangelical undergraduates develop intellectually throughout college, no studies have considered the writing development of evangelical undergraduates. The document analysis revealed that some evangelicals developed significantly as writers over time as they gained discourse community expertise. This finding corresponds with findings from many studies of undergraduate writing development. Longitudinal studies of L2 students, “basic writers” and “underprepared” students have found improvement in writing over the course of the undergraduate career (Leki; Shaughnessy; Sternglass). Sternglass argues that eventually, “even the weakest students benefit by appropriate instructional prodding to achieve the levels required for academic success” (289). Studies of more “traditional” undergraduate students have also found that student writing improves over time but that development is context-specific (Beaufort; Carroll; Curtis and Herrington; Herrington and Curtis; Sternglass). Curtis and Herrington highlight “syntactic growth, growth in critical thinking and writing within a given discourse community” (85), while Lee Ann Carroll finds evidence of “growing ability” in the several areas: “employing appropriate genre and discourse conventions, locating and interpreting relevant sources, applying concepts from a discipline, developing evidence acceptable in the discipline, and organizing all of this information within single coherent text” (90). Will’s and Ember’s writing development fit into this understanding of writing as a situated and social
activity and writing expertise developing as writers acquire disciplinary-specific content, rhetorical, and genre knowledge (Beaufort; Carroll; McCarthy).

Importantly, Will’s account of resisting the evolutionary content of his biology lab reports and the textual evidence of his strides in terms of composing within the lab report genre demonstrate that evangelical undergraduates can develop as writers even when they experience resistance to course content. Will’s development is also striking because of its rapidity. Based on their study at Harvard, Sommers and Saltz observed that “writing development isn’t always happening on the page during freshman year” (144). They explain this lag as a normal phenomenon, noting that “gaps between what a student knows about writing and what the student can actually do can be observed throughout all four years… making it difficult to measure writing development at any one point in a student’s college career” (Sommers and Saltz 144). Will’s development did happen “on the page” during his first year and in a course whose content he found objectionable, suggesting that evangelical identity, even when it causes resistance, does not necessarily work against writing development. Will’s accounts of his experiences during his first year in college suggest that he had accepted a “novice” identity, which Sommers and Saltz found allows first-year students to “[adopt] an open attitude to instruction and feedback, a willingness to experiment, whether in course selection or paper topics, and a faith that, with practice and guidance, the new expectations of college can be met” (133-134).

Taken together, Ember’s account of her personal transformation during college and her writing samples across four years demonstrated that her personal, disciplinary, and writing development were simultaneous and intertwined. Ember’s accounts and perceptions of her schooling emphasize the ways that forming positive relationship with instructors not only
supported her personal development, but also helped her form an academic identity and contributed to her rhetorical awareness. Through positive and dialogical relationships with her instructors, Ember came to see herself as a member of the university, rather than an evangelical outsider. As a result, her approach to academic writing evolved over time from arguing for sanctioned positions to enacting integrated values. Ember’s accounts about the important role that positive, personal relationships with instructors played in her development are in line with other studies of writing development (Edwards; Herrington and Curtis; Leki; McCarthy; Sternglass). For example, Sternglass considered the effects of personal relationships on students’ writing development as well as the “crucial role” that “empathy and support between an instructor and an individual student play” in the student’s writing development and motivation (195).

Ember’s accounts and her writing samples also demonstrate that academic writing expertise can develop within the context of evangelical identity; in other words, development of academic writing expertise does not entail suppressing or discarding religious identity. Although Ember viewed her own development in terms of a before-and-after narrative—contrasting her beliefs and choices before and after leaving a high control church—and although her approach to academic writing evolved from arguing for sanctioned positions to enacting integrated values, the interview and document analysis revealed significant continuities in Ember’s identity and her writing across a period of four years. For example, although Ember’s evangelical identity evolved, her accounts reveal that her evangelical beliefs were changed, maybe stretched, but not ruptured. In the next section on methodological considerations and participant self-identification, I analyze Ember’s self-described beliefs and demonstrate how they recognizably perform
Bebbington’s four hallmarks of evangelicalism and explain why her evangelical identity might be unrecognizable to some evangelicals (including her “before-leaving-church” self).

Ember’s interview also revealed continuities in her rhetoric despite significant development. Her accounts of specific writing situations revealed that the theme of innocence was a resource for academic writing both before and after leaving her church. Ember’s interest in defending innocence is resonant with evangelical values. Her writing samples confirmed the persistence of this theme over time but also showed that while she continued to find innocence valuable, her approach to it became more nuanced. In her later papers, Ember still argued for innocence as a value, but she increasingly argued that all humans are marked by a mixture of innocence and corruption and that this mixture does not make them any less heroic or valuable. Another theme that persisted within Ember’s writing over time was a universalizing impulse; for example, in her analysis of Blake’s chimney sweeper poems, she not only defended the effectiveness of innocence in the context of the specific poem, but also argued that innocence should be more valued in general. During the interview, I did not ask her why she made this generalizing argument, so it is not possible to say precisely what motivated this choice. But Ember’s generalization, like her value of innocence, has resonances with evangelical discourse. My purpose here is simply to demonstrate that Ember’s writing development is more aptly characterized by metaphors of extension—growing, transforming, deepening—than metaphors of disjunction.

**Methodological Considerations**

Qualitative research, “despite any claims to objectivity, is never neutral” because the researcher’s “choice of methods, methodology, epistemology, and most important, the choice of participants, are always political acts with social implications” (Addison and McGee 3). In this
section, I consider how this study’s methodologies and methods influenced the findings and how these influences should be taken into account when interpreting the findings.

**Participant Self-Identification**

This study’s most unique methodological choice was to rely on self-identification rather than other methods of identifying evangelical participants. Self-identification resulted in a sample that was much more diverse than most studies of evangelical undergraduates and, therefore, influenced several of the study’s major findings: that there is no single evangelical identity or approach to academic writing and that evangelical undergraduates rarely compose obviously faith-motivated academic writing.

Recruiting participants who agreed to self-identification as evangelicals avoided many of the ethical problems associated with more common methods of sampling. As discussed in Chapter Two, most studies of evangelical undergraduate writers rely on teachers to identify evangelicals by their “problematic” texts and “perpetuated a narrow view of evangelicals as ‘problem students’ who refused to think critically, parroted narrow-minded bigotry, and maintained fierce allegiances to hyper-conservative political and theological views” (Cope and Ringer 106). This narrow characterization of evangelical students also results from conflation with the term *fundamentalist* (see Cope and Ringer). Because much of the existing composition literature evinces confusion over related but distinct terms (for example *evangelical* and *evangelist; evangelicalism* and *evangelism; apocalypticism and millennialism*; etc.) it is frequently

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17 This section, “Self-Identification,” is revised based on an excerpt from a paper published by Emily Murphy Cope and Jeffrey M. Ringer:
The excerpt that is revised and included here was substantially written by me, with some editing by Jeffrey M. Ringer.
unclear if the religious individuals and groups under discussion are appropriately characterized in terms of their religious identities. Self-identification also seemed especially appropriate in the context of this study, which took place at a large public research university in the “Bible Belt” where evangelicalism infuses the “ambient” religious culture (Engelke). Of the study’s ten participants, fully half would not have been visible through affiliation sampling (i.e., recruiting participants who participated in evangelical churches or campus ministries). Ember had no institutional affiliation and four others—James, Jean-Luc, Morgan, and Rachel—attended mainline campus ministries or churches.

Self-identification as an evangelical was discussed during unrecorded meetings with each potential participant, when we also discussed the study and the informed consent form. The informed consent foregrounded the term evangelical and the importance of self-identification; during these initial meetings, I highlighted my use of the term and explained I was using the term because while evangelicals had become the focus of significant discussion among writing teachers, I sensed that discussion did not reflect all evangelicals. This became a selling point for participants who were keenly aware of negative perceptions of evangelicals. I asked each participant if they felt comfortable identifying as evangelical and found that nine of ten participants quickly agreed. Self-identification proved successful; every interested person who contacted me chose to participate. The interviews reveal that none of the participants use the label evangelical as the primary way of describing themselves or their faith, but they all agreed that they were evangelicals.

Ember was the only participant who was ambivalent about identifying herself as an evangelical. Ember grew up in a church that, she said, “meets all the requirements of being a cult.” She thus distanced herself from evangelical because of wounds by other evangelicals.
Nevertheless, Ember reported having an “intimate” relationship with God. She no longer attended a church but met Bebbington’s definition of evangelical and agreed to identify as such. In her recorded interview Ember admitted to some discomfort even with the label Christian.

After empathizing with Ember’s ambivalence about identifying as an evangelical, I explained that this study was using evangelical in a particular, scholarly sense and briefly outlined Bebbington’s quadrilateral, pointing out that I was not using Bebbington’s definition as “a litmus test” but as a means of helping Ember determine whether she felt comfortable identifying as evangelical. Ember responded, “I think it would be hilarious if you classify me as an evangelical [laughs], because of the con— I called myself that for so many years.” Ember was about to say “because of the connotations,” which suggests that such concerns were paramount for her and that her self-identification was thus ironic.

Still, Ember assented—in her own words—to each of Bebbington’s hallmarks. While Ember’s description of her beliefs and attitudes falls within the framework of evangelicalism, other evangelicals might not recognize her. During our discussion of Bebbington’s definition, Ember said:

> I do believe that Jesus is special. I think that people can get to God through Jesus without knowing it, because the bible verse said, “No man can come to the Father, but through the Son.” I think people will come to the Father. If they get to Him, they’ve gotten through the Son whether they know it or not. In that way, Jesus is very special. I would hope that everyone could have the opportunity to know Him, but in their own way, not in the way that someone prescribes to them.

In this excerpt, Ember articulated a pluralistic evangelicalism: people don’t need to realize that Jesus makes their relationship with God possible. But her statement resonates with Bebbington’s
quadrilateral: a relationship with God (conversionism) is possible only through Jesus’ sacrificial death (crucicentrism). And though she interpreted it differently than many evangelicals would, Ember authorized her pluralistic evangelicalism by paraphrasing John 14:6 (biblicism). Finally, when expressing her desire for others to “know Him” (activism), Ember critiqued traditional evangelical models of conversion that specify one narrow route to God.

My interactions with Ember reveal the challenges of using self-identification to recruit evangelicals as well as the rewards of recruiting participants who are ambivalent about the term evangelical. I was concerned with the ethics of asking Ember to identify as an evangelical when she so obviously rejected labels and affiliations. Although confident in Ember’s evangelicalism, I valued the agency that self-identification allowed participants. Ultimately, Ember identified as an evangelical because she shared my desire to revise scholarly constructions of evangelicals; she was willing to participate as an insider because she wanted her voice to be heard. Recruiting ambivalent evangelicals takes time, sensitivity, and the willingness to let participants go rather than pressuring them to self-identify. However, because Ember pushed the limits of received definitions of evangelical, the rewards of recruiting participants like her are rich. When participants willingly negotiate the labels they resist, they contribute to our understanding of the diversity within identity categories. Participants like Ember prompt scholars to enact robust dialectical research processes valued by qualitative researchers (Guba and Lincoln 193).

One limit of self-identification is that potential participants may have relied on popular definitions of the term evangelical based on stereotypes, leading them to decide not to participate. For example, one of the weaknesses of self-identification is that this study’s sample is overwhelmingly white (nine out of ten participants identified themselves as white). Because evangelical connotes whiteness in popular usage, non-white Christians who meet definitions of
evangelical may not have seen themselves as part of the study’s sample population. One unfortunate consequence of relying on self-identification for sampling, then, is that this study may render non-white evangelicals less visible. Additionally, while this method captured a much more diverse group of evangelicals than other sampling methods have, this study’s sample arguably does not include fundamentalist evangelicals.

**Qualitative Interviews & Document Analysis**

Combining qualitative interview methods with qualitative document analysis allowed for evangelical undergraduates’ perspectives and experiences to be heard and their actual writing in a range of academic situations to become visible, providing a more complete picture of their experiences and rhetorical choices to emerge than is presented in the existing composition literature. Using qualitative interviews to describe evangelical undergraduates’ experiences with academic writing led to the finding that there was no single phenomenon of evangelical undergraduate writing, rather that there are multiple evangelical identities and multiple evangelical approaches to academic writing. Document analysis alone could not reveal the diversity of evangelical identities and the way those identities influenced participants’ rhetorical choices, especially since hardly any of these participants’ academic writing was obviously faith-motivated. Although qualitative surveys might have captured some diversity in terms of evangelical identity and approaches to academic writing, they would not be as effective as qualitative interviews in collecting information about how participants perceived the way their faith influenced rhetorical choices in specific academic writing situations. By asking participants to tell the stories of composing specific papers they had written for undergraduate courses, a more reliable description of the ways evangelical identity shapes academic writing could emerge, revealing differences between what participants hoped to accomplish “in general” through
academic writing and what participants actually chose to do in specific situations. Their stories corresponded with findings about the ways that academic writing processes are constrained by factors beyond the scope of the course such as other coursework, financial pressures, social events, etc. (Leki; Sternglass). Using qualitative interviewing allowed this study to avoid viewing evangelical student writing through the prism of elite, public evangelical discourses and made visible the extent to which evangelical undergraduates’ experiences of academic writing are similar to undergraduate students’ generally.

Using naturalistic methods to collect participants’ academic writing allowed for systematic analysis of a wide and more representative range of evangelical student writing and a better description of the characteristics of evangelicals’ academic writing than is constructed in the existing composition literature. This led to one of the major findings, that evangelicals rarely compose obviously faith-motivated texts and that their academic texts are usually fitting responses to specific academic writing situations. This finding is considerably different from the conclusions reached about the academic writing of evangelical undergraduates by teacher-research methods, anecdotal evidence, and teacher lore. By asking students to share any and all writing they had composed for actual courses, this study collected a broader range of academic texts in terms of discipline, genre, and year in coursework than previous studies, which typically describe evangelical writing in the context of a single course, if not a single assignment.

Examining the writing samples chronologically led to the study’s finding that some evangelicals developed as writers over time as they gained discourse community expertise. This finding was corroborated by a similar finding from the interview study, that participants’ approaches to academic writing were dynamic and sometimes evolved over time.
The open-ended nature of the interview questions supports the trustworthiness of the findings. Participants’ experiences with and perceptions of their faith and academic writing were elicited by open-ended questions such as “Tell me about your faith” and “Tell me the story of writing this paper.” These questions invited participants to respond in ways that were salient to them, rather than in ways that confirmed my assumptions or that lined up with my experiences as an evangelical. Additionally, inviting actual evangelical undergraduates to tell their stories of composing and revising academic writing addressed a problem in the existing composition literature, which has typically “relied on preconceived ideas about how ‘fundamentalist Christians’ view the Bible, truth, and so on” rather than “individual students’ perceptions on these matters” (DePalma 239). DePalma points out that most studies of evangelical student writing “tend to start with a description of how religious students think about language and texts, based on definitions generated in religious studies or elsewhere, and move to an illustration of student texts that fit those definitions” (239). This approach “is limited, because it works from generalizations that do not account for the complex notions about texts and language that many religious students have” (DePalma 239). This study sought to understand how individual evangelicals perceived their faith and how those perceptions and their experiences as evangelicals influenced or did not influence their writing for college.

The trustworthiness of the study’s findings is also supported by the study design, which combined two sources of data: qualitative interviews and writing samples. One of the study’s most unique and significant findings, that some evangelical undergraduates develop rhetorically, was confirmed by analysis of both sets of data and across multiple categories of participants. Additionally, combining both methods allowed me to test the strength of emerging categories; for example, the finding that participants’ who had been identified via the interview data as
“enacting integrated values” composed all of the writing samples that argued for embracing ambiguity, complexity, or multiplicity confirmed the salience of my categorization of participants.

While combining qualitative interviews with qualitative document analysis proved effective in gathering data that yielded significant findings regarding the experiences of evangelical undergraduates and the characteristics of their academic writing, some aspects of the data collection and analysis process limited the study and findings. One problem that emerged during data analysis was the lack of contextual information about specific writing situations; although I had requested that participants share assignment sheets with me, none did. Instead, I had to rely on participants to describe their assignments, which provided me with less reliable information about their academic writing situations and made it difficult to evaluate the contextual appropriateness of writing samples. Some participants had trouble remembering the details of assignments completed in previous semesters. Additionally, some participants provided so many writing samples that it was impossible to ask them to describe all of the assignments during the one-hour interview. I worked to mitigate this limitation as much as possible by researching course descriptions and syllabi, but this information was not always available.

A second limitation that emerged during data analysis was the lack of longitudinal data. For some students in their third or fourth years of undergraduate coursework, I was able to learn much more about their development as writers through their writing samples than through their interviews because one sixty-minute interview was not enough time to collect details about their experiences writing all of the papers they had submitted. Additionally, even if I had increased the length or number of interviews to allow for more data collection, participants would still have been temporally removed from the experienced they described, making the data less naturalistic.
Perhaps the most important methodological consideration is how the findings of this study may have been affected by my own relationship to the phenomenon of evangelicalism. In many ways, my ability to identify as an evangelical with participants made this study possible. As I have discussed elsewhere, there are many reasons why it might be difficult for nonevangelicals to gain access to evangelical undergraduates and to develop the trust necessary for them to feel comfortable participating in a research study about their faith and religious experiences (see Cope and Ringer). Nevertheless, throughout the design, data collection, and data analysis I took steps to ensure that I was not grafting my experiences and perceptions as an evangelical onto the participants’ experiences, perceptions, and writing. I considered using methods for ensuring the trustworthiness of the findings such as member-checking and multiple coders, but these methods would have been impractical for several reasons. Member-checking requires additional time and interest from participants, which may have presented a barrier to participation in the study. Using multiple coders was also impractical given the time and financial constraints of the dissertation process. I did work to mitigate the influence of my experiences and perspectives by analyzing the interview data inductively and then using themes that emerged inductively from the interviews to guide the document analysis. I also frequently consulted with experienced researchers who did not share my experiences with evangelicalism; on several occasions, they examined portions of the data, discussed my interpretations of the data, and worked with me to revise emerging categories and themes. Additionally, I participated in a recorded “bracketing interview,” which provided me an opportunity to discuss and become more alert to the ways that my own positionality might be influencing the study’s findings.
Implications

These findings are relevant in the context of the study’s site, a large flagship public university in the southeastern United States. As with any qualitative study, the findings of this study are not generalizable to all evangelical undergraduate students, but they may be relevant in similar contexts such as other public universities in the southeastern United States. Additionally, although the study findings may describe a local or regional phenomenon, they do suggest that some evangelicals are invisible in the current composition literature. These evangelicals’ experiences and writing may provide some useful insights for faculty who engage with similar evangelical undergraduates.

Paradigms

In some ways, this study’s findings are a counterpart to Marzluf’s findings about the overstated “conflict narrative,” the assumption that “college students’ high levels of religious engagement contrast with college professors’ commitment to secular values” (266). Marzluf explains:

Composition research, teacher lore, and politically conservative commentary about U.S. higher education use the conflict narrative in order to express assumptions about pedagogy, literacy, and the values of colleges and universities, constructing “stock figures” (Helmers, 1994) of secular, liberal teachers and their narrative counterparts, fundamentalist Christian and conservative students. (Marzluf 266-267)

Marzluf’s findings show the stock figure of “secular, liberal teachers” to be exaggerated; this study’s findings show the field’s constructions of evangelical undergraduate writers to be stock figures who bear little resemblance to few actual evangelical undergraduates. The conflict
narrative and stock figures of critical pedagogues and fundamentalist students have been influential in most of the field’s discussions about pedagogy and evangelical students. Despite challenges to the conflict paradigm (Marzluf; Carter; DePalma), the conflict narrative and “contact zone theory,” which assumes cultural conflict, continue to shape composition studies and recommendations related to faith-motivated student writing.

Mary Louise Pratt defines contact zones as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (34). Pratt argues that contact zone theory usefully critiques and supplements “ideas of community that underlie much of the thinking about language, communication, and culture that gets done in the academy,” such as “speech communities,” or, in composition parlance, discourse communities and activity systems (37). Pratt argues for placing “contact zones” at the center of our analyses of communication in order to better interpret how communication works across differences. Bizzell’s 1994 “‘Contact Zones’ and English Studies” helped spread contact zone theory within composition studies. Bizzell embraces contact zone theory as a way of aligning English departments with the reality of multiculturalism and aligning pedagogy, “deconstruction, feminist literary theory, and cultural studies” (163). Contact zone theory has become an important paradigm for composition studies concerned with religious student discourses (Bizzell; Brauer; Goodburn; Hansen; Montesano and Roen; Rand; Rothgery; Williams).

This lens of multiculturalism may be helpful when working with some religious undergraduates, especially undergraduates who have not assimilated the norms of a specific academic culture. However, contact zone theory offers few resources for understanding the evangelicals in this study: they were somewhat aware of the academic culture they found
themselves in. Yes, they had much to learn about academic inquiry and writing, especially research methods and genres. But they did not need to learn that evangelical discourse was not the *lingua franca* of the academy. Further, relying on contact zone theory to understand religious student writing may render invisible faith-motivated writing that does not obviously conflict with dominant academic discourses. It certainly obscures the phenomenon of faith-motivated academic discourse.

A more suitable paradigm for understanding these evangelicals’ academic writing and the writing of students like them is secularization. There are multiple theorizations and manifestations of the secular, not all of which are fitting for the participants of this study. These evangelicals are “secular-while-religious,” well-adapted to varieties of secularism that tend toward religious pluralism rather than *laïcité*, the total exclusion of religion from public life (Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, and VanAntwerpen 13).

**Pedagogy & Curriculum Design**

Over the past twenty-five years, compositionists have offered many suggestions for working with evangelical undergraduates in the context of writing and rhetoric instruction. Most of these recommendations arose from anecdotal experiences or teacher lore and reflect the influence of conflict and contact zone paradigms. Compositionists have critiqued the practice of prohibiting explicitly religious discourse or topics in academic coursework (Anderson; Bizzell; Browning; De Palma; Dively “Religious” and “Censoring”; Trapp; Williams; Worth). Repudiation of this practice stemmed from arguments about the nature of academic discourse, which they insist is not monolithic and stable or more valuable than any other discourse (Anderson; Bizzell; Carter; DePalma; Stenberg; Swearingen). However, this study found that
these evangelicals perceived religious discourse as inappropriate for academic writing and were unlikely to produce such texts without explicit invitation from an instructor.

Several compositionists have argued that writing instructors need to do more to learn about their students’ religious discourses and literacies (Goodburn; Perkins “Radical”; Stenberg). Such knowledge, they suggest, might help instructors interpret and respond to religious student writing more sympathetically. For example, Goodburg, Rand, and Stenberg recommend interpreting fundamentalist discourse as cultural criticism, which better aligns religious students’ purposes with critical pedagogues’ interests. Some suggest ways to identify with students who compose obviously faith-based texts: Anderson recommends that instructors view explicitly faith-based texts as evidence of the writer’s courage, while Neulieb and Ringer suggest drawing from shared religious values to foster trust and engagement in the revision process (Anderson 22; Neulieb 49; Ringer “Dogma” 363). Compositionists have provided guidance for responding to obviously faith-based student writing, emphasizing the need to balance criticism with genuine interest in students’ ideas (DePalma; Goodburn; Perkins “Radical”; Ritz; Ringer “Consequences”). For example, DePalma recommends asking writers who use religious clichés or jargon to “mine their ‘God-terms’” and Ringer provides a set of questions designed to help writers who engage in biblical citation to reflect on their rhetorical purpose and effectiveness (DePalma 333; Ringer “Consequences” 293). Most of these recommendations are not relevant to evangelicals who do not write obviously faith-motivated texts; however, it is possible that DePalma’s practice of unpacking “God-terms” could have helped Isabella and Michele become more aware of the ways that they substituted the rhetorics of personal responsibility and morality for religious arguments.
Other recommendations for teaching evangelical students include providing models of rhetorically effective religious discourses or including explicitly religious content into rhetoric and writing course design (Anderson; Browning; De Palma; Dively; Ritz; Williams). Assignment suggestions include ethnographic research of religious communities (Carter; Rand), analysis of religious rhetorics (Anderson; Dively “Censoring”), and informal writing about experiences negotiating conflicts stemming from religious identities (Goodburn; Williams). Vander Lei and Hettinga have argued, though, that courses with assignments and content like these might feel “more threatening than a classroom in which the instructor shares their presumptions about the distinctions between the sacred and secular and, consequently, ignores their faith” (721). In light of this study’s findings about participants’ enacted conceptions of the secular, I suspect that Vander Lei and Hettinga’s concern is well founded. Secular evangelicals may be especially uncomfortable writing about their own faith experiences in a context that they understand as secular. Leesa’s and Will’s interviews, however, suggest that they may have welcomed an invitation to compose explicitly religious academic texts.

Many of the existing recommendations for working with evangelical students that I have reviewed are not relevant for participants of this study or evangelicals like them. Most of these recommendations are aimed at solving a problem that this study shows is not universal for evangelical undergraduates. While much of the existing literature about evangelical student writing has located a problem in conflicts between evangelical students’ and instructors’ perceptions of what is appropriate for academic discourse, this study suggests that this problem is overstated. In the rest of this section, I consider implications for pedagogy and curricular designs that are relevant to the participants of this study and evangelicals like them.
Many studies of evangelical student writers advocate teaching for rhetorical awareness. Carter’s oft-cited pedagogy of “rhetorical dexterity” entails teaching students the concept of “communities of practice” and helping students understand why rhetorical choices that are effective in one community of practice may not be in another (591-592). Several compositionists have advocated teaching audience awareness and context awareness (Anderson; Williams; Worth). The findings of this study demonstrate that evangelical identity can constrain rhetorical awareness but also reveal that rhetorical awareness is connected to evangelicals’ level of identification with nonevangelicals and accumulated rhetorical experiences on campus and with academic writing. It is not clear how much influence direct instruction in rhetorical theory has on rhetorical awareness relative to these other factors. The need for further research about how rhetorical instruction influences (or does not influence) evangelical undergraduates’ rhetorical awareness is one clear implication of this study.

Ringer has called for more explicit instruction about the relationship between identity, values, and writing. This study’s findings about how evangelicals interpret the salience of their writing and about their rhetorical awareness both support this recommendation. Participants who argued for sanctioned positions evinced comparatively low levels of rhetorical awareness, which limited their ability to recognize the available appeals to their audiences. Ringer suggests guiding evangelical students in reflecting on how their values “overlap and conflict with those of their audience” (“Consequences” 293). Ringer rightly points out that this practice would benefit “students of faith” as well as “those who align with no faith tradition” (“Consequences” 294). The rhetorical tradition already provides a powerful tool for identifying not only where a rhetor’s and audience’s values overlap, but also how those values are manifested as rhetorical resources: commonplaces. While many first-year writing textbooks and courses draw from Aristotle’s types
of proof (*ethos, pathos, logos*) to teach invention, few teach students to recognize commonplaces and use them to appeal to audiences.

Ember’s accounts of positive interactions with faculty throughout college suggest that student-faculty relationships may be more important than direct instruction for helping evangelicals develop rhetorical awareness. In Ember’s case, positive interactions with faculty supported her rhetorical development by increasing her identification with nonevangelicals and providing her with more feedback about the effects of her rhetorical choices. It is important not to separate the feedback from identification; it seems likely that Ember was receptive to her instructors’ feedback about her rhetorical approach because she identified with them. The same feedback may have been rebuffed or even caused Ember to further retreat from identifying with nonevangelicals if given in the context of a negative student-faculty relationship. This implication is supported by other studies that find faculty play a large role in shaping the student-faculty relationship and in helping students construct the writer-audience relationship through that relationship (Edwards; Herrington and Curtis; McCarthy).

In addition to rhetorical awareness, this study also illuminates how important evangelicals’ interpretations of salience are for their experiences of academic writing. Rather than finding a problem, this study highlights that there is room for improvement in engaging evangelical undergraduates with academic writing. This study also revealed that activism is a highly salient purpose for most evangelical undergraduates. Therefore, one implication of this study is that faculty need to design assignments that allow evangelical undergraduates to engage in activism and need to assist evangelical students in recognizing those opportunities.

Stenberg briefly raises the possibility that writing courses with service-learning components may be especially engaging for religious students. Except for Joe, participants in
this study evinced high levels of evangelical activism. In addition to evangelism, activism is frequently expressed as social work aimed at alleviating suffering. Many evangelicals in this study reported participating in “mission trips” that were primarily focused on social work: building homes, feeding the hungry, etc. This study suggests that if evangelicals interpreted academic writing assignments as opportunities for engaging in such social relief efforts, they would be engaged with the writing and experience it as highly salient.

Apart from service-learning writing, which makes the social dimensions of writing explicit, faculty can help evangelical students interpret their academic writing as salient to others by supplying an actual audience for student writing and by engaging students in conversations about the values of academic discourse communities. Very few composition studies of evangelical student writing discuss the importance of giving evangelical students an audience. While many emphasize the importance of teaching audience awareness, they typically envision the audience of academic writing as the instructor. One notable exception to this pattern is Perkins’s examination of how peers responded to evangelical identity and faith-based writing in a writing class (“Attentive”). The participants in this study rarely described academic writing experiences in which writing was delivered to an audience other than their instructor. However, in the rare occasions when their writing was delivered to an audience, participants experienced their writing as highly salient (for example, Michele’s speech and Rachel’s IRB proposal). Additionally, this practice may not only support writers’ engagement but also their rhetorical awareness as they receive feedback from an actual, rather than imagined, audience. Thus, one implication of this study is the need for faculty to assign writing that has an audience beyond the instructor.
The accounts of participants who were enacting integrated values in their academic writing suggest that over time some evangelicals come to see the values of academic disciplines or discourse communities as compatible or identical with their evangelical values. Both James and Rachel saw academic research communities, medicine and psychology, as sharing their faith-motivated impulse to alleviate suffering. Because medical research and psychology research is often oriented toward application, it was fairly easy for James and Rachel to interpret the values of their academic discourse communities and see connections with their evangelical values. This ability to interpret academic discourse community values and identify overlaps contributed to their experience of academic writing as salient to themselves and others. One implication of this study is the need for faculty across the disciplines to explicitly discuss the values of their discipline, making those values more visible and available to students.

Finally, this study suggests that faculty need to be patient with evangelical student writers, remembering that development happens over time. Of course, the slow and recursive nature of writing development is not unique to evangelical undergraduates (Beaufort; Carroll; Herrington and Curtis; Leki; Shaughnessy; Sommers and Saltz; Sternglass). Analysis of Ember’s academic writing revealed that she returned to topics multiple times throughout her undergraduate coursework; this thematic returning should not be viewed as laziness, but revision. Thus, rhetorical education needs to be conceived of in terms of years, not weeks.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The purpose of this study was to address a gap in the scholarship about the academic writing of evangelical undergraduates by investigating their experiences with academic writing situations and the characteristics of their academic writing. This study worked to foreground the experiences and perspectives of evangelical undergraduates, seeking to better understand how
evangelical identities influence academic writing. This study also sought to systematically collect samples of a wide range of evangelicals’ academic writing and to describe its characteristics. Future composition research should continue to investigate evangelical undergraduates’ experiences with and perceptions of academic writing and the characteristics of their actual writing for college in order to construct a more complete description of the phenomenon and inform considerations of writing pedagogy and curriculum.

Given the diversity found within this sample of ten participants, future composition research should investigate the diversity of evangelical undergraduates and their approaches to academic writing. Additional and larger studies may reveal even more diversity or confirm patterns from this study. Multi-site research may also shed light on the regional dimensions of this phenomenon. Contrastive studies that compare the academic writing of evangelical undergraduates with the academic writing of nonevangelicals would also usefully clarify the extent to which evangelical undergraduate writing is typical.

While this study succeeded in describing the experiences and writing of a more diverse group of evangelicals than previous studies have, it primarily described the experiences and writing of white evangelicals who had largely assimilated the norms of academic writing. As discussed earlier, I was unsuccessful at recruiting black evangelicals for this study, which not only limits the study’s findings but also unfortunately reifies stereotypes of evangelicals as white. Composition researchers should attempt to study the experiences and writing of black evangelical undergraduates. Additionally, my recruitment methods did not result in the recruitment of any participants who might be labeled fundamentalist evangelicals. However, fundamentalists are part of the spectrum of American evangelicalism and, to date, little is known about their experiences of academic writing. Their experiences warrant further study because it
seems likely that much of the Christian student writing discussed in the existing composition studies was composed by fundamentalist evangelicals, but very few studies have included their experiences or perceptions or systematically examined their academic writing.

Two of this study’s findings had to do with the development of academic writing expertise, even though this study was not specifically designed to study development. Future composition research needs to include longitudinal studies designed to collect data about how evangelical undergraduates develop as writers and the role of direct rhetoric and writing instruction in that development. Bryant’s research also suggests that campus ministries may play a role in evangelical students’ intellectual development. This study confirmed that campus ministries constitute primary social and religious communities for many evangelical undergraduates. Future research should consider the ways that campus ministries serve as resources or constraints for evangelical undergraduates and their academic writing.

Finally, this study highlights the phenomenon of secular evangelicals. In many ways, these evangelicals resembled Lindsay’s “cosmopolitan evangelicals,” but cosmopolitanism alone does not provide a framework for understanding these evangelicals’ concepts of appropriateness in different contexts. Additionally, since contact zone theory does not provide a satisfactory paradigm for interpreting these evangelicals and their academic writing, further research that investigates younger evangelicals’ tacit or explicit conceptions of the secular may help construct a paradigm that is more useful for proposing rhetoric pedagogies that prepare evangelicals for civic engagement.

**Conclusion**

The experiences, perspectives, and academic writing of the evangelical undergraduates who participated in this study showed that evangelical undergraduates possess many more
rhetorical resources than we have previously assumed. I hope that this study has demonstrated the limitations of relying on teacher lore and anecdotal classroom evidence to understand our students and their writing and shown the fruitfulness of consulting students directly about their experiences and writing choices. By sharing their experiences and their writing, these evangelicals contributed to new constructions of evangelical identity in the disciplinary literature and illuminated resources for renewing the conversation between evangelicals and the academy. It is my hope that scholars and teachers will draw from these evangelicals’ accounts and writing to recognize commonplaces and, from them, invent rhetoric pedagogies that respect the ambitions and potential of these religious citizens.
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<td>Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity</td>
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<td>Balester, Valerie</td>
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<td>Ball, Arnetha F. and Lardner</td>
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Appendices
Appendix A: Recruitment Email
Subject Line: Faith and Writing

Body of the Email:

Do you ever think about how your faith relates to what you learn in college? What about how your faith relates to your academic writing? Do you like to write about your beliefs or do you prefer to keep your faith and education separate?

If you’d be interested in talking about these issues, I’d love to discuss them with you as part of a study I’m conducting about the academic writing of evangelical undergrads at public universities. I’m working on a PhD in English and as a Christian scholar I’ve thought about these questions a lot. Now, I’d really like your perspective.

If you’re a Christian undergrad and this sounds interesting, please send me an email so we can set up a time to talk: [researcher’s email addresses]

Thanks!

Emily

*Emily Cope*

*PhD Student in English*

*University of Tennessee*
Appendix B: Informed Consent Statement
INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT
The Academic Writing of Evangelical Undergraduates

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
You are invited to participate in a research study focusing on the academic writing of students who self-identify as evangelical Christians and are currently enrolled as undergraduates at a public university. The findings of this study may help teachers and scholars understand the experiences of Christian students as they write for academic audiences and the characteristics of academic papers written by Christian students.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS’ INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY
To participate in this study, all you need to do is submit electronic copies of any academic writing and assignments you’ve completed for credit at your university and participate in a one-hour interview (conducted in person). These interviews will be digitally audio-recorded and transcribed. You will have the option to review and edit transcribed interviews if you would like to.

RISKS
This study presents minimal risks to you. Every step possible will be taken to keep your identity confidential.

If you feel any discomfort during our interview, you may discontinue the interview. The following campus resources may be able to help you if you feel any emotional distress as a result of the interview:

- UTK Counseling Center
  - Phone number [phone number]
  - [website link]
- UTK Campus Ministers Council
  - [website link]

BENEFITS
As a participant in this study, you may benefit from the opportunity to talk about your experiences as a writer and as a Christian at a public university. Another benefit of participating in this study is that its findings may be presented at academic conferences or published in academic journals in an effort to help teachers and scholars understand the writing and experiences of their Christian students. Your participation in this study will not be compensated financially or otherwise.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Throughout this study, the various steps outlined below will be taken to ensure and maintain the confidentiality of your identity as a participant:

- You are encouraged to remove all identifying markers from their papers before emailing them to me. If you do not, I will delete all identifying markers from received papers. Your name and your instructor’s will be removed from all files, and all files will be renamed using a randomly generated code that will be used to refer to them for the duration of the study.
- The only person who will have access to your emails or files with your name on them is Emily Cope, the Principal Investigator of this study.
- Your teacher(s) will not know that you are participating in this study.
Your files (including writing samples, digital interview recordings, and interview transcriptions) will be downloaded to a folder and stored securely on the password-protected laptop computer of the Principal Investigator. Backup copies of all files will be stored securely on the pass-word protected flash drive and stored at the private residence of the Principal Investigator.

Your emails will be deleted once the files have been downloaded. The Principal Investigator will keep a separate list of participants and their email addresses.

Digital recordings of interviews will be destroyed (deleted) once the interviews are transcribed. Transcribed interviews and writing samples will be destroyed (deleted) once the study is completed. Signed Informed Consent Forms will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the Office of the Director of Composition at the University of Tennessee campus for three years after the completion of this study.

During the interview, I will ask if you would like to use a pseudonym of your choice. This pseudonym will be the only name by which you will be referred to in the write-ups of this study. If you prefer not to use a pseudonym, I will refer to you simply as “a participant.”

CONTACT INFORMATION
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study), you may contact the primary researcher Emily Cope by mail at 301 McClung Tower, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN, 37996; or by email at ecope2@utk.edu or [researcher’s personal email address]. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Compliance Section of the Office of Research at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be destroyed.

CONSENT
I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant’s signature ___________________________ Date ______

Investigator’s signature _________________________ Date ______
Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol
“Getting to Know You” Questions
What brought you to the University?
What are you studying here?
How far along in the program are you?

Faith Background/Context
Would you tell me about your faith? What does being a Christian mean to you?
  Probes—
  Would you tell me more about:
  - the story of how you became a Christian
  - what your faith means for your daily life
  - the church you grew up in
  - where you go to church while you’re at college

What is it like being a Christian on campus?

Education Background
Would you tell me a little bit about your education before you came to the University?
  Probes—
  Would you tell me more about:
  - the kind of town you grew up in
  - what you learned about writing
  - what kind of writing you did in high school
  - what high school was like for you

Writing Process
Tell me the story of writing this paper.
  Probes—
  Would you tell me more about:
  - the assignment
  - the audience, who you wrote this paper for
  - what other topics you considered, why you chose this topic
  - how you chose sources or evidence
  - what other sources or evidence you considered
  - how this paper changed as you wrote/revised it

I was interested in the [fill in] section of your paper. Would you tell me more about this section?
Tell me about the feedback you received on this paper.
  Probes—
  Would you tell me more about the feedback from your:
  - friends
  - parents
  - classmates
  - teacher
Did your faith or beliefs play a role in writing this paper? How? Would you like to tell me anything else about this paper?

**Faith & Academic Writing**
Do you think your faith affects your writing for college? OR Do you think your faith is relevant to the writing you do for college?

Probes—
-why? OR why not?
-how?

Tell me about a situation in which your faith affected your writing.
Some people think that universities aren’t friendly to Christians, that the professors are biased against Christianity and liberals. What do you think about that?

**Concluding Questions**
Is there anything else you can think of that might be relevant to this study?
Appendix D: Summaries of 66 Writing Samples Analyzed in the Representative Sample
## Table A.1 Summaries of English Writing Samples

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<th>Participant (Year)</th>
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<td>textual analysis</td>
<td>civil disobedience in <em>Antigone</em>; Cal State protests; Robert F. Kennedy speech</td>
<td>Antigone engaged in civil disobedience and is praiseworthy.</td>
<td>celebrating civil disobedience as moral action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ember (3)</td>
<td>textual analysis</td>
<td>Blake’s two “Chimney Sweeper” poems in <em>Songs of Innocence</em> and <em>Songs of Experience</em></td>
<td>Blake’s <em>Innocence</em> poem is more effective in arguing against child labor than his <em>Experience</em> poem.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary reading of texts; celebrating innocence and ambiguity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ember (3)</td>
<td>textual analysis</td>
<td>heroism in <em>Beowulf</em> and <em>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</em></td>
<td>While Beowulf and Gawain operate under different social codes, they both are exemplars of courage.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary reading of two texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ember (4)</td>
<td>rhetorical analysis</td>
<td>Isabella in Shakespeare’s <em>Measure for Measure</em></td>
<td>Like all humans, Isabella is influenced by those around her, but ultimately capable of making decisions for herself, both unwise and wise.</td>
<td>defending character as a human whose motivations and actions are always mixed; arguing against dichotomies of women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ember (4)</td>
<td>rhetorical analysis</td>
<td>rhetorical theory; the rhetoric of child brides</td>
<td>The case of Nujood Ali changed the rhetoric surrounding child brides.</td>
<td>explaining how and why public rhetoric about child brides changed; performing disciplinary reading of a current event; celebrating a young woman’s activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Topics</td>
<td>Main Point/Argument</td>
<td>What Text is Doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ember</td>
<td>textual analysis</td>
<td>Machiavelli’s The Prince</td>
<td>none: summarizes Machiavelli’s theory of governing</td>
<td>summarizing a primary text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ember</td>
<td>textual analysis</td>
<td>Literacy in Frederick's Narrative</td>
<td>Prohibition against slaves’ literacy helped Douglass realize the importance of literacy.</td>
<td>performing close reading of primary text; celebrating education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabella</td>
<td>rhetorical analysis</td>
<td>Axe body spray advertisements</td>
<td>Body spray ads unethically use sex appeal to manipulate men into buying product.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary reading of two advertisements (not totally successful); arguing that advertising based on sex appeal is unethical and degrading for culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabella</td>
<td>argument/position paper</td>
<td>local newspaper editorial about racism</td>
<td>A violent crime against two white university students by black perpetrators prompted racist acts on campus.</td>
<td>persuading young people to become abstinent; persuading people to support a culture of abstinence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabella</td>
<td>rhetorical analysis</td>
<td>abstinence; sexual behavior of adolescents and young adults</td>
<td>Abstinence protects young people from unwanted consequences of sex and is “a better way of life.”</td>
<td>performing disciplinary reading of a text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>rhetorical analysis</td>
<td>popular book, Bottlemania</td>
<td>The author’s choice to reveal her biases makes her argument more credible.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary reading of a text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>discussion of data</td>
<td>Amnesty International’s media campaign against female genital mutilation</td>
<td>Amnesty International’s “War of the Roses” campaign is effective with western audiences because of its emotional appeal and AI’s credibility.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary reading of a text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean-Luc</td>
<td>rhetorical analysis</td>
<td>survey about gender conducted by class; race and gender</td>
<td>Survey results show that African American attitudes toward gender rarely differ from the aggregate.</td>
<td>interpreting data; defending interpretation of data by providing and discussing portions of the data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>rhetorical analysis</td>
<td>Apocalyptica song, “Not Strong Enough”</td>
<td>Song contains rhetorical elements.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary reading of a text; reaching required word count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>rhetorical analysis</td>
<td>Drugstore music</td>
<td>Drugstore chain plays upbeat light rock music to appeal to as many customers as possible.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary reading of a situation; reaching required word count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Topics</td>
<td>Main Point/Argument</td>
<td>What Text is Doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leesa</td>
<td>rhetorical analysis</td>
<td>Slate article, “Consider the Oyster”</td>
<td>Article effectively persuades vegans to reconsider their criteria for choosing food and non-vegans to consider veganism.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary reading of a text; personally responding to an assigned text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leesa</td>
<td>rhetorical analysis</td>
<td>Beatle’s song “Revolution”</td>
<td>Song effectively persuades young hippies to protest peacefully.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary reading of a text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michele</td>
<td>reaction/reading journal</td>
<td>the novel I Am Charlotte Simmons</td>
<td>Protagonist could have preserved her virginity by avoiding drinking and partying.</td>
<td>demonstrating completion of assigned reading; personally responding to an assigned text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michele</td>
<td>historical research paper</td>
<td>history of coeducation at the university</td>
<td>Coach should have supported student’s desire to take a challenging course.</td>
<td>demonstrating completion of assigned reading; personally responding to an assigned text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>academic project proposal</td>
<td>proposed project about higher education costs and general education requirements</td>
<td>General education requirements should be eliminated because they increase the cost of and time spent in college and limit major coursework.</td>
<td>constructing a local history of coeducation based on archival research; celebrating women’s achievements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will</td>
<td>rhetorical analysis</td>
<td>local newspaper editorial about poverty</td>
<td>Editorial was effective in creating awareness of conditions that give rise to poverty and motivating readers to feel compassion.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary reading of a text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will</td>
<td>argument/position paper</td>
<td>religious speech at public universities</td>
<td>Banning religious speech on public university campuses would do more harm than good for the university community.</td>
<td>arguing for the preservation of religious free speech on public university campuses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant (Year)</td>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Topics</td>
<td>Main Point/Argument</td>
<td>What Text is Doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ember (2)</td>
<td>historical research paper</td>
<td>life of David Brainerd</td>
<td>Brainerd was “just a man.”</td>
<td>using archival research to resist hagiographic readings of Brainerd while offering a sympathetic reading of Brainerd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ember (3)</td>
<td>historical research paper</td>
<td>American incarceration rates</td>
<td>Current over-incarceration of black Americans results from political campaigns and poorly researched policies of 1960s-1980s.</td>
<td>persuading readers to reconsider stereotypes of black men; countering beliefs about criminality; arguing for reconsideration of sentencing policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean-Luc (2)</td>
<td>historical research paper</td>
<td>bubonic plague and British laws</td>
<td>Bubonic plague significantly shaped British laws.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary reading of a historical situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean-Luc (3)</td>
<td>historical research paper</td>
<td>Napoleon; Battle of Waterloo</td>
<td>Napoléon’s overconfidence, pride, and preoccupation with the British contributed to his defeat at Waterloo.</td>
<td>demonstrating comprehension of course material and assigned reading; offering his own interpretation of a historical event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan (2)</td>
<td>textual analysis</td>
<td>Pericles’ funeral oration</td>
<td>Pericles uses his speech not only to commemorate the fallen soldiers, but also to inspire Athenians.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary reading of a text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan (2)</td>
<td>textual analysis</td>
<td>Hakluyt’s “A Discourse to Promote Colonization”</td>
<td>little; mixed evaluation of Hakluyt’s arguments</td>
<td>performing disciplinary reading of a text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel (2)</td>
<td>textual analysis</td>
<td>Orwell’s <em>The Road to Wigan Pier</em></td>
<td>none; summarizes plot</td>
<td>demonstrating completion of assigned reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel (2)</td>
<td>rhetoric analysis</td>
<td>Nazi propaganda</td>
<td>Nazi propaganda was very effective and had devastating consequences.</td>
<td>explaining why Nazi propaganda was effective by analyzing its rhetoric and appeals in historical context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel (3)</td>
<td>reaction/reading journal</td>
<td>the Living On Project</td>
<td>none; personal response to the LOP</td>
<td>expressing personal reactions to LOP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table A.3 Summaries of History Writing Samples
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (Year)</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Main Point/Argument</th>
<th>What Text is Doing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ember (2)</td>
<td>review of literature; position paper</td>
<td>determinism and free will</td>
<td>Free will is a more helpful perspective than determinism.</td>
<td>explaining why it is difficult to prove or disprove freewill or determinism by surveying the historical debate; suggesting that free will benefits humans more than determinism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan (2)</td>
<td>review</td>
<td>academic journal article about corporate whistleblowing</td>
<td>Employees do not owe loyalty to companies and have an ethical responsibility to report corporate wrongdoing in certain conditions.</td>
<td>summarizing and responding to an academic journal article; situating his position within academic debate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan (2)</td>
<td>review of literature; position paper</td>
<td>academic journal article about ethical codes for sports agents</td>
<td>All sports agents, whether attorneys or non-attorneys, should operate under the same professional code of ethics.</td>
<td>summarizing and responding to an academic journal article; situating his position within academic debate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan (2)</td>
<td>review of literature; essay exam</td>
<td>debate over ethics of advertising</td>
<td>Advertisements should be appealing without being deceptive.</td>
<td>summarizing ongoing debate about advertising and deception; arguing for a middle position that allows for appealing advertisement but not intentional deception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan (2)</td>
<td>review of literature; essay exam</td>
<td>professionalism; ethics for researchers</td>
<td>in each of four questions, summarizes two positions on an issue and then evaluates both arguments</td>
<td>demonstrating comprehension of disciplinary concepts and assigned reading</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table A.5 Summaries of Religious Studies Writing Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (Year)</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Main Point/Argument</th>
<th>What Text is Doing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jean-Luc (4)</td>
<td>textual analysis</td>
<td>biblical treatments of suffering</td>
<td>Biblical treatments of suffering vary depending on genre; wisdom literature provides most help for people who are suffering.</td>
<td>perform disciplinary reading of a text and demonstrating disciplinary knowledge; suggesting resource for suffering people; connecting personally with assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel (3)</td>
<td>review of literature; position paper</td>
<td>the “messianic secret”; unity of New Testament</td>
<td>Contradictions in the New Testament are a result of incorrect copying, not Christ’s meaning.</td>
<td>summarizing and responding to ongoing academic debate; situating herself within ongoing academic debate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel (3)</td>
<td>review of literature; position paper</td>
<td>early Christian attitudes toward Judaism</td>
<td>Seemingly anti-Semitic portions of the New Testament should be read in their historical contexts and understood as efforts to legitimize Christianity.</td>
<td>arguing against interpreting New Testament as anti-Semitic; critiquing historical and persistent anti-Semitic attitudes within Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel (3)</td>
<td>review of literature; position paper</td>
<td>differences in New Testament accounts of Christ’s birth</td>
<td>The gospels were written for different audiences and purposes and should be read in their historical contexts, but all provide hopeful message and emphasize the importance of Christ.</td>
<td>arguing for unity of New Testament message despite variations and apparent contradictions; situating her position within ongoing academic debate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table A.6 Summary of a Speech Writing Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (Year)</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Main Point/Argument</th>
<th>What Text is Doing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michele (1)</td>
<td>outline for argument speech</td>
<td>abortion</td>
<td>Abortion is morally wrong, bad for women, and there are good alternatives.</td>
<td>persuading classmates that abortion is morally wrong and that there are good alternatives to abortion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant (Year)</td>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Topics</td>
<td>Main Point/Argument</td>
<td>What Text is Doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabella (1)</td>
<td>lab report</td>
<td>species traits and feeding</td>
<td>Hypothesis that carnivores have shorter snouts and herbivores have more molars than carnivores is supported by lab results.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary task; arguing that lab findings are reliable by describing methods and providing data from lab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James (1)</td>
<td>exam</td>
<td>academic journal article about scientific skepticism</td>
<td>Assigned article is a good model of scientific skepticism, but is made less readable by high level of detail.</td>
<td>evaluating the effectiveness of a journal article; performing disciplinary reading of a journal article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James (1)</td>
<td>lab report</td>
<td>molar width and diet of herbivores and carnivores</td>
<td>Hypothesis that molars of herbivores are wider than molars of carnivores when compared to overall length of the skull is supported by lab results.</td>
<td>demonstrating comprehension of material missed on midterm; earning extra credit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James (1)</td>
<td>lab report</td>
<td>gender; human evolution</td>
<td>none: writes new midterm questions and solutions to earn credit for incorrect answers on midterm</td>
<td>performing disciplinary task; evaluating the effectiveness of a journal article; performing disciplinary reading of a journal article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean-Luc (2)</td>
<td>lab report</td>
<td>rates of soil moisture on a slope</td>
<td>Lab finding that males were on average taller than females in sample of college students may be evidence of evolution of sexual dimorphism.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary task; interpreting data by providing details from the lab and secondary sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean-Luc (3)</td>
<td>lab report</td>
<td>two species of beetles</td>
<td>none: seems to be incomplete</td>
<td>performing disciplinary task; reporting on lab activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will (1)</td>
<td>lab report</td>
<td>nasal width and palate length of herbivores vs. carnivores</td>
<td>Hypothesis that herbivores have wider nostril cavity and longer palate length was supported by lab results.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary task; arguing that lab findings are reliable by describing methods and providing data from lab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will (1)</td>
<td>lab report</td>
<td>biodiversity in wooded and grassy soils</td>
<td>Hypothesis that rates of biodiversity in soils from woods and grass would be approximately equivalent was not supported by lab results.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary task; arguing that lab findings are reliable by describing methods and providing data from lab; demonstrating comprehension of disciplinary concerns by reflecting on hypothesis and suggesting further investigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant (Year)</td>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Topics</td>
<td>Main Point/Argument</td>
<td>What Text is Doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>James (1)</td>
<td>discussion blog post</td>
<td>race and ethnicity</td>
<td>James does not discriminate among individuals based on race or ethnicity, but judges people by their individual actions.</td>
<td>identifying as someone who does not discriminate; responding and contributing to class conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>constructions of “the American family”</td>
<td>The “American family” has changed over time as economic and social realities have shifted.</td>
<td>arguing that the stereotypical American family is no longer meaningful; responding and contributing to class conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>movie <em>Asante Market Women</em>; women’s social and economic power</td>
<td>none: poses questions</td>
<td>raising questions for class conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>definition of “nation state”</td>
<td>none: summarizes definitions of “nation state” and contrasts with other types of social orders</td>
<td>demonstrating comprehension of assigned reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James (1)</td>
<td>field notes</td>
<td>middle class status</td>
<td>Middle class Americans are not as well-off as some think because they do not have the wealth or status of upper classes and do not receive the financial subsidies for education that working class Americans do.</td>
<td>countering common wisdom being middle class is desirable; responding and contributing to class conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>definition of “family values”</td>
<td>Family values are multiple and defined by each family.</td>
<td>connecting personal experience to course topic; responding and contributing to class conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>immigration; constructions of family</td>
<td>The experience of immigrants reveals how incomplete the American “neolocal family” is.</td>
<td>demonstrating comprehension of assigned reading; responding and contributing to class conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James (1)</td>
<td>case study report</td>
<td>ethnographic observation of student groups on university campus</td>
<td>none: field notes report James’ observations of university students</td>
<td>performing disciplinary task; justifying choice not to conduct interviews or collect data about intended population (hookah smokers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Greek rush week; privilege and discrimination</td>
<td>Greek organizations do not seek to discriminate, but Rush Week showcases systemic inequalities and privileges.</td>
<td>defending Greek culture from charges of discrimination, while performing awareness of the problems of privilege and discrimination</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table A.9 Summary of an Education Writing Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (Year)</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Main Point/Argument</th>
<th>What Text is Doing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morgan (3)</td>
<td>lesson plan</td>
<td>4th grade math: decimals</td>
<td>none: outlines lesson plan for teaching decimals to 4th graders</td>
<td>demonstrating comprehension of course content; demonstrating reflection on teaching practice by revising lesson plan to be more effective; providing fellow teachers with a lesson plan to help students understand relationships between decimals and fractions and how to add and subtract decimals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table A.10 Summaries of Geography Writing Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (Year)</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Main Point/Argument</th>
<th>What Text is Doing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Will (1)</td>
<td>report</td>
<td>human geography; Nigeria; South Africa</td>
<td>none: summarizes research about economic, social, and environmental conditions in two African countries</td>
<td>demonstrating comprehension of course material by researching two countries and describing them in disciplinary terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will (1)</td>
<td>report</td>
<td>globalization</td>
<td>The complex interdependence of Kyoto, Japan, and Longhua, China, illustrate positive and negative consequences of globalization; both cities can take steps to mitigate negative consequences of industrialization or urbanization.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary task; demonstrating comprehension of course material by using key concepts to explain a case study</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table A.11 Summaries of Political Science Writing Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (Year)</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Main Point/Argument</th>
<th>What Text is Doing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jean-Luc (2)</td>
<td>case study / report</td>
<td>Afghan election</td>
<td>Despite evidence of some corruption, Afghanistan is not a nominal democracy but a young, emerging democracy.</td>
<td>performing disciplinary reading of a recent event; offering sympathetic interpretation of Afghan democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean-Luc (3)</td>
<td>textual analysis</td>
<td>Socrates; democracy</td>
<td>Socrates’ critiques of democracy are still relevant and clarify some problems within American political culture.</td>
<td>persuading reader that although Socrates’ critiques of democracy sound extreme, they usefully point out the weaknesses of democracy; demonstrating comprehension of course content by applying it to a current context</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table A.12 Summaries of Psychology Writing Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (Year)</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Main Point/Argument</th>
<th>What Text is Doing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jean-Luc (4)</td>
<td>review of literature</td>
<td>academic journal article about clergy attitudes toward denominational statements about homosexuality</td>
<td>little argument: summarizes recent study and offers only minor critiques of the study</td>
<td>summarizing an academic journal article; performing disciplinary reading of academic journal article and situating it in an ongoing academic conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel (3)</td>
<td>draft of IRB</td>
<td>proposed study of salivary habituation</td>
<td>Proposed study will contribute to field’s understanding of stimulus for eating and improve eating disorder research.</td>
<td>persuading Institutional Review Board to approve her proposed research study</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table A.13 Summaries of Sociology Writing Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (Year)</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Main Point/Argument</th>
<th>What Text is Doing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rachel (3)</td>
<td>reading notes</td>
<td>sociology study, The Second Shift</td>
<td>none: notes from reading</td>
<td>keeping track of main ideas in book; prewriting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel (3)</td>
<td>review of literature</td>
<td>sociology study of women’s lives, The Second Shift</td>
<td>primarily a summary of the book The Second Shift; weak argument at the end that women’s second shift will remain until male gender norms are changed.</td>
<td>summarizing an academic book</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### First-Year Studies Writing Samples

**Table A.14 Summaries of First Year Studies Writing Samples**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Main Point/Argument</th>
<th>What Text is Doing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>discussion blog posts</td>
<td>self-introduction</td>
<td>none: introduces self to classmates</td>
<td>introducing self to classmates; identifying as open-minded and interested in biology; encouraging classmates to debate collegially</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>health care debate</td>
<td>Most people agree that the American health care system is flawed but disagree about how to fix it.</td>
<td>encouraging classmates to remain open-minded when examining global models of healthcare; responding and contributing to ongoing class conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>his performance in the course</td>
<td>James deserves full participation credit.</td>
<td>persuading professor to give him full participation credit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean-Luc</td>
<td>autobiography</td>
<td>self-introduction</td>
<td>none: introduces self to classmates</td>
<td>introducing self to classmates; identifying as fellow university student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leesa</td>
<td>report</td>
<td>how she selected a major, degree requirements, and career plans</td>
<td>none: summarizes why she chose to major in Religious Studies, her research on the major and associated career options</td>
<td>explaining how the major will help her accomplish personal and professional goals; reporting on assigned research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Vita

Emily Murphy Cope received her Bachelor of Arts in Bible and Theology from The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago in 2004 and her Master of Arts in English from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in 2008. She received her Doctor of Philosophy in English from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in 2015, with concentrations in Rhetoric and Writing Studies.