Sabbatical Report: Targeting Equity Using Inquiry-based Learning and Contract Grading

My sabbatical project consisted of work I conducted in several stages, each marking a step in the direction of developing solutions to the challenges I have faced since fall 2019 teaching English composition in a post-AB 705 environment. My project was to conduct research, design curriculum, and develop new tools and strategies to increase student agency and identity formation in the eighteen weeks of my 1A (English Composition) course, a learning process I would previously have stretched from English 2 into the transfer course over the span of 36 weeks (two semesters). My goals included the following:

- finding ways to communicate the value of devoting time to the learning process under an accelerated model of learning, as struggling students face difficulty making time – either because of overextension outside of school (e.g. work, family, competing commitments) or lowered expectations under pandemic learning conditions – and expending energy on developing required skills, instead choosing to glean what they can from minimal commitment in the form of attendance alone;
- helping students see the value of effort over grades when no longer required to slow down and seek the help they need to address weaknesses in their skills and assimilation of content early enough in their transfer coursework;
- exploring the solutions of **(1.) inquiry-based learning or problem-based learning (hereafter IBL)** to help students feel intrinsically motivated enough to pace their learning according to their self-identified needs and points of curiosity and **(2.) contract grading** (**hereafter CG**) to remove conditions like the punitive "0" that can contribute to a culture of threat preventing their sense of belonging in college.

The following were the stages of my project:

Stage One (August and September)

I conducted research during the first two months of my sabbatical, primarily in the form of finding, processing, and compiling information from several books, print articles, and online resources available at other colleges and in publications by prominent scholars in the fields of IBL and CG. During Stage One of my sabbatical, I read and took notes on

- Joe Feldman's *Grading for Equity: What It Is, Why it Matters, and How It Can Transform Schools and Classrooms,*
- Susan D. Blum's *Ungrading: Why Rating Students Undermines Learning (and What To do Instead),*
- Ellen C. Carillo's *The Hidden Inequities in Labor-Based Contract Grading*
- Donald L. Finkel's *Teaching with your Mouth Shut,*
- *Focus on Inquiry: A Teacher's Guide to Implementing Inquiry-Based Learning*
- Asao B. Inoue's *Labor-Based Grading Contracts: Building Equity and Inclusion in the Compassionate Writing Classroom,*
- tended more closely to (re-reading several times) Zaretta Hammond's *Culturally Responsive Teaching*, and
- close to thirty articles on IBL, CG, and related topics

This research-heavy approach during stage one of the project helped to upend my solidified practices and completely transform my thinking about the potential uses of IBL and CG in the classroom setting.

Inquiry-based Learning (IBL) requires teachers to scaffold lessons in carefully planned sequences of tasks/exercises that promote active group collaboration to help students verbalize their thoughts – development of metacognition or learning to learn – but also provide the conditions for individual engagement and the development of needs-based choices. The goal of IBL is to encourage inductive reasoning around open-ended questions, hypotheses, experimental or trial-and-error processes and risk-taking or grappling with new ideas/content so students can develop self-initiated criteria for the development of higher order evaluation skills. One of its key components is the development of metacognitive skills (also part of my training in Reading Apprenticeship in 2019) that help students cultivate curiosity in response to challenging ideas and tasks. Instead of shutting down or running away from difficult content, students who tap into their own points of curiosity self-regulate their fight/flight responses and choose engagement instead.

The research I conducted fulfilled my prediction that IBL offers teachers one form of critical pedagogy that leans *democratic* instead of *oppressively authoritarian*, clearly supporting how students need to see writing as an act of translation, performance, and cultural passing to meet standards. They need to be able to sense the way dominant culture creates the hegemonic conditions for understanding one's own value as a writer using criteria that police – via qualifications or qualitative assessments passed as objective standards -- insider/outsider, self/other, good/bad, etc. Ira Shor, esteemed scholar of critical literacy and professor of rhetoric and composition at the College of Staten Island CUNY, refers to the work of John Dewey (the father of progressivist education) in suggesting what is at stake when we ignore the translation work students are asked to do in an English composition class:

> Deweyan education seeks the construction of a reflective democratic citizen. In this curriculum, the class-based division between the ideal and the real, the liberal arts and the vocations, is collapsed into a unified learning field. Language use in such an egalitarian field is the vehicle for making knowledge and for nurturing democratic citizens through a philosophical approach to experience. (Shor "What Is Critical Literacy" 10).

When students are kept in the dark about the power dynamic behind norms like the five-paragraph essay and Standard English, essentially when students are instructed on predetermined information instead of progressively encouraged to develop their own inquiry process – from places of personal identification and self-reflection -- about their own encounter with the content "covered" in a classroom, they are denied the very tools to become active citizens in a global world. If, as Ventura College's mission statement declares, our vision includes the goal to "develop human potential, create an informed citizenry" ("Ventura College 2017-2023 Educational Master Plan" 1), the English composition classroom inherently possesses the flexibility needed to allow teachers to focus on skills development using a whole range of tools and techniques like IBL to provide the conditions for student empowerment around authentic, real-life problems or questions they have about the world.

Participation in Faculty Academy during spring and fall 2016 – immediately after the completion of my first sabbatical project – taught me how to initiate a collaborative form of "open-ended questioning" as one IBL strategy in the classroom. As Cynthia McDermott used to

say during our FA sessions, "Anyone can ask a question, and so anyone can feel empowered in a classroom doing IBL." I learned how to use IBL for research papers with its own elaborate scaffolding over the span of several weeks toward students' final research projects, but my current research has shown the possibilities for smaller, incremental changes to classroom instruction, specifically in the form of "guided and structured inquiry . . . [or] use of materials such as templates and instructional materials" (Deborah de Ridder 17) to ensure careful scaffolding that supports potentially disparate points of inquiry students may wish to pursue in response to ongoing course content and readings. Templates are one way to nudge students toward less threatening metacognitive work or self-reflective processing as they encounter new ideas. A sample from the many templates I developed from my research and plan to use in spring 2023 include the following:

- This idea (type out your short quotation after the colon at the end of this template) about _____ (←summarize your short quotation) from our course reading entitled "   " relates to my own experience and observations because _____ (←insert your explanation): "   " (author's name and page number) ←insert short quotation and its author
- From this quotation, "   " (author's name and page number) ←insert short quotation and its author), I am now thinking about questions like _____, _____, and _____. One open-ended question from my list is _____. I think one answer could be _____. However, I wonder if _____.
- When I look at the topic of _____, I see_____. I think_____. I wonder _____.

All of the templates I developed try to tap into the "engage, explore, explain, and extend" instructional framework to introduce students to the inquiry process in classrooms (Giselle Martin-Kniep). I also incorporated into my templates tools like Talk to Text, Think Aloud, and Golden Lines I learned from becoming certified in Reading Apprenticeship during summer and fall 2020-2021 and have since taught to students as part of my approach to model the reading process from a place of inquirer instead of expert. These strategies require establishing trust with students by implementing regular "'checkpoints' for student accountability and guidance at each stage of the IBL projects'" (De Ridder 17), promoting more interaction with fellow students on points of inquiry and obstacles encountered developing open-ended questions on topics that require deeper knowledge, understanding, and contextual awareness. The vulnerability required of students to engage in this process could result in students becoming defensive and guarded about what they know, do not know, and the skills they fear they may not have yet cultivated K-12, and so I learned in my research to be more conscious of collectivist principals. Zaretta Hammond writes, "the collectivist worldview is common among Latin America, Asian, African, Middle Eastern, and many Slavic cultures" (25) and can be promoted in classrooms that foster interdependence, reliance on group wisdom, dialogue and collaboration, relational interactions. Hitting the pause button after IBL exercises so students can process their open-ended questions with fellow classmates – as metacognitive "ice-breakers" and "warm-ups" at the beginning of class – further complements the lessons I learned during my training with Dr. Diego Navarro on the topic of "Inquiry into Constructs that Instill a Culture of Dignity: Creating Conditions of Belonging & Psychological Safety for Students of Color." Dr. Navarro's workshop emphasized

the point that curiosity and metacognition are coping mechanisms against bio-reactive responses that result from students sensing threat, and that a teacher can develop curriculum and teaching strategies that promote curiosity and metacognition as ways to increase a student's window of tolerance or sense of safety and belonging when encountering challenging concepts and tasks.

IBL offers another benefit, in that students who are given templates to tap into their experiences and bases of knowledge can find common ground with other students by engaging in collaborative discussion about the questions they ask instead of the answers they seek, thereby also learning to value the skills and perspectives they bring to a classroom. They are asked to use templates to reach toward larger, deeper, and more meaningful questions based on points of identification they may share with other students and with the texts and content a teacher chooses as part of the curriculum. This collective meaning-making is the most enriching form of engagement because it helps students see what they bring to the table as assets to a classroom, namely those traits and strengths they learned outside of academic contexts, ones that may not readily align with the hyper-individualistic traits a teacher might normally associate with academic achievement. Hammond writes,

> Culturally and linguistically diverse families still use them [traditional cultural learning methods] to teach children life skills and to pass along important cultural knowledge from generation to generation. At home and in their communities, traditional learning methods still work. Consequently, . . .students come to school with well-developed neural pathways for actively processing information under the right conditions. (127)

IBL exercises not only help students to learn how to communicate with other students about their points of interest in the course content using the safe space of questions instead of answers, but IBL also ignites curiosity so students can learn to use course content as a launchpad or springboard into other topics and applications that interest them. From having conducted research on IBL these past few months, I am increasingly convinced the best exit skill for students to acquire in my classes is an ability to ask the kinds of questions that can transfer from one context to another, from one academic discipline to another, and from academics to their communities and future work trajectories. My sabbatical research reinforced the importance of making our classrooms safe spaces for learning and belonging, and so my work on metacognitive skill development (using IBL as my framework) has contributed to a larger repertoire of equity-minded practices in my classroom that can be used more readily and incrementally in lower-stakes exercises rather than just higher-stakes, end-of-semester research projects.

My research into IBL ultimately showed, too, that IBL would be more effective and meaningful within the context of Learning Communities, wherein students can reach outside of the confines of English composition to understand the larger, real-world value of asking open-ended questions in the context of their own areas of focus, majors, or fields of study. In their book *Diversity and Motivation: Culturally Responsive Teaching in College*, Margerie B. Ginsberg and Raymond J. Wlodkowski state,

> Most learning communities. . . teach with highly active, collaborative learning experiences, build community by enrolling students in cohort groups or large blocks of coursework, and provide intellectual coherence to students by developing relationships between various subject areas, or by teaching a skill such as writing in the context of a subject area. (119)

In addition to books on targeting motivation in diverse student bodies, I read several articles on IBL in STEAM programs that used integrated units to present topics in cross-curricular ways instead of in isolation. In one elementary school classroom, the teacher presented

> an integrated unit both within the social studies disciplines and branching into ELA and math. For example, when reading *Henry's Freedom Box* she recreated a box that was similar in size to the crate Henry mailed himself in. Students used nonstandard measures to estimate the size of the box. In response to their many curiosities about the Underground Railroad, students were given the opportunity to map various routes that formerly enslaved people could take. Students also thought about how laws are made and changed and of course used history and historical inquiry in their investigations. During the inquiry, students were constantly engaging with reading, writing, spelling and vocabulary expansion. . . Students also identified characteristics of Civil Rights leaders referencing informational texts and primary sources. (Elizabeth Kenyon "Critical Inquiry into Moments of Historical Change: Fostering Broader Understandings of Citizenship" 224)

In college settings, this form of cross-curricular work would take shape best in the ideal circumstances Learning Communities afford, almost verging on the model of interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary studies. The teachers in this situation play the role of mentor, coach, and/or facilitator:

> A teacher using inquiry materials needs to leave space for students to deal with the topic being taught and to accept self-responsibility for their learning - which offers the experience of self-determination of learning processes. A teacher needs to accept the role of a mentor to provide an appropriate learning environment and learning material (Novak, 1988). In inquiry-based science learning environments, students are the main actors while teachers act as tutors or mentors (Sotirou et al., 2017). (qtd. in Cathérine Conradty and Franz X. Bogner 285)

IBL is most effective when students possess interests and contexts in the form of background information for asking questions within their fields of study or connecting meaningfully with the content, and so Learning Communities would help to set the conditions for deeper engagement from students. After all, as Donald Finkel reminds us, "John Dewey links 'interest' to 'need,'. . . Our interested student wants to study algebra because she *needs* algebra. She needs it *now,* not in some remote, abstract future. . . in order to solve . . . a problem that grows organically out of her present circumstances" (52). I have come to believe the *now* we present to students as the basis for helping them to recognize their own *needs* comes from greater collaboration between teachers in different programs and disciplines generating content that speaks to students in meaningful ways.

> One of the tenets of E.D. Hirsch's thinking in *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1987) or the "Core Knowledge" movement/Foundation – as much as this work has continued to add fodder to the backlash against ethnic studies programs, etc. – is the background knowledge necessary for students to thrive in higher education, and I address this issue with my own students in the form of Charles Murray's "Are Too Many People Going to College?" in our *They Say I Say* reader/textbook. As a conservative thinker, Murray expresses traditional views about what it means to be an American, views predicated on a knowledge of Western Civilization and its history, etc., but these views (as alienating and condemning as they

feel) also help students see some of the gaps that may be contributing to some of their own struggles in college classrooms. I always share my own "outsiderness" when encountering passages from the bible, for example, as a freshman English major close to thirty years ago, especially as someone who read the bible as literature in my early 20s to (over?)compensate and feel less like an impostor because I was raised in a different religious tradition. While my students find Murray's views (and by extension, via cited passages, Hirsch's ideas) elitist and stifling in terms of the options offered to those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, they also see the way K-12 might have dropped the ball in exposing students to the cultural literacy that would have contributed to stronger engagement, personal commitment, and sense of competence in college. We do multiple experiments using "cultural literacy" as our gauge for "level of engagement," usually involving historical texts (passages from Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, for example) to talk about what theories or ideas might be missing from our schema as a way to understand the "units" or word clusters we encounter. These exercises I do with students seem similar to the work being explored around "adaptive expertise" in many of the readings I encountered while getting certified in Reading Apprenticeship. Students tell me they are not really expected to read in many of their economics, psychology, child development, political science or sociology courses. Most say they are given study guides and multiple choice tests. They say they are expected to read in certain history classes, and that those classes are difficult for them, and as much as I have raised this issue with my colleagues outside of English, so much defensiveness blocks deeper conversations about activating the across-the-curriculum reader in our students, helping them (through our collective efforts as teachers) to become more flexible readers and, by default, thinkers. The issue of "reading like experts" is so vital to student success, it just feels so counterintuitive to place all that work on English and a few history teachers. We must engage in discussion about these challenges across the curriculum and campus so collective action can replace the sense of shame currently preventing dialogue.

As community college teachers, we must move toward presenting contexts beyond the English composition classroom in order to explore the most equitable IBL options, contexts that help students evaluate themselves, academia, their communities, and the world in informed enough ways to form questions that are engaged and impactful. In other words, it will take more than an English program to help students engage in meaningful IBL, at least enough to target equity as a project of radical resistance and critical inquiry.

Contract grading (CG) refers to a transactional/business relationship wherein the teacher clearly outlines performance tasks, each student chooses the performance level toward which he/she plans to work, and these tasks and choices align with each grade level in the assessment process. During my last sabbatical – please see the report I generated in August 2015 but was never collected or requested by administration, the president, the college, or the district in any form, even after I repeatedly inquired and truly wanted to disseminate all that I had learned and developed – I researched and created a student-centered rubric to be used in the English 2 (developmental) portfolio assessment process at VC and designed and shared teaching materials that aligned with the rubric's criteria. The goal was to encourage students to participate in the process of assessment using a "Self-Reflective Cover Letter for the Portfolio" arguing for the rubric-based strengths exhibited in the student's work submitted for evaluation by English faculty using the same rubric. My first sabbatical was devoted to finding assessments that were more transactional than evaluative, a way to focus on student growth and attainable goals – because of rubric-fueled instruction – instead of performance measures arbitrarily created by teachers. My project was to research rubrics and assessment procedures that were bias-resistant

and thereby more transparent and explicit about evaluative criteria, a way to lift the veil on grading and draw students into ongoing, semester-long conversations about the logic, purpose and practical end-goals or exit skills of "good writing." This research work helped me pitch to my students and colleagues the value of demystifying grading for teaching and learning purposes.

My training in the "Grading for Equity" series of workshops with Joe Feldman over the month of October 2021 was my inspiration for exploring the solution of grading contracts as an extension of the work I did for my sabbatical in 2015, and so this past semester truly granted me time and space to research and address the problems inherent to traditional grading systems on the 0-100 percent scale. If schools are indeed assimilating mechanisms based on restrictive norms that teach to the "A" student, traditional grading simply reinforces the racial, ethnic, class and gendered norms rewarded or punished by those systems. Writing well involves many skills and processes, not least of which is the practice it takes to master dominant discourse enough to understand the standards themselves. In other words, writing well is not just mastery of content (traditionally evaluated as "academic performance"), but rather also depends on a student's understanding of the very measures or criteria scholarly people in academia and society use to evaluate the quality of a person's writing. Writing is, essentially, a cultural act of enunciation, and so acculturation must necessarily be part of my curriculum. However, what comes with this process of acculturation is also a value system that is inherently biased and regulatory (policing). It articulates standards as norms that all must value above those forms of expression that are inherent to a cultural tradition, whether those forms are vernacular, local, community-based, or even sub-cultural (i.e. oral traditions).

My desire to conduct research was, in part, also resistance to the constant pressures textbook companies place on teachers to replace what they know about their students' needs, a force I see already replacing teachers' agency at the K-12 level, with more global quick-fixes like pre-generated worksheets and study questions to target challenges related to learning, socioeconomics, and equity at large. I see this temptation to abdicate our responsibility – what I see as a teacher's practitioner-based knowledge about the local populations we serve – to textbook companies as part of a much larger problem: neoliberalist trends in education. Ira Shor states,

> Democratic opposition to these neoliberal regimes and to the unrelenting austerity imposed on the 99% for 40 years now is also a global phenomenon. Neoliberalism, or the harsh rule of the market which suppresses democratic citizenship in favor of runaway consumerism, is now "the power that is in power," as Paulo Freire would say, while democracy, equality, ecology, and peace (how I define the agenda for "social justice") is "the power not yet in power," in Freire's terms. (Shor, Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane, Cresswell "Dialogic and Critical Pedagogies. . ." S3).

While textbook companies have offered ways to democratize learning by making materials more accessible to students with conflicting schedules, perhaps even offering many online resources and forms of learning as options to standardized forms of instruction, I am resistant to their appropriation of curriculum. My questions always remain as follows: how can curriculum help students become dialogic and independent critics – versus one-way and dependent receivers – of information and ideas; how can we, as institutional agents, actively invite students to engage in forms of understanding standards and norms (often blindly upheld by textbook companies) as arbitrary expressions of a market-driven, hyper-individual, competitive culture? My job as community college teacher is to resist the trends, the power instilled in teachers if they choose to

become an unquestioning purveyor of the literacy dominant culture regulates and polices. My job is to teach students how to write well so they can communicate as global citizens in a world that understands the value of performatively using these very standards to survive. When I completed my sabbatical work in 2015, I was interested in how a rubric can be empowering as we teach students to write well – writing as survival -- in a "literate" world, but I wanted to extend this question to grading itself during these past several months, and here are some of my conclusions from the research I conducted.

I think part of the answer lies in trying to help students see how effective communication is both meaningful and ethical: that "good writing" or "writing well" looks and feels "good" and "well" to a targeted audience in mind and that a writer possesses power in delivering information, ideas, or arguments to that targeted audience. Acculturation is less about learning an arbitrary set of standards and more about learning standards appreciated and respected by an audience. The trick or challenge is to expand a student's understanding of audience by helping them to expand their understanding of community, first, as that expansion requires a feeling of belonging and acceptance that can truly be at the heart of learning how to write well. Audience may very well be the key in helping address various challenges related to achieving equity in the classroom. If, as Hammond points out,

> we look at the stress some students experience in the classroom because they belong to marginalized communities because of race, class, language, or gender, we have to understand their safety-threat detection system is already cued to be on the alert for social and psychological threats based on past experience. (45)

At the heart of writing well is basic trust in the audience a student imagines, but that audience most often includes a conception of the teacher as authority figure, and as a teacher, I know my intelligence and knowledge can be intimidating. When I encountered hyper-educated teachers like I am now, I often felt anxious about screwing up because of my insecurities about my status as a fledgling writer. As a freshman, I remember almost shaking in fear of being discovered as a worshiping fraud, someone who adored what good teachers possessed but could only ever mimic at best. I had thoughts I wanted to share but lacked the language and logic to form them confidently, as though my ideas were never worthy enough to commit to paper. Having completed my research during this sabbatical, especially the books and articles I encountered about showing vulnerabilities to mentor students instead of teaching in a traditional sense, I now plan to share these fears with my students, but also the fact that over the course of a semester during my freshman year, I learned who to see as an inspiration for my learning and who to see as a judge. The judges were scary and remained so for the entire semester, and I do not carry a single one of them in my heart today. The inspirers were scary but grew to be trusted for their compassion and faith (in me and my own process). Hammond's term for this type of teacher is "warm demander" by "Building a culture of care that helps dependent learners move toward independence . . . anchored in affirmation, mutual respect, and validation. . .Think of it as an equation: rapport + alliance = congnitive insight" (75). That ability to discern between the inspirers and the judgers must come from a grounded place that taps into a student's deeper intuition as he/she/they develop trust. A good teacher thinks, "I may not have their trust, *yet*, but my practices will earn that trust if the student can remain receptive." Receptivity, too, takes a village to cultivate, and yet so much shaming can get in the way of that process. For example, a sense of shame can prevent a teacher from reaching out to the village on a campus, in the first place, but shame can also be ingrained in an institution's approach, services, and support resources. Tutors can erect a kind of *rite of passage* barrier, often unconsciously, conveyed in

how they talk with a tutee, or teachers can share stories of their own humiliation as students and how they stuck with a course despite that humiliation. Instead of openly discussing the toxicity of such an approach and a willing desire to change that culture, institutions can replicate conditions of harm that students experience but can't name. I know this much: when I felt worthy – truly respected as a learner – enough to write my ideas on paper as a freshman college student, I knew then as I know now that writing is teaching to an audience one can trust, which is really the moment students feel valued enough to teach their teachers.

My sabbatical work's emphasis on research during the first phase helped me embrace the importance of tapping into a student's feeling of competence in my classroom, a feeling I already had going into the project. Having previously explored William Glasser's "choice theory" (research starting in Faculty Academy in 2016) as one way to help students acknowledge their needs and be recognized for the strengths they bring to the table as they make micro-choices in the classroom setting, I developed writing prompts that helped guide students in identifying their needs (survival, love and belonging, power, freedom and fun). I also discovered ways to scaffold reading to tap into these needs instead of launching into "close readings" of texts just because, for example, "Well, students, this is good for you!" as the pitch for our discussions. I also have done my share of strange things I never did as an undergraduate student, for example, writing about or drawing an object students still have in their lives that holds power over them (a childhood stuffed animal, a pet, etc.) to understand a reading like Li-Young Lee's poem "Persimmons". My teacher's intuition from all the theory and reading I have done over the years to improve (thus my turn to Glasser three years ago) has told me that students do, in fact, hold a vast repertoire of knowledge as the foundation of a feeling of competence in how they see things, just perhaps not the "cultural literacy"-type knowledge that makes academic discussions so fun for those with social and cultural capital and economic stability. The knowledge students are tapping into when they start with self-reflection always brings them closer to understanding the iterations of, in the poem "Persimmons" for example, a persimmon over time in the speaker's life, its shifting value depending on who is encountering it. However, research into CG has further opened a truly radical way of conceiving of student empowerment.

Choosing CG at the English 1A level is an attempt to join the *ungrading* movement, but this movement is counter-cultural. *Ungrading* is hard to embrace because students are acculturated to measure their value and growth in terms of metrics, and so teachers often default into traditional grading practices students expect to encounter, thereby setting up criteria for evaluation that make them unconsciously complicit in waging political, social, or cultural war on the very students they want to help, those who face disadvantage outside of the classroom like the majority of students at VC. Traditional grading creates and sustains stress in ways that work directly against equity practices. As Susan Blum argues,

> grading dehumanizes and flattens the nuances in students' practices and understanding. It could be the mechanistic approach, derived from the factory model of education. . .the fixation on grades, which leads to cheating, corner cutting, gaming the system, and a misplaced focus on accumulating points rather than on learning. . . primarily focused on assessment, evaluation, sorting, ranking. . .audit culture, or what Jerry Z. Muller in his book *The Tyranny of Metrics* calls "metric fixation.". . loss of intrinsic motivation when extrinsic motivations are dominant. . . Those who focus on increasing students' intrinsic motivation often tap into students' curiosity. . . They attend to the social and emotional rewards of learning and also to authentic application. ("Why Ungrade? Why Grade?" 2-3)

Grading is clearly an expression of hegemonic practices in a society that emphasize single-point metrics or measurements over emergent and continuing progress or growth. The conditions reinforced by traditional grading systems also contribute to a range of inequities in the classroom, presenting themselves earlier and earlier in our students' lives, from standardized evaluations like district benchmarks and state testing in elementary school to teachers who, according to Joe Feldman in his preface to *Grading for Equity*, use "categories that seemed more subjective, such as Citizenship, Participation, and Effort" (xviii) in middle and high school. College teachers know that students have been acculturated to be motivated by grades and culturally biased measurements of effort, and so if teachers refuse to grade or even give out points for effort as part of a student's process in learning content, student resentment toward the curriculum and learning goals of the class could replace actual learning. In other words, students have been indoctrinated to crave the *carrot and stick* of grading and biased assessment of their level of engagement, indeed craving the stress of grades and teacher approval as part of their educational experience. Students fail to realize how these traditional grading systems inherently alienate them from their own learning process, sense of growth, and progress as learners over time, the very move from dependent to independent learner we want for students at VC. As Ira Shor suggests in his interview with the journal *Dialogic Pedagogies*, "This theme is echoed in DP with a shared critique of education that subjugates students to regimes that alienate them from their own experience" (Shor, Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane, Cresswell S2). Because of a cultural expectation that education inherently involves the stress of arbitrarily impressing a teacher, a teacher's choice to ungrade becomes a charged, countercultural, or radical position that requires a shift beyond simply acquiring new teaching tools and imposing new pedagogy on students. Initiating a shift *with* students, instead of simply *on behalf of* students, is about helping students to engage in critical literacy through dialogic inquiry into their own conditions and experiences (critical self-reflection on one's own experience of material inequities using critical thinking). This shift is a cognitive and emotional one away from stress as our *modus operandi*, and as Joe Feldman argues, "we need to use less stressful grading practices . . . and replace them with practices that are not only more accurate and equitable, but also infuse our classrooms with more care, forgiveness, and hope" (Feldman "Taking the Stress out of Grading" 20).

Contract Grading is one solution to address the difficulty of making this shift with students. As early as 1977, students reported the following sentiments about CG options in classrooms: "'I like the idea of contract grading; it makes me feel more business-like in my attitude toward the class,' "I am being treated as an adult being held responsible for my actions,' 'I feel less like a student and more like a business person'" (qtd. in James J. Polczynski and I. E. Shirland 241). A reason for these feelings is the way CG emphasizes a student's learning process and labor using a more formative and cumulative approach over final products and achievement dependent on summative work and teacher approval. Scholars like Ira Shor and Peter Elbow, also experts in teaching English composition through the lens of critical inquiry, see CG in the form of student portfolio work as one way to teach democratic principles like finding meaning and substance in writing practices (over arbitrary measures of "quality") and negotiation with curriculum (as more important than coverage of content). Cathy Spidell and William H. Thelin summarize both scholars' seminal views on CG as espoused through portfolios, self-assessment,

process letters, peer-assessment, and student-made rubrics (all practices I already do with my students without having yet fleshed out my own CG document):

> With such student-friendly goals at their foundation, grading contracts would appear to be ideal for any classroom situation. Certainly under Elbow's method, students could see an instructor who has reflected deeply about the meaning of grades. In Shor's, students would have the opportunity for empowerment to make a classroom meet their needs. In both cases, students would have a better idea about what to expect and a firmer understanding of how to accomplish goals, which could lead to increased student motivation. (36)

From this initial research exploring the foundations of contract grading, I am increasingly convinced a shift away from the 100-point scale toward CG is necessary in my own practice as a teacher. At the most basic level, CG would afford me the chance to explore *ungrading* as a way to avoid the punitive zero as students engage in their rigorous writing process.

Joe Feldman's work in his book *Grading for Equity* and other published articles provides much needed criticism of scholars like Asao B. Inoue, the originator of labor-based contracts, for depending too heavily on ideas about labor derived from foundational scholars. Inoue's approach is an extension and response to Peter Elbow's notions of participatory or active learning as displayed through conscientious effort and participation. One aspect of the labor-based contract is the negotiation work students are encouraged to perform, often in front of the class or as self-advocates during student-teacher conferences, as a way for teachers to instill the value of participatory citizenship in students so they take ownership of their effort and work. Feldman cautions against Inoue's over-dependence on these ideas that depend on assessment of student effort based on standards that are heteronormative, White, dominant, and classed. While Inoue, himself, suggests a "White, racial *habitus"* requiring non-whites and "others" to mimic standards in their performance of effort (Inoue *Labor-Based Grading Contracts: Building Equity and Inclusion in the Compassionate Writing Classroom* 62), Feldman criticizes the belief that a teacher can objectively – and without implicit bias – evaluate labor, effort, and engagement. Feldman points out how

> grades should only be based on valid evidence of a student's content knowledge, not on a

> student's environment or based on evidence that is likely corrupted by a teacher's implicit

> bias. . . [like] extra credit, the timing of when students submit assignments, and behaviors that traditionally are included in categories like Participation and Effort. (*Grading for Equity* 124)

Traits involving effort and labor always enlist our own subjective assessment of "others" against a normative standard (Feldman *Grading for Equity* xix), much to the detriment of underprivileged students who have not quite mastered these "performance goals" of cultural passing or acculturation as assimilation, even if the emphasis is drawn away from content-heavy "mastery goals" or "quality." In her book *The Hidden Inequities in Labor-Based Contract Grading*, Ellen C. Carillo raises similar criticisms of Inoue's practices, especially in terms of students with disabilities in a neurodiverse classroom. She writes

> Assessments like labor-based grading contracts that depend on learners' retroactive

requests for accommodations rather than instructors' proactive attempts at inclusivity create a situation that disability justice advocate Mia Mingus (2011) has coined 'forced intimacy' . . .As I consider Inoue's weekly negotiations . . . 'how much time realistically each student can commit to the class, and what that will mean in terms of meeting learning goals and the minimum requirements of the grading contract' (Inoue 2019, 226). . .I have similar concerns . . . regarding how students with disabilities might fare during these negotiations. (Carillo 30-31)

Having been trained in teaching men of color who may not yet know how to perform "labor" in ways that can be fairly assessed using normative criteria, who might find sweating through a task embarrassing, who may possess a fixed mindset – and for reasons having to do with past experiences in classrooms and wanting to save face – that reading them is almost indiscernible, I can see the value of these criticisms of the labor-based contract. Likewise, those who struggle in our classes at VC because of issues related to equity cannot be readily "normed" in terms of the traits we associate with activity and participation. In other words, I have worked hard to avoid the assumption – or at least be conscious of it so I can question and disrupt it when it arises -- that a student failing to finish an assignment can automatically be interpreted as failing to give time to the process needed to practice skills and master content. Labor-based contracts, therefore, create conditions for bias to enter assessment because of assumptions about "effort" or "work" or "perseverance" and other character traits that cannot be fairly assessed or evaluated.

Feldman also shows how the 100-point scale erects barriers to student achievement because of the punitive zero, and offers a solution of making 50% instead of 0% the floor:

We can correct the 100-point scale's disproportionality toward failure by instituting a 'minimum grade' – that is, setting a percentage such as 50 percent that no student can score below. . . In this way, we've made the gradations of the letter scale more proportionate . . . Our grades now require from the student the same degree of improvement from an F to a D as we would require to move from a B to an A. We really don't need sixty different descriptions of an F for mathematical reasons. . .Minimum grading assigns a value to failure that is more mathematically accurate and reasonable than the 100-point scale. (*Grading for Equity* 84-85).

Feldman articulates the specific student population targeted in this approach, specifically, those "who have an early failure in a semester course and who, even though receive passing or even high grades in the second quarter, are consigned to fail because of a low, unsalvageable first quarter grade" (85). For students who try to complete the work but still fail, the grading can include a differentiation from 52-60%, as in "tries but has too many errors" (Feldman 87). After careful assessment of these different approaches to CG, Feldman's approach most closely aligned with my own teaching philosophy, ultimately helping to address the bias teachers can show toward their assessment of student "labor." At the end of stage one of my project, I used my findings to create a set of questions to interview my colleagues at VC and MC to help me iron out the wrinkles in creating my own grading contract for use in English 1A. I also used my research from phase one to set the stage for collecting examples of CG from different campuses that most closely matched my own vision.

Stage Two (October and November)

When I completed my initial research, I knew my version of CG would be modeled after the "contract" concept but would also need to match my identity as a teacher, therefore avoiding the pitfalls I learned about a "labor"-based approach. As someone who finds it hard to improvise while teaching, I needed to find that right balance between theory and praxis before launching into a contract used with students the following semester. During stage one, I made concerted efforts to address some of my initial concerns when implementing CG with students so I could ask the right kinds of questions and find the right types of examples during stage two. I completed the following steps during stage two of my project:

- interviews with colleagues at VC and MC who have developed CG systems,
- research conducted online to find different CG options – at least twenty possible versions of contracts -- teachers have used and the rationales they have developed across the U.S., and finally
- development of my own CG system that is compatible with my values and aspirations as a teacher.

Dr. Katie Booth, English Faculty and English Transition Coordinator at Moorpark College, was an invaluable resource throughout stage two of my project. Over a series of several interviews in October and November, she not only shared important resources in the form of articles and books on the topic of CG, but she was a mentor, cheerleader, and friend throughout the process of creating my own contract to present to students in spring 2023. Upon request, Dr. Booth openly shared her own documents as models for my own work, conversed with me about the advantages and disadvantages of CG, and assuaged many of the fears I initially expressed to her over email, evident in this transcript:

> **Me**: From my preliminary research and training in preparation for the sabbatical work, I'm feeling inspired to take the plunge (away from the punitive zero), but also somewhat overwhelmed by the inherent problems to how I currently grade and confused/intimidated by all the variations I've encountered during stage one of my project. The sabbatical is really my chance to find my own sweet spot -- one that speaks to my values and teaching philosophy (though I anticipate that shifting the more I delve into the interviewing process) -- in implementing contract grading, and so I really do look forward to talking with you!

> **Dr. Booth**: You nicely express so much of my own feelings and worries about this approach to grading, which resonate with so much of the research I've been reading about grading equity. I spent 2 years in advance of jumping in with false starts, ultimately not being brave enough to take the plunge. Now that I have, I don't envision ever returning, although the waters are still muddy....I look forward to connection.

The documents Dr. Booth shared included the following:

- "English MO1A unit 1 Final Rubric," wherein Dr. Booth states, "In alignment with the course's Ungrading Philosophy, Dr. Booth promises that if students thoughtfully and fully
  a) complete all assigned essays, essay reflections, and essay revisions,
  b) complete as much of the other assigned coursework as possible,
  c) commit to the process of learning, practicing, and revising, the reading, writing, and

critical thinking skills that comprise this course
they will have earned the right to self-assign their final transcript grade for the course, in conversation with herself and the Class Rubric." This openness in explaining the concept of Ungrading to students was inspiring and informed my own rationale (see phase three of my project) I share with students.

- "English MO1A Class Ungrading Philosophy," wherein Dr. Booth shares several components of her approach to assessment, one being "the ungrading philosophy specifically stipulates that students must do coursework to earn the right to self-assess" (thereby warding off the temptation students may feel toward assessing A-level work for incompletes in the course). Also, this document reinforced how "Essay rubrics will be devised in conversation with students." This statement immediately aligned with my own research on how to offer students feedback on essay assignments and helped inspire my own statements (see phase three of my project) I share with students.
- "English MO1A Course Calendar" filled with engaging content, skills development, and curriculum on an interesting theme, and
- "English MO1A Syllabus" showing the nuanced way Dr. Booth paces learning using a CG system.

I also interviewed my **VC colleagues Jenna Garcia and David Carlander**, both of whom improvised CG systems during the pandemic as a more compassionate form of assessment during a particularly stressful time. They both offered equally compelling materials as Dr. Booth to help build my confidence in taking the plunge toward CG in spring 2023. Here is a transcript of one exchange I conducted with both colleagues over the months of October and November:

> **Me**: With the help you offered me this semester during my sabbatical and from having tapped into resources elsewhere, too, I was able to take the plunge and finally start creating my contract, one that matches my teaching and vision for 1A as a rookie "ungrader" trying to turn the tide! But, of course, with every breakthrough for me, there's also bound to be a setback: mine happened to materialize in the form of a panicked 3 a.m. awakening two nights this past week because I have yet to picture how to "do" -- like, literally put into action as a "ungrader" assessing and evaluating work alongside students all semester -- this new practice in a, well, practical way using Canvas' gradebook.
>
> This morning it struck me a screenshot or two of the way both of you have mapped contract grading (using your Canvas' gradebook) would go so far for the lurking anxiety I'm feeling about unhoming my students -- ironically hitting me, too, via the uncanny/unheimlich 3:00 a.m. cold sweats that have been haunting me -- in my efforts to ungrade and essentially create the conditions of possibility for new identities to emerge as organically as possible for me and my students.
>
> I'd so appreciate if you sent my way any visual -- a sample screenshot of your own gradebook or a video you watched or resource you used to help you map -- that could help me create my gradebook in a way that encourages students to complete the work required to earn a grade by the end of the semester. For example, do you just hide the final grade category? do you even use categories? Are students angry about rubric scores

they receive on drafts from peers (and from me when asked) but no "grade" until the final portfolio?

As you'll see from the document I attached to this email, if a student turns in really struggling (scores of 3 or lower) final drafts but completed all the conditions for receiving an A (which is basically doing all the work) and then submitted revisions of those final drafts in the final portfolio that earn a border score of B+/A-, then I plan to give that student an A despite the C-level work turned in all semester (result = happy student). However, the same C-level writing student may revise and receive final portfolio scores that are in the C-range, in which case I'll give that student a C (result = potentially angry student for not "knowing" via grade their writing was C-level). Those happy/angry results are so hard to reconcile in terms of the ultimate motivation we hope students will have to keep going and sign up for 1B and continue along the trajectory, right?

I've attached the first draft of a document I plan to distribute to students in my 1A courses starting in spring 2023, something that emerged after close to twenty-five pages of writing my response to research (which no one, I discovered from last year's sabbatical, ever reads or requests, anyway!). All that writing was really empowering at the personal level, though, and always is ☺

Thanks so much in advance for any help at this final stage of making the contract happen in as coherent a way as possible while I remain mindful of hiccups I'm sure to experience as I teach in spring. You're very much appreciated as good friends and colleagues.

Jenna: The gradebook is a real sticking point and makes clear that we are trying to retrofit an old system in an attempt to do something completely different. It will be awkward, and there's no way around that. But at least in my case, I haven't had any angry students—mostly just confused or questioning. Once I remind them about the reason for the different system and that it generally works in their favor, they tend to be ok with it.

Here are some of the things I've tried out:

- Not displaying final grades in Canvas—this made many of my students feel uncertain about their progress and I eventually just made it visible to them. It seems like a security blanket for some.

- Using Grading Schemes to remove points/grades from individual activities—I've attached a screenshot of what this looks like in the gradebook. Basically, you create a scale on while certain point values equal a qualitative value. In my case, the categories are Not Submitted, Not Yet, Pass, and High Pass (for an essay). Again, it's not perfect because students can still see the number value in the Gradebook.

- Grade Check in emails—This has been the most effective. After each essay/unit, I send an email to each student letting them know where they stand in terms of the contract. I use a form email that I can quickly personalize with their info. Here's a sample:

Hi STUDENT NAME,

I have finished scoring all of the work from Weeks 1-5. For this unit, you have earned X of 20 points for online activities, and you have earned a High Pass on Essay 1. Excellent work!

This means you are on track to meet the requirements for an A according to our class grading contract. To keep this grade, you will need to do the following:

- Keep your online participation rate at 85% or higher

- Complete Essay 2 and Essay 3 with a Pass or High Pass

- Revise one essay for the Capstone Project

I appreciate all the work you have put in so far, and I look forward to seeing more of your work in the future. If you have any questions or concerns, please let me know.

No matter what, Sumita, it's going to feel shaky the first semester. You've clearly done all of the necessary foundational work you can to set up the system. Being flexible once there are real humans interacting with it is where a big challenge comes in. Each semester, I've learned things that have affected the way I've used my contract, and now that my classes are more and more in person, I'm having to rethink even more.

Always interested in hearing about your thoughts on this topic!

David: Glad you're finding your way with this stuff—there's a lot to think about, I know. And I definitely sympathize with the concern about what the "logistics" of contract grading look like; until you do it, it can feel a little uncertain (and, even when you *do* do it, it still can feel uncertain! Or is that just me...?).

I'm afraid my gradebook looks pretty run o' the mill, so I'm not sure any visuals would be too terribly helpful, but I can certainly break down what I do.

I only have one category--"Assignments." And I make the grades total available to view to students, but I remind them on a regular basis that the grades total percentage is not entirely accurate because in addition to completing a certain percentage of Canvas assignments, students must also earn a "Complete" on the later drafts of their essays.

If a student writes to the prompt, meets their page count (or gets really close), and meets the source requirement, they earn a "Complete" for the essay. If not, I kick it back to them with an "Incomplete," and it's up to them to make the adjustments/revisions necessary. They have to earn a "Complete" on those essays in order to pass the class. This is why that overall percentage isn't entirely accurate; I may have a student who has an overall 84%, but they didn't earn "Completes" for their essays. That student isn't on track to pass until they revise.

I'll confess, I haven't done the email updates the way Jenna has, which is something I want to incorporate moving forward. For now, I've been emailing all students who didn't earn a "Complete" on their essays to let them know they still have work to do. It usually catches a handful of students who, for whatever reason, don't realize the position they're in, and they

then get me the work. But it isn't a catch-all solution, for sure. I think what Jenna's doing is the much stronger approach.

Always happy to talk about this stuff to work to try to make it better. Even though I've used it a couple years now, I still feel like I'm trying to find the version that's most effective. It's a process, for sure.

Over the two months of stage two of my sabbatical project, David and Jenna offered samples of how they "Ungrade" using CG, screenshots of their Canvas Gradebook set-up, and encouragement to continue tweaking my own document (see phase three). I also felt validated by my colleagues, that the fears I was experiencing were normal and my own emergence as an *ungrader* would take being open to a trial and error process while teaching the course. That feeling of camaraderie emboldened me to create a document I had faith in for spring 2023.

During stage two, I also collected examples of CG in practice at different colleges and in school systems. Many of my online sources were accompanied by explanations, some of which helped to address the concerns I was having, too. For example, one article from *Edutopia* presenting examples of CG included the statement,

> Critics of grading for equity say there is not enough empirical data or experience to suggest that the purported successes of the approach could work at scale. In many districts that have adopted equitable grading, the process is too new—and still too inconsistent—to yield reliable research data. The complications of the pandemic also thwarted the collection of empirical data, and many educators remain unconvinced of the program's merit. (Alexis Tamony "The Case Against Zeros In Grading," October 2021).

In the comments section of this same article online, a teacher writes, "The biggest pushback I have gotten from my colleagues has been related to the reporting of the redefined floor of 50 in the online grade book . . . it's confusing for a parent to see that an assignment is missing but at the same time the student received a 7/14." The online grade book exacerbates the issue of "I don't want to give them something for nothing." This type of concern helped me feel more at ease about the experiment I was launching the next semester because I was not alone in fearing the response from students about missing work. I felt encouraged about using FERPA to my advantage as a college teacher dealing directly with students instead of their parents or families.

Stage Three (December)

December was devoted entirely to the editing and revision work I needed to do on my documents I planned to distribute to students, including the final templates I uploaded to Canvas for IB-related work and the CG work I wanted students to have in their hands with my syllabus and Essay assignments on the first day of classes in January. I have attached to this report the handouts I created for my students (see pages 21-24).

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Rationale for Contract Grading

Learning to write is about learning how to communicate (a.) **something you want** (b.) to **someone** for (c.) some **purpose**.

a.) "something you want" means, *do you have a clear and engaging topic?*
b.) "someone" means, *do you know your audience*?
c.) "purpose" means, *do you want to **present information**, offer **ideas in the form of an argument**, create a narrative by providing anecdotes or examples for **entertainment,** or a **combination** of two or more purposes*?

Your learning path (and what I hope to be your motivation) for taking this course is to learn how to get better at **communicating something you want to someone for some purpose** while using academic prose to experience the **feeling of an increasing sense of belonging to an academic community of writers**. While grades can provide some idea of where you stand in a course based on the work others in the class are doing – others meaning both the teacher and your fellow students -- they tell you very little about your learning path or growth. Grades often deter learning because they prevent you from

- taking the risks needed to own your learning path (growth)
- knowing your own strengths and weaknesses as a result of the hard work you're doing to apply what you're learning (learning is often gradual and cumulative, requiring a process instead of a mad scramble to create a perfect end-product)
- engaging in the steps needed to make progress (misinterpreting a grade as a "stamp" from the teacher deciding your level in the course before you've had a chance to learn in a gradual and cumulative way)
- experiencing the elation of an "aha!" moment or breakthrough – I often tell students this can happen during week ten or eleven after completing the processes needed in applying lessons to the creation of at least two formal essays -- when hard work results in the lightbulb turning on or a feeling of "now it clicks! I get it now!"
- feeling like you own your own path, that you are in charge and can make decisions about what you need to improve and how you plan to get there (this is called personal agency)
- knowing what you need and when you need it in order to do better.

My job is not to control you to do perfect work, tell you to buckle down, stamp you with a letter, lecture you about my own "aha" moments, push you on a path you don't yet know or own, or tell you what you need and when. My job is to educate, to bring forth your best effort resulting from the process of trial and error it takes to apply the lessons you have learned in my course so you can grow as a writer. Bringing forth your best effort will naturally awaken you to what you have inside of you.

Contract Grading and this Course's "Grading Contract"

Complete the work so you can understand the process or time investment it takes to learn (becoming comfortable with mistakes as part of that process). Try your best to apply the course's lessons so you can test yourself and discover your own weaknesses and strengths along the way. Continually self-assess using *your translation* (an exercise you'll complete early on) of the English program's official rubric to help you discover your own sense of belonging to our community of writers. Revise your work to present your best efforts in the form of a portfolio. That's it!

You'll earn an **A if you finish or achieve all of the things** mentioned above, which means you accomplished ALL four goals as follows:

All larger writing projects include all stages of the writing process by the due dates listed (or by the one-week grace period), and so the drafting process is completed for each essay, including **at least ONE visit to the tutoring center** to work on revisions, with a **maximum of ONE final draft missing** until submitted as complete in the final portfolio (which means you have completed the drafting process up to the second rough draft for that ONE missing final draft). The course's rubric will factor heavily in the feedback you receive from the teacher and peers on drafts, so missing the opportunity to submit rough and final drafts will lessen the range of possible feedback before submitting the final portfolio.
Almost all smaller exercises assigned on a weekly basis (see weekly modules) -- meaning smaller reading/writing/viewing/responding exercises -- are **finished within one week of their due dates** to help you pace your learning in a cumulative way with attempts made to pace yourself in catching up as soon as possible when you have fallen behind and a **maximum of FOUR missing or "no credit" exercises by week fourteen**. These exercises are given a Credit/No credit "grade" but with teacher feedback provided. To earn an A, **a student must complete almost all smaller exercises assigned on a weekly basis by the one-week grace period**.
Every self-assessment exercise is completed on time (by the one-week grace period) to show the importance you've placed on pacing your learning, progress, and growth using our rubric.
Your **portfolio receives at least one score in the A-range** leading to an overall grade of B+ or higher.

You'll earn a **B if you finish or achieve most of those things** listed above, which means you accomplished ALL four goals as follows:

All larger writing projects include all stages of the drafting process by the due dates listed (or by the one-week grace period), and so the drafting process is completed for each essay, including **at least ONE visit to the tutoring center** to work on revisions, with a **maximum of TWO missing final drafts** until submitted as complete in the final portfolio (which means you have completed the drafting process up to the second rough draft for those TWO missing final drafts within the one-week grace period). The course's rubric will factor heavily in the feedback you receive from the teacher and peers on drafts, so missing the opportunity to submit rough and final drafts will lessen the range of possible feedback before submitting the final portfolio.
Most of the smaller exercises assigned on a weekly basis (see weekly modules) -- meaning smaller reading/writing/viewing/responding exercises -- are **finished within one week of their due dates** with attempts made to pace yourself in catching up as soon as possible when you have fallen behind and a **maximum of EIGHT missing or "no credit" exercises by week fourteen.** These exercises are given a Credit/No credit "grade" but with teacher feedback provided. To earn a B, **a student must catch up on most smaller exercises assigned on a weekly basis by week fourteen**.

Every self-assessment exercise is completed on time (by the one-week grace period) OR effort is made to catch up when time and life permit within the month of drafting due dates to show the importance you've placed on pacing your learning, progress, and growth using our rubric.
Your portfolio receives two scores in the B-range, leading to an overall grade of B or B- (79.5% or higher) when both scores are averaged.

You'll earn a **C if you finish or achieve many of the things** listed above, which means you accomplished ALL four goals as follows:

All larger writing projects include all stages of the drafting process by the due dates listed (by the one-week grace period or by week fourteen in cases of extreme emergency), and so the drafting process is completed for each essay including **at least ONE visit to the tutoring center** to work on revisions, with a **maximum of THREE missing final drafts** until submitted as complete in the final portfolio (which means you have completed the drafting process up to the second rough draft for those THREE missing final drafts within the one-week grace period or by week fourteen in cases of extreme emergency). The course's rubric will factor heavily in the feedback you receive from the teacher and peers on drafts, so missing the opportunity to submit rough and final drafts will lessen the range of possible feedback before submitting the final portfolio.
A majority of the smaller exercises assigned on a weekly basis (see weekly modules) -- meaning smaller reading/writing/viewing/responding exercises -- are **finished by week fourteen with attempts made to pace yourself by catching up as soon as possible** when you have fallen behind, with a **maximum of TWELVE missing or "no credit" exercises by week fourteen.** These exercises are given a Credit/No credit "grade" but with teacher feedback provided.
Every self-assessment exercise is completed by week fourteen OR effort is made to catch up when time and life permit within the month (again, the importance of pacing your learning, progress, and growth using our rubric).
Your portfolio receives at least one score in the C-range, leading to an overall grade of B-/C+ (border grade of 79.4% or lower), C, or C- when both scores are averaged.

You'll have earned a **D (or lower) if you did not prioritize learning in this class**, which means any of the following occurred by week fourteen:

Most of the larger writing projects are missing stages of the drafting process by the due dates listed (by the one-week grace period or by week fourteen in cases of extreme emergency), and so the drafting process and final drafts are incomplete for each essay assigned. Students must finish all rough drafts before week fourteen in order to submit final drafts in the form of a portfolio by the end of the semester. The course's rubric will factor heavily in the feedback you receive from the teacher and peers on drafts, so missing the opportunity to submit rough and final drafts will lessen the range of possible feedback before submitting the final portfolio.
Very few of the smaller exercises assigned on a weekly basis (see weekly modules) -- meaning smaller reading/writing/viewing/responding exercises -- were finished by week fourteen and attempts were not made to pace yourself by catching up as soon as possible when you fell behind (meaning, **FOURTEEN or more missing or "no credit" exercises accumulated by week fourteen).**
At least one self-assessment exercise was missed by week fourteen, meaning you were unable to catch up when time and life permitted within the month (again, the importance of pacing your learning, progress, and growth using our rubric).
Your portfolio receives at least one score in the D-range, leading to an overall grade of C-/D+ (border grade of 69.4% or lower), D, or D- when both scores are averaged.

Student Checklist for "Grading Contract"

Larger writing projects (write in the dates you submitted each item)

Essay 1	Essay 2	Essay 3	Research
R1:_____ R2:_____	R1:_____ R2:_____	R1:_____ R2:_____	R1:_____ R2:_____
Final Draft: _____	Final Draft: _____	Final Draft: _____	Final Draft: _____

Tutoring Center visits (write in the dates you attended)

Essay 1	Essay 2	Essay 3	Research
Session date: _____ Session date: _____	Session date: _____ Session date: _____	Session date: _____ Session date: _____	Session date: _____ Session date: _____

Your thoughts and questions (how engaged were you?):

Based on the checklist you completed above, what grade did you earn (for this category?):

Weekly Exercises (write in the number – e.g. 3.2 or 12.6 – of the weekly exercises you missed)

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8
Week 9	Week 10	Week 11	Week 12	Week 13	Week 14	Week 15	Week 16

Your thoughts and questions (how engaged were you?):

Based on the checklist you completed above, what grade did you earn (for this category?):

Self-Assessment Exercises (write dates you submitted each item in response to each larger project)

Essay 1	Essay 2	Essay 3	Research
Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:

Your thoughts and questions (how engaged were you?):

Based on the checklist you completed above, what grade did you earn (for this category?):

Portfolio Contents (place these items in the order of first on top, i.e. cover letter, then final drafts of shorter essays with the chosen one flagged and on top, and then the final draft of the research essay)
- ☐ cover letter
- ☐ final drafts of Essays 1, 2, and 3 (flag with a post-it note the essay you want the committee to score)
- ☐ final draft of Research essay

Your thoughts and questions (how confident do you feel about your work this semester?):