A Critical Race Analysis of Transition Level Writing Curriculum to Support the Racially Diverse Two-Year College

Jamila M. Kareem
University of Central Florida, jamila.kareem@ucf.edu
A Critical Race Analysis of Transition-Level Writing Curriculum to Support the Racially Diverse Two-Year College

Jamila Kareem

This article applies critical race theory to an institutional analysis of writing curricular outcomes to assist two-year college writing program administrators, curriculum coordinators, and instructors with examining the racist implications of writing curriculum outcomes and to develop antiracist curricula that support the academic, professional, and civic success of the majority of their students.

It is not just that there is a desire for whiteness that leads to white bodies getting in. Rather whiteness is what the institution is orientated “around,” so that even bodies that might not appear white still have to inhabit whiteness, if they are to get “in.”

—Sara Ahmed, “A Phenomenology of Whiteness”

I hated academic writing by the time I reached the first year of my undergraduate education. My disdain had nothing to do with ability. I had rented the properties of whiteness for school, so I knew how to habitually reproduce the models of syntax, grammar, semantics, and style taught to me over the last twelve years of schooling. I use schooling here in contrast to education. Although I did not know it at the time, my aversion to schooling is common among Black American communities, who often value education rather than the control and mainstream culture perpetuation of public schooling (Bush; Woodson; Ogbu). From a young age, my propensity for writing well in the institutionalized standards of Standard English dialect indicated a form of definitive intellectual capability.

In middle school and high school English courses, I spent half the time listening to the teacher talk about stories and poems and the other half writing my own. Being from an all-Black, economically excluded, politically disregarded neighborhood of Indianapolis, Indiana (shout out to anyone from Mapleton Fall Creek!), I can look back now, as a Black American woman on the tenure track studying academic writing practices, and say for most of my schooling, I received little education relevant to my station as a Black woman in the world. The epistemological approach to knowledge about literacy and communication was limited.

Copyright © 2019 by the National Council of Teachers of English. All rights reserved.
While this case is my own, my experience is common among students of color (Richardson; Gilyard, *Voices*; Martinez; Kynard, "Writing"; Villanueva).

In truth, until I reached college, writing for school was something I did for a grade and a “way out of the black ghetto” (Smitherman 202). My parents supported the school system with convincing me of the latter. Some scholars have examined the outlook that “literacy is freedom” within the history of Black American communities (Richardson; Bush et al.), but specifically, “discourses of whiteness” (Inoue, “Whiteness”) have been the key to escaping that ghetto. If I could write White well, I could get into college. If I could get into college, I could have the opportunities they didn’t have, and I could escape the trappings of poverty and injustice. At least, that ideal prevailed over others.

I never had the opportunity to study at a community or technical college as a student, but my undergraduate college situation mimicked that of the majority of community college students. Like many two-year college students, I was a first-generation student who worked part-time while attending school and dealt with “significant family responsibilities” (Calhoon-Dillahunt et al. 10). The four-year institution I did attend as an undergraduate was akin to community college in key ways. The urban commuter campus, a satellite for two larger regional state universities, served primarily local students of racially, ethnically, linguistically, and economically diverse backgrounds, as is the case for community colleges (Calhoon-Dillahunt et al. 9). Despite factors such as persistent raciolinguistic prejudices in K–12 and college literacy education influencing the acclimation to college-level writing, transitioning-centric scholarship focused on high school graduates acquiring college-level writing habits fails to attend to racialized experiences in contingent moments of moving writing across these academic thresholds. The institutional analysis presented here demonstrates that overall, the absent presence of race (Pendergast) manifests through the presence of Eurocentric epistemological perspectives (Collins; Delgado Bernal and Villalpando) in the writing and general education (Gen Ed) curriculum of this predominantly White university in the southern United States, henceforth referred to as the University. I argue that examining the racial interest convergence of writing curriculum outcomes can assist two-year college writing program administrators (WPAs), curriculum coordinators, and instructors reflect on the racist implications of current learning outcomes and develop antiracist curricula that support the academic, professional, and civic success of the majority of their students.

Although this study took place at a four-year metropolitan institution, the discussion and results apply to two-year institutions especially. The majority of Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) are community and technical colleges (Kirklighter et al. 7), and these institutions admit most of Black American and indigenous American students in addition to Latinx students (Calhoon-Dillahunt et al. 9).
Still, graduate programs tend to prepare future composition teachers and potential writing program administrators to pursue “careers at four-year institutions, with little or no attention to community colleges, the contexts where many graduate students are likely to make their careers” (12). Siskanna Naynaha suggests, as with the institution analyzed here, community college culture represents the values and customs of a majority White American student and faculty collective (198), even as student populations at these institutions continue to expand their racial and ethnic representation.

This article begins by outlining the relevance of critical race theory (CRT), identifying how racial interest convergence (Bell; Delgado and Stefancic) emerges from Eurocentric epistemological perspectives and an absent presence of race in institutionalized writing measures. Then the article describes the relevance of racial methodology for analyzing academic writing transitions and describes an institutional analysis of documents that guide such writing transitions. The results of the analysis follow, and I conclude by proposing implications for transcending racial interest convergence in two-year college writing programs as students transition from writing in high school to writing in college.

**Interest Convergence, Absent Presence of Race, and the Eurocentric Epistemology in Academic Writing Standards**

Even with the most inclusive diversity initiatives, success in college-level literacies remains racially inequitable. According to CRT, this systemic racial inequity results from the racist norms of society (Delgado and Stefancic; Ladson-Billings and Tate). The result of these norms is that racism is challenging to eliminate, because it advances the social and material interests of the whole American culture (Delgado and Stefancic), or it is the result of interest convergence (Bell). Racial interest convergence shows the institutional benefits of maintaining race as an absent presence (Prendergast) and demonstrates how these benefits potentially rupture transitional experiences of students of color. Critical race theorist Derrick Bell developed the theory of interest convergence to explain the limits of racial justice in American society. Higher education institutions have a duty to play to the interests of their stakeholders, and these interests often represent those in the White middle-class, capitalist world. Since interest convergence establishes that “the interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interest of whites” (Bell 523), this analysis of learning outcomes and curriculum shows how the institution is limited in the support it can provide relevant to many racially marginalized students’ lives, since that support often does not converge with the interests of stakeholders.

Two-year colleges in particular are influenced by the interest convergence
Two-year colleges in particular are influenced by the interest convergence dilemma due to the populations they serve, populations diverse in age, class, race, employment status, and student status. According to Cristina Kirklighter et al., community colleges comprise 53 percent of HSIs. Further, Naynaha describes community colleges as explicitly targeting their recruitment efforts at Latinx students (198). Yet, as is the case with all mainstream educational sites (Delpit; Kynard, Vernacular; Woodson), community colleges have taken up the charge of serving racially disadvantaged students by indoctrinating them in literate and rhetorical behaviors of the racially dominant culture. Those in educational authority permit raciolinguistically marginalized students to use minority language practices in instances when it serves to keep Eurocentric-based language practices in control. Staci Perryman-Clark references this type of interest convergence in discussing how school writing curriculum in most instances has allowed for Black American language patterns. For the most part, “teacher-researchers have limited the welcoming of home language patterns to a few varieties of genres that do not necessarily require students to engage extensively or cite scholarly and academic research” (“Africanized” 254). Similarly, Carmen Kynard argues that in many cases, teachers and evaluators of writing exams discipline student responses that employ Black American forms of expression in academic writing (“Writing” 5). These implications show that even if race is absent from the visible curriculum, racialized ideologies are present in writing pedagogy.

I am utilizing the work of composition scholar Catherine Prendergast in examining race as an absent presence. The failure to examine race results from the norm of racism in society, and according to Prendergast, the absent presence of race occurs when “race remains undertheorized, unproblematic, and underinvestigated in composition research,” which leaves teacher-researchers void of any meaningful way to examine racialization of writers, writing practices, or institutionalized writing standards (36). As Taiyon J. Coleman et al. question in the final act of “The Risky Business of Engaging Racial Equity in Writing Instruction: A Tragedy in Five Acts” from Teaching English in the Two-Year College in 2016, “So what happens when a group’s actual invisibility, which can also be read as an absence or failure, is normalized, subsequently making that very invisibility central to maintaining a larger structural reality of dominant whiteness within institutional spaces?” (365). The invisibility of certain racial identities is apparent, and so its absence is present. Coleman et al. argue that the “erasure of race is especially perilous for students and faculty of color” and that disciplinary conversations around racial equity and writing education often “perpetuate institutional … violence against black and brown bodies” (347). At the high school–to-college transition level, students of underrepresented racial groups seeking to be evaluated as successful within this
system must continue to suppress their linguistic cultural identity and racially influenced rhetorical traditions at predominantly White institutions, as they have for the entirety of their educational lives.

In program-level and institutional-level writing curriculum, discursive expectations of students are centered on the properties of whiteness and Eurocentric epistemological traditions. Therefore, the presence of students whose literate activities challenge these properties and traditions is very visible but dismissed. While “the implications of critical race theory for writing and writing research are not immediately evident” (Prendergast 37), by framing my institutional analysis of policies about transitioning with interest convergence and the absent presence of race, I am able to determine the effects of denying racialized experiences in transitioning at the institutional level.

Although the emphasis on race in the curricular artifacts shaping the writing transition from high school to college offers a way to understand how systemic racial structures function in the transition, Walter Benn Michaels argues that race is a faulty analytical measure. According to Michaels, it is impractical to link racial culture to particular actions (46), such as curricular design or instructional strategies. This argument may prove true in an ahistorical context devoid of systemic oppression by the dominant White racial culture. While we learn race rather than inherit race (Michaels 46) and no one can truly act a particular race (47), education critical race theorists contend that racial formations directly correlate to systemic discrepancies in education access (Kynard, “Writing”; Ladson-Billings and Tate; Leonardo; Richardson). Further, compositionist Asao B. Inoue asserts that we make racial projections on those that we assess in writing classrooms (Antiracist 45).

Whether or not it is real, race is woven into the fabric of American social institutions. Denying the value of racialized experiences may come as a result of institutionalizing Eurocentric epistemologies about literacy and writing. These epistemologies have historically delegitimized Black and other racially underrepresented experiences with rhetorical education that happened outside of White-invested spaces (Collins; Bernal and Villalpando). According to Dolores Delgado Bernal and Octavio Villalpando, “Higher education in the United States is founded on a Eurocentric epistemological perspective based on white privilege,” and this view “presumes that there is only one way of knowing and understanding the world, and it is the natural way of interpreting truth, knowledge, and reality” (189). In academic writing standards, Eurocentric epistemologies nullify language behaviors...
that do not conform to Eurocentric ways of knowing. Out of this epistemological stance comes the proliferation of White-centric ways of being (Collins 271), which produces the discourse of whiteness (Inoue, “Whiteness”).

A discourse of whiteness is taught as the most validated linguistic and rhetorical practices. Distinct features of the discourse include “Hyperindividualism—self-determination and autonomy,” an “Individualized, Rational, Controlled Self,” “Rule-governed, Contractual Relationships,” and “Clarity, Order, and Control” (Inoue, “Whiteness”). Inoue suggests that while “Individual rights and privacy are often most important and construct the common good,” the individualistic quality of whiteness as a discourse places “Little emphasis on connectedness, relatedness, feeling, interconnection with others,” this discourse dismisses social connections that influence it (“Whiteness”).

Race and Transitioning across Cultures of Academic Writing

Two-year colleges are sites of transition. They serve most of the racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students in higher education. Transition-focused writing studies scholarship has given attention to what is at stake by failing to change into a college writer for the generic student population (Farris; Denecker; Sehulster; Koszoru). None of the available key disciplinary volumes that center on high school–to-college transitions consider social identities, including What Is “College-Level” Writing? (Sullivan and Tinberg), College Credit for Writing in High School: The “Taking Care of” Business (Hansen and Farris), and Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts in Writing Studies (Adler-Kassner and Wardle). Instead of arguing for making race a central theme of these texts, I suggest that scholars take note of what they leave out by not giving any attention to racial cultural identity of students. Taking a critical race lens to the transitional moments from secondary to postsecondary writing experiences gives the field a critical opportunity to address deeper societal issues that often makes transferring literacy practices across institutional cultures seemingly impossible for many students, specifically those from “underclass” (Wilson) communities.

By pinpointing the absent presence of race consciousness and orientation toward whiteness in this University’s writing curriculum, this study intends to show why designs in curriculum similar to this at many institutions promote interest convergence when acclimating racially marginalized students to college-level writing practices. Even for Black Americans and other racially marginalized students who
have not wrestled with the high school–to-college institutional-cultural transition, being physically marked as other places them in a susceptible position. These students have made a choice, or sometimes were compelled into a choice, to access membership in this predominantly White institutional community by adopting or renting the properties of whiteness as a discourse, as I did, in part, throughout my education. An institutional analysis of racialized perspectives in curricular documents guiding transition can expose where Eurocentric epistemological perspectives bring about an absent presence of race that may impede transitional experiences for some racially marginalized students.

The analysis of First-Year Composition Program student learning outcomes (SLOs), Gen Ed criteria, and their implications for two-year institutions encompass the teacher-scholar-activist work that Patrick Sullivan advocates. In addition to “embracing the revolutionary and inescapably political nature” of two-year colleges, I am enacting the political nature through the “democratic project” of performing the “intellectual work” of critiquing “prevailing ideologies and consciousness . . . in conjunction with practical political activity” (Cloud 15). This work supports efforts of teaching to transgress as it demonstrates “that to educate [students of color] rightly . . . require[s] a political commitment” (hooks 3). Even though curricular documents such as the Gen Ed criteria and composition program SLOs examined in this study have little power on their own, they hold institutional political influence, and the proposed revisions potentially changes their rhetorical power.

An Institutional Analysis of the Absent Presence of Race and Interest Convergence

This analysis examines the institutional and writing program policies that keep whiteness-based discourses in the dominant position at the University, and I consider the impact these policies may have on students of color new to the university. This study employs a racial methodology to present an archival institutional analysis of documents directly or indirectly shaping transition experiences of new college students at the University. Inoue forwards racial methodology as a way to study how racial formations inform our research, theories, and practices in writing studies (“Racial”). Applying a racial methodology to writing studies research helps research-
ers attend to racialized perspectives throughout research processes, calls attention to how racialized social orders embed institutional and individual research practices, and adds needed complexity to who is included in research and how researchers represent racially constructed knowledge and experiences. The ultimate purpose is to illustrate the ways that institutional values about writing standards racialize transitional experiences from high school to college first-year writing (FYW).

Institutional Analysis Process

Institutional analyses allow us to observe and analyze which systems function well and which systems fail toward a particular institutional goal, and why these successes and failures occur. Even more, it leads to institutional critique that requires researchers to create a plan of action to reform institutions and their structures (Lamos, “Institutional”). In writing studies research, institutional analysis and critique manifests in several ways: (1) “spatial-analysis techniques,” (2) “rhetorical analysis designed to promote ‘story-changing,’” and (3) “a critical historical approach . . . designed to illuminate how and why particular localized institutional configurations have emerged over time” (Lamos, “Institutional”). The archival institutional analysis of this study applies the second approach and helps further understanding of how transitioning across institutions as an academic writer operates through multiple networks at micro and macro levels (Porter et al.) outside the student and outside the classroom. Framed with a racial methodology, this analysis examines the racial ideologies and assumptions found within these micro- and macro-level curricular documents.

The Documents

The primary units of analysis in this study are the language of the institutional documents that shape what comprises successful transitions to college and college-level writing at the University, the First-Year Composition Program student learning outcomes, and the Gen Ed Written Communication Area criteria. At this university and similar predominantly White metropolitan public research institutions, the writing program and Gen Ed outcomes are the driving force behind the curriculum taught in the classrooms. The outcomes are derived from theory and practice of teaching college writing. Moreover, the Gen Ed outcomes are cross-curricular and so are also valued in other disciplines.

Eurocentric Epistemologies and Absent Presences of Race in First-Year Writing Curriculum

The academic writing practices of transitioning students in their first year at the University are shaped by the Composition Program SLOs and the Gen Ed Written Communication outcomes. Rather than understanding these curricular practices around FYW as racist, teacher-researchers should recognize them as racialized. In this case, that means they are influenced by White privilege, a philosophy that “goes beyond the overt racism of white supremacist hate groups and includes
a system of opportunities and benefits that are bestowed upon an individual simply for being white” (Bernal and Villalpando 189) or that privileges orientations of whiteness above all others (Ahmed). The Gen Ed outcomes about written communication represent this epistemological perspective in that they exhibit the attributes of whiteness as a discourse (Inoue, “Whiteness”) and capitalistic-based White supremacist literacy (Richardson).

General Education Written Communication Student Learning Outcomes

The Gen Ed consists of courses and required outcomes for learners across the curriculum. Because every student must either complete Gen Ed curriculum at the University or transfer Gen Ed credits in, this represents a key component of the institutional epistemology. Students are assessed on their ability to meet the Gen Ed requirements and, therefore, how they perform college-level work in the content areas. The requirements of the various learning outcomes of this curriculum are listed on all general education course syllabi. The full written communication area outcomes (General Education Task Force) are linked in Appendix A, but below I discuss the three outcomes that most illustrate an absent presence of race through Eurocentric epistemological perspectives.

“Apply academic conventions in different writing situations; employ structural conventions such as organization, formatting, paragraphing, and tone; and use appropriate surface features such as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.” This outcome focuses on control, a habit certainly necessary for skilled writers. In addition to exhibiting the whiteness discourse feature of “Individualized, Rational, Controlled Self” in which “Conscience guides the individual and sight is the primary way to identify the truth or understanding” (Inoue, “Whiteness”), this University outcome reflects what Richardson calls “White supremacist literacy” practices of “obedience ... [and] positivism” (9). Thus, even as control of rhetorical features is fundamental to most writing epistemological traditions, the focus on appropriateness within the academic context where audiences are limited constrains the opportunity to employ alternative discourses. In the micro-society of this predominantly White institution that holds discursive customs associated with whiteness in such high esteem, appropriate genres, rhetoric, audiences, and conventions are linked to these customs. In the composition program outcomes, for example, one form of appropriateness comes from requiring students to “[u]se structural conventions such as organization, formatting, paragraphing, and tone” and “[d]emonstrate control of surface features such as grammar, punctuation, and spelling” (Department of English). Even if a student correctly applies the structural conventions common to, say, Latinx-centric rhetorics, one of many high-context writing cultures, American writing professors from the dominant raciolinguistic culture may not recognize the appropriateness of the conventions. Race is an absent presence, as the academic conventions required in different writing situations are based in conventions shaped by middle-class White American perspectives disguised as innate. The constraints on alternative discourses occur even if the discursive practices are audience appropriate. For example, “sermonic tone,” “ethnolinguistic idioms,” and “rhythmic, dramatic,
evocative language” (Gilyard and Richardson 41–42; Smitherman, Talkin 12–13) are common properties of Black American discourses that vary from discourses of whiteness.

An antiracist revision to this outcome might ask learners to “[give] attention to the influence of style and usage on composing effective communication.” This outcome is included among those described in Appendix B. Rather than privileging academic writing conventions, it honors students’ knowledge and experiences with multiple rhetorical traditions and literacy practices. Additionally, because two-year college students tend to represent a “range of experiences and perspectives” (Calhoon-Dillahunt et al. 10) on life and writing, the outcome I propose takes those perspectives and experiences into consideration and embeds a reflective component into the learning process. Instead of applying conventions as though they are without deeply entrenched cultural histories, this outcome asks student writers to address the effects of syntactic conventions on semantics throughout their writing processes. These considerations should occur regardless of the raciolinguistic cultural basis of the texts.

“Select and/or use appropriate genres for a variety of purposes, situations, and audiences.” This outcome concerns teaching students about the importance of the rhetorical situation at hand. In an apolitical, antisocial context, the outcome simply requires comprehension of how audiences and purposes influence genre production and how genres shape audience engagement with texts. The racial complications lie in factoring what genres are accepted as appropriate for the academy and what audiences the curriculum and its agents encourage students to address. Perryman-Clark notes that even with the advent of Students’ Right to Their Own Language, Black American students in college writing courses must still negotiate the language choices they make, particularly in established curricula using whiteness as a discourse. As a result, “the pressures for students to adapt Standard English in academic writing while adapting alternative language varieties outside of the academy can add complexity to how language rights choices are often affected and contingent upon audience expectations” (Perryman-Clark, “African American” 480). The situations that students analyze and respond to are limited as is the valuing of discursive resources that students bring to complete academic writing tasks. Moreover, genres associated with, for example, “Black textual expressivities” (Kirkland, “Beyond” 15) and Black American rhetorical traditions are accepted in limited contexts, if at all in many cases. The absent presence of race sees the practice of valuing some genres, audiences, and discourses over others as socializing students “into discourses of race and power relations” (Prendergast 49). In light of this socialization, students transitioning to the University may believe they are limited in crafting their versions of reality—commonly influenced by their lived experiences as members of a subjugated racial group—due to the limitations of the audiences and contexts that they are permitted to address.

Because “[i]t is imperative . . . that we teach critical literacy and that we educate our students and learn from their stories, and not simply train them in the practical skills demanded by the business community” (Kroll 124), I propose “de-
liberately writes for multiple public audiences” and “recognizes how racial culture and other cultural experiences influence reception of a text” as possible antiracist revisions to this outcome. Both of these suggestions tackle the racial, linguistic, and cultural implications of writing for familiar and unfamiliar audiences and situations. Through such an understanding, community college students, at the transition level in particular, can learn to apply college-level writing practices through a sociological context that allows them to critique and respect these practices. This approach to administrating and teaching writing is supported by culturally sustaining pedagogies, which suggests that “our pedagogies must address the well-understood fact that what it means to be Black or Latinx or Pacific Islander (as examples) [or White] both remains rooted and continues to shift” (Paris and Alim 9). Culturally sustaining, antiracist writing instruction does this by “creating generative spaces for asset pedagogies to support the practices of . . . communities of color . . . while maintaining a critical lens vis-à-vis these practices” (10). One way to enact this practice is to engage students in confronting real audiences from multiple kinds of communities, communities affected by intersections of racial identity, such as the one with which I grew up but never had opportunities to engage.

“Employ critical thinking processes to create an understanding of knowledge as existing within a broader context and to incorporate an awareness of multiple points of view.” This outcome might help students work with racial culture concepts about writing and literacy if instructors choose to implement it in such a way. Critical thinking about arguments from multiple perspectives is important to analyzing writing, rhetoric, and discourses in students’ present and future lives. However, the kinds of perspectives that teachers most frequently accept as reliable or representational are shaped by discourses of whiteness and Eurocentric epistemologies. Take the literacy narrative assignment as an example. This assignment is common at the University, and it requires students to understand literacy acquisition as “knowledge . . . existing within a broader context.” However, students are encouraged to narrate engagement with traditional literacies, or those supported by formal (read: Eurocentric) education literacy acts. Students who privilege literacies that are marginalized in academic spaces may feel that these literacies are invalid or displaced in the context of the writing classroom. Literacy practices from dominant discourses are considered “timeless” and “widespread,” a part of higher-scale “semiotized TimeSpace” (Blommaert 5). Jan Blommaert describes the sociolinguistic scales of semiotized TimeSpace as the social, cultural, political, ideological, and historical control people try to wield over semiotic practices, which become sociolinguistic patterns and norms (5). Demonstrations of critical thinking that involve subjective or personal connections sit on lower scales of the semiotized TimeSpace of the college classroom.

Such sociolinguistic ranking occurs in a case study by Kynard. The student LaDonna in “Writing While Black: The Colour Line, Black Discourses and Assessment in the Institutionalization of Writing Instruction” by Kynard wields an institutional writing exam to “find intellectual value in a task that would otherwise be a dummy exercise” (17) by “bring[ing] in her own viewpoint and identification by incorporating the work of Caribbean scholar, Erol Hill, whose thinking was
central to her semester’s research project on music as an anti-colonial revolution-
ary aesthetic” (16). Although this form of engagement with the material is clearly
an excellent example of interpretation, synthesis, and connection, Kynard explains
about the faculty who rated LaDonna low on the exam:

Without the necessary background, the connections that LaDonna makes be-
tween Black aesthetics as counter-knowledge in the context of colonialism are
totally missed. And yet, there have been very few willing to concede that her
arguments require background knowledge on Caribbean colonialism, a topic
obviously void in [institutionalized first-year English] when Orwell provides
the canonised [sic] text which can be comfortably read from the gaze of liberal
whiteness and mainstream literary theory. (Kynard, “Writing” 17)

I see that the student made a choice to follow a different anti-Eurocentric world-
view of the rhetorical knowledge she had gathered and to adapt to the situation.
The claims and evidence she provided failed the test of Eurocentric epistemological
perspectives of critical thinking processes.

Faculty might resist ordering discursive practices with an outcome revision
such as “Applies decisive interpretive practices to illustrate how familiar knowledge,
new information, and lived experiences work together to form assessments about the
world.” As with the previously suggested antiracist revisions to the Gen Ed written
communication criteria, this proposed outcome works to acclimate students to the
writing processes privileged by higher education through sustaining raciolinguistic
experiences. While the current criterion focuses on points of view and knowledge
 gained through published, peer-reviewed works, the revised criterion validates pers-
pectives that may be outside of the purview of Eurocentric academic TimeSpace.

Composition Program Student Learning Outcomes

Outlined in detail on the English Department’s website, the SLOs represent the
basic college-level writing “habits of mind” (Framework) expected at the University,
and composition instructors evaluate students on their ability to meet these criteria.
The SLOs demonstrate an absent presence of race, as much of the language in these
outcomes is based on assimilationist Eurocentric values. The six areas of knowledge
covered in the FYW sequence at the University as of 2016 include rhetorical
knowledge, critical thinking and reading, processes, community issues and cultural
diversity, confidence and ownership, and conventions. As is the case with the Gen
Ed outcomes, the Composition Program SLOs aim to universalize writing situa-
tions and contexts for all students to respond. The outcomes for the first course of
the sequence instructs students to “analyze and respond to the needs of different
audiences,” “employ a tone consistent with purpose and audience,” “use a variety
of genres or adapt genres to suit different audiences and purposes,” and “choose
evidence and detail consistent with purpose and audience.” While these seem to
permit space to address or write for frequently underrepresented or underserved
communities, often the rhetorical practices that connect with those communities
are misunderstood by literacy teachers within the academy.
Afrocentric rhetorical attributes, for instance, consider the wisdom of proverbs, aphorisms, and even biblical verses for use in formal, even academic, documents. So, the features may be more rhetorically effective for a primarily Black American audience or an audience familiar with the rhetorical features. While such features are likely well known by non-Black Americans, their usage in academic texts may be discouraged or penalized. Not to mention, without the permit of “ethnolinguistic idioms” or “verbal inventiveness” (Gilyard and Richardson 41; Smitherman, “Blacker” 13) in academic writing tasks, students transitioning to the university may believe they are limited in crafting their versions of reality—commonly influenced by their lived experiences as members of a subjugated racial group—through written texts, because of the limitations of the audiences implied through their teachers.

In examining what knowledge about writing is privileged in the University Composition Program, I considered each individual outcome with the aforementioned research questions. Although the orientation along whiteness may not be deliberate within the writing program, it is persistent. In other words, the influence of Eurocentric epistemological perspectives in our society makes their presence in the writing curriculum purposeful, but those teaching these values may not recognize them as aligning with a particular racialized perspective. The full list of outcomes appears in Appendix C. On a passing glance, the outcomes do not exhibit Eurocentric epistemological perspectives. However, FYW outcomes essentially require students to assimilate into the Eurocentric epistemological institutional culture. This culture is invested in whiteness, so as suggested by Sara Ahmed in the epigraph, when bodies enter the institution, they either line up with whiteness or they do not (159). Values of whiteness must intersect with other institutional lines to be truly in line with institutional identity (159). When the outcomes require students to consider culture and community, it is partly from an outsider perspective, as the objective researcher not from the position of the practitioner. Overall, the student learning outcomes are race anti-conscious.

For example, the outcome to “provide an understanding of knowledge as existing within a broader context, including the purpose(s) and audience(s) for which a text may have been constructed” is a universal approach to audience, perspectives, community, and culture, but it also provides the opportunity to reinforce racial dominance in the curriculum. As Patricia Hill Collins argues, “Because this enterprise [of academia] is controlled by elite White men, knowledge validation processes reflect this group’s interest” (271). As in other types of knowledge, “new knowledge claims” about writing and rhetoric “that seem to violate this fundamental assumption are likely to be viewed as anomalies” (272). Therefore, even as
FYW instructors teach students to give critical attention to various audiences and purposes, those students whose social, professional, and civic lives might lead them to compose racially subjugated or less accessible groups in the academy are expected to learn to write for more apparent privileged audiences.

Subject matter related to racialized experiences might be taken up by the outcomes in the second course of the sequence, “community issues and cultural diversity.” Under this outcome, the program suggests that “[s]tudents will produce writing that communicates an understanding of how communities and cultural categories are constructed” as they “[q]uestion existing assumptions about culture and community,” “[d]escribe actions being taken to address cultural and community issues,” and “[a]ddress concerns of diverse audiences” (see Appendix C). Although definitely a move toward examining the impact of cultural ideologies on the creation and reception of genres and rhetorical practices, these outcomes are culturally unsustainable for students unaligned with Eurocentric epistemological perspectives. Moreover, writing program educators fail to become mindful of how the inherent power of White supremacy marks their curriculum and pedagogy (Olson 216). Culturally sustaining writing curricula and pedagogies decenter values of whiteness in literacy practices and sustain the literacy practices of communities of color (Paris and Alim). These curricular practices aid in resisting racial interest convergence in the teaching of writing.

**Interest Convergence in Programmatic Goals and Pedagogy of First-Year Writing**

Racial interest convergence intersects with Elaine Richardson’s concept of “White supremacist literacy” or the ideological literacy characteristics of “consumption, consent, obedience, fragmentation, singularity (as opposed to multiplicity), and positivism” taught “as a set of isolated skills divorced from social context” (ch. 1). White supremacist literacy is a discursive representation of Eurocentric epistemological perspectives that students are expected to adopt as the University shapes them into becoming more academic. Both Kynard and Valerie Balester found that faculty teaching the final year of high school and first two years of college generally lack an understanding of or any working experience with non-Eurocentric means of verbal expression. This is the reason why interests must converge.

Teachers, who are put in place to reproduce dominant racialized ideologies about literacy, are encouraged to inculcate students into these dominant ideologies so that students may perpetuate White supremacist literacy practices. Afrocentric,
indigenous, and other marginalized epistemological perspectives may receive examination as exotic or other but not as useful in the whiteness-based discourses of the academy. Sociolinguist Jan Blommaert details how space, such as higher education institutions or classrooms, can act as an “agentive force” in assessing sociolinguistic competences (2). Therefore, the performance of higher-scale genres, such as argumentative essays, in college writing courses are assessed by different means than those genres in community writing spaces, for instance. If “[articulate, multilingual individuals could become inarticulate and ‘language-less’ by moving from a space in which their linguistic resources were valued and recognized into one in which they didn’t count as valuable and understandable” (2), any use of raciolinguistically marginalized discourses remains constrained to the privileged genres of academic TimeSpace.

Composition Program Student Learning Outcomes

FYW programs converge racial interests when they recognize racialized experiences only as a byproduct of cultural differences rather than the results of systemic stratification, which is the case with the “community issues and cultural diversity” outcome (Appendix C) at the University. As cultural difference, epistemologies associated with blackness or brownness can exist as long as they do not impede on the values of whiteness. Within many communities of color, for instance, narrativizing personal experiences as well as factual information is common. Scholars from underrepresented racial communities and dominant racial formations such as Aja Y. Martinez, Keith Gilyard, Elaine Richardson, Victor Villanueva, Frankie Condon, and Thomas Newkirk have shown storytelling as critical to their theorizing about writing and writing education, yet the discursive practices of “narrative sequencing” and “testifying” (Gilyard and Richardson 42) are largely excluded from FYW program outcomes.

The problem with writing programs in general equating race to culture is that it ignores the social conditioning tied to the history of racial tension in Culture. Moreover, it reifies racial stereotyping by marking some things as associated with Black American culture or indigenous culture instead of with some Black or indigenous people. When students “question existing assumptions about culture and community” (Appendix C) they are doing so from a hegemonic standpoint. The investment in these hegemonic practices is not only cultural but material, as Bruce Horner suggests. Horner explains that “the institutional form of the [first-
year composition] program is treated as a commodity” (172). Since the institution is invested in the exchange value of composition work, the interest with issues of race must converge with larger institutional issues. For the institution, and the writing programs that represent institutional values, teaching students outside of privileged racial groups to act discursively within the traditions of dominant racial groups is more meaningful than teaching the rhetorical traditions of underprivileged racial groups. If language use—syntax, style, genre, and discourse—is one way “the structuration of America’s racialized society began . . . with the growing signification (interpretive rules) of whiteness” (Guess 664), limiting the ways a language is used to align with that structuration remains a subtle but powerful way that writing programs help higher education maintain White supremacy.

Transcending Interest Convergence by Making Race Present Transition-Level Curriculum

I have come a long way from being the little Black girl bussed from a forsaken neighborhood in the urban Midwest to the overwhelmingly White site of formal learning. Yet those experiences still impact me. During my first foray into the academic job market, a job talk attendee asked me, “Is it necessary to make the language of the outcomes more inclusive? Shouldn’t that come through the pedagogy and teaching?” Yes, it should, and the documents alone have only as much influence as the teachers applying the contents of the documents. In a higher education system and academic discipline laden with middle-class English-speaking Euro-American lived experiences, applications of the documents in teaching will reflect these experiences.

Like so many high-achieving students of color, I have extensive experience in renting Eurocentric epistemological perspectives as a form of survival in the education system. My contention is not with these perspectives alone. They have been key in shaping society, and all students should have access to learning about their practices. Teachers of writing should value these perspectives but not at the expense of delegitimizing other critical epistemological perspectives. Rather than constraining developing writers to the limited rhetorical properties of discourses of whiteness, learning outcomes should be culturally sustaining (Paris and Alim). Culturally sustaining pedagogies of writing encourage teachers to design curriculum that incorporates the study of multiple and intersectional discursive practices. Students move between discourses, valuing none as acontextually higher value than others.

Teaching Implications for Two-Year Colleges

Revising Gen Ed and programmatic SLOs to antiracist and culturally sustaining also provides professional development opportunities for two-year college writing faculty in race-conscious teaching practices. An example of such faculty professional development is an interactive workshop in which these faculty implement antiracist outcomes to backward design course curriculum and assessment. If teachers would like to revise a researched argument, they might use the outcomes “Develops knowl-
edge of the cultural implications of academic, peer-reviewed research” and “Effectively uses non-academic community knowledge, and primary lived experiences as part of research,” found in Appendix B, to create culturally sustaining research process assignments. These assignments teach ways to productively reference lived experience as a primary source alongside secondary source material. As well, such an assignment could offer students the chance to create meaningful critiques of the racialized perspectives in their researched sources, and faculty trainings should focus on how to assess such critiques.

For students who choose to write with discursive features unique to the dominant American English dialect privileged in the academy, faculty development could provide preparation for understanding common cultural differences in expressing ideas. Helen Fox explains that “world majority” cultures—as in most of the world’s cultures other than Western-dominated—write with a subtlety and high context often unheard of in the culture of American directness (19), and teachers often read these practices as errors. In addition to practices such as “narrativizing” and “signifyin” (Smitherman; Gilyard, Introduction; Williams), students might employ call and response, a strategy used “to synthesize speakers and listeners in a unified movement” (Williams 414) in ways unusual to academic settings. The revised outcomes that are meant to sustain cultural practices of communities of color (Paris and Alim) can aid faculty in teaching students to use their cultural-specific rhetorical features effectively rather than reprimand students for them.

Several other examples of antiracist, culturally sustaining writing pedagogy are available for examination. These examples include hip-hop literacy (Pough; Banks; Kirkland), heritage-centric literacy (Irizarry; San Pedro; Domínguez), and community-based literacy (Moss) pedagogy among others. These approaches are antiracist in that they actively work against racist ideologies around literacy and writing in school. In doing so, they recognize race as an influential force in shaping dominant discourses that traditional curriculum imposes on students. While the goal of this study is not to establish definitive learning outcomes for FYW, I would be remiss not to provide examples of what these outcomes might look like at predominantly White institutions. Some examples of these outcomes are listed in Appendix B. Like the current outcomes, these have enough flexibility to allow for pedagogical latitude, but they require writing instructors to reflect on how race is related to rhetorical knowledge, research processes, and writing conventions.
As is the case with any antiracist means to evaluate teaching and learning, the outcomes should be adaptable rather than static. What I hope this shows is how at the curricular level, education administrators can help individual FYW teachers transcend the implicit interest convergence by asking students to research, analyze, and critique the sometimes-racialized language and discourses of their worlds. The presence of race in transition-level writing course curriculum and outcomes must not be ignored if teachers and program administrators are to create truly equitable pedagogies. With such pedagogies, Eurocentric epistemological perspectives and discourses of whiteness are decentered rather than devalued. Two-year colleges serve the greater portion of students of color, so department chairs and WPAs can utilize the results of the analysis here to create race-conscious faculty development. I encourage community college leaders in curriculum development to revisit their own SLOs and Gen Ed writing curriculum criteria to see where racial interest convergence stems from Eurocentric epistemological perspectives to reflect racist ideologies about literacy and writing. Keith Kroll proclaims that in community college English instruction, “[i]t is imperative, then, that we teach critical literacy and that we educate our students and learn from their stories, and not simply train them in the practical skills demanded by the business community” (124). To do this “counter-hegemonic act” of making learning about more than “information only” (hooks 3) but about “a life of the mind” acts as “a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racist colonization” (4). An emphasis on antiracism in this transition-level writing curriculum creates opportunities to develop faculty and students into critically and politically minded writers and actors in academic, professorial, and civic communities.

APPENDIX A: Student Learning Outcomes

Written Communication is the ability to develop and express ideas, opinions, and information in appropriate forms. To fulfill this requirement, students will complete, revise, and share a substantial amount of writing in multiple genres or media. Students who satisfy this requirement will:

1. Produce writing that reflects a multi-stage composing and revising process and that illustrates multiple strategies of invention, drafting, and revision.
2. Apply academic conventions in different writing situations; employ structural conventions such as organization, formatting, paragraphing, and tone; and use appropriate surface features such as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
3. Select and/or use appropriate genres for a variety of purposes, situations, and audiences.
4. Employ critical thinking processes to create an understanding of knowledge as existing within a broader context and to incorporate an awareness of multiple points of view.
5. Select, evaluate, and integrate material from a variety of sources into their writing and use citation appropriate to the discipline.
A Critical Race Analysis of Writing Curriculum

APPENDIX B: STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Can critically read and analyze the rhetorical practices of multiple cultures through content and genre
   a. Apply multiple linguistic traditions to related audiences while using appropriate tone
   b. Describe or demonstrate the cultural basis for grammar and style conventions
2. Ability to write for multiple public audiences
   a. Conduct audience analysis and historicize arguments within communities
   b. Develop projects directed to community action for non-academic communities
3. Understands how rhetorical traditions are formed and practiced
   a. Research rhetorical traditions or linguistic traditions including academic and racially- or ethnically-based
   b. Work with more than one rhetorical or linguistic tradition for course’s major project
4. Recognizes how racial culture and other cultural experiences influence reception of a text
   a. Employs inclusive research practices, including research source perspectives from three or more cultures, both domestic and international
   b. Develops knowledge of the cultural implications of academic, peer-reviewed research
   c. Effectively uses non-academic community knowledge, and primary lived experiences as part of research
5. Gives attention to the influence of style and usage on composing effective communication
   a. Chooses paragraph structure, sentence variety, and punctuation by demonstrating comprehension of their rhetorical purposes
   b. Reflects attention to target audience and specific purpose through application of discourse features

APPENDIX C

English 101 (Intro to College Writing)

English 101 focuses on recognizing and responding to different rhetorical situations and developing effective writing processes. A student writer in English 101 should expect to create and revise works in multiple genres; establish a clear purpose and sense of his or her presence and position in each work; and compose the equivalent of 18–20 pages of text over the course of the semester.

Student Learning Outcomes for English 101: Rhetorical Knowledge

Students will produce writing that responds appropriately to a variety of rhetorical situations. Their writing should:

> Focus on a clear and consistent purpose
> Analyze and respond to the needs of different audiences
> Employ a tone consistent with purpose and audience
> Use a variety of genres or adapt genres to suit different audiences and purposes
> Choose evidence and detail consistent with purpose and audience
> Recognize the utility of digital technologies for composition
Critical Thinking
Students will produce writing that abstracts, synthesizes, and represents the ideas of others fairly. Their writing should:
> Summarize argument and exposition of a text accurately
> Demonstrate awareness of the role of genre in the creation and reception of texts
> Provide an understanding of knowledge as existing within a broader context, including the purpose(s) and audience(s) for which a text may have been constructed
> Incorporate an awareness of multiple points of view
> Show basic skills in identifying and analyzing electronic sources, including scholarly library databases, the web, and other official databases

Processes
Students will produce writing reflective of a multi-stage composing and revising process. Their writing should:
> Reflect a recursive composing process across multiple drafts
> Illustrate multiple strategies of invention, drafting, and revision
> Show evidence of development through peer review and collaboration

Conventions
Students will produce writing that strategically employs appropriate conventions in different writing situations. Their writing should:
> Use structural conventions such as organization, formatting, paragraphing, and tone
> Demonstrate control of such surface features as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling
> Provide an understanding of the conventions of multimodal composition that comprise developing communication in the 21st century

Confidence and Ownership
In fulfilling the above outcomes, students will take ownership of their work and recognize themselves as writers who:
> Have a growing understanding of their own voice, style, and strengths
> Demonstrate confidence in their writing through frequent drafts
> Can articulate their own positions relative to those of others

Adopted November 2014

English 102 (Intermediate College Writing)
English 102 focuses on creating and answering questions through research and writing using academic sources, both primary and secondary. A student in English 102 should expect to: develop and answer research questions; articulate a position relative to others on a topic; address audiences inside and outside the academic community; and compose, revise, and edit multiple assignments equaling about 20 to 25 pages of text, including at least one extended research project.
Student Learning Outcomes for English 102: Rhetorical Knowledge

Students will produce writing that responds appropriately to a variety of rhetorical situations. Their writing should:

> Articulate a purpose for research and their own position relative to the positions of others
> Analyze the needs of an audience and the requirements of the assignment or task
> Adapt an argument to a variety of genres and media to suit different audiences and purposes
> Use evidence appropriate to audience and purpose

Critical Thinking and Reading

Students will produce writing that abstracts, synthesizes, and represents the ideas of others fairly. Their writing should:

> Use evidence that responsibly represents other research and communities in and beyond the classroom
> Demonstrate an understanding of a text as existing within a broader context, with a distinct audience and purpose
> Represent and respond to multiple points of view in research and across community and cultural issues
> Select academic and nonacademic sources with discernment

Community Issues and Cultural Diversity

Students will produce writing that communicates an understanding of how communities and cultural categories are constructed. Their writing should:

> Demonstrate awareness of multiple points of view
> Question existing assumptions about culture and community
> Describe actions being taken to address cultural and community issues
> Address concerns of diverse audiences

Processes

Students will produce writing reflective of a multi-stage composing and revising process. Their writing should:

> Use sources to discover and develop research questions and/or projects
> Reflect recursive composing processes and strategies across multiple drafts and research assignments
> Show evidence of research development through peer review and collaboration
> Evaluate the credibility and relevance of both print and digital sources

Conventions

Students will produce writing that strategically employs appropriate conventions in different writing situations. Their writing should:

> Use structural conventions such as organization, formatting, paragraphing, and tone
> Demonstrate control of surface features such as grammar, punctuation, and spelling
> Provide an understanding of the conventions of multimodal composition (in print and/or digital media) that comprise developing communication in the 21st century
> Cite the work of others appropriately

Adopted Spring 2015

**Works Cited**


General Education Task Force. “NEW Course Codes, General Education Requirements, and Student Learning Outcomes.” *Cardinal Core Program*, 2017. PDF.


Gilyard, Keith, and Elaine Richardson. “Students’ Right to Possibility: Basic Writing and African American Rhetoric.” *Greenbaum*, pp. 37–51.


Smitherman, Geneva. “‘The Blacker the Berry, the Sweeter the Juice’: African American Student Writers and the National Assessment of Educational Progress.” National Council of Teachers of English Annual Convention, 1993, Pittsburgh, PA. PDF


Woodson, Carter G. *Mis-Education of the Negro.* Associated Publishers, 1933.

*Jamila M. Kareem* is an assistant professor of writing and rhetoric and assistant director of first-year composition at the University of Central Florida, where she teaches first-year and upper-division writing and rhetorical theory courses.