

When First-Year College Composition Isn't

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As Elizabeth Wardle notes, the assumption within college composition studies is that Freshman Year Composition (FYC) “should and will provide students with knowledge and skills that can transfer to writing tasks in other courses and contexts.” However, in any given term, for various reasons, students in “freshman composition” can be sophomores, juniors, or seniors. In fact, at the University of California in Irvine, the mandatory composition program classes may be comprised of only 30% freshmen; some sections of FYC are solely juniors and seniors. The skew in non-FY UCI students challenges both the efficacy of the course curriculum and the assumption that students need training as freshmen to succeed in their college studies. Non-FY FYC students would seem to have had successful experiences in curricular matters – presumably, they’ve begun to write in their area of study. If students are already practicing awareness of academic conventions before they take FYC then they are exhibiting a type of discursive agency which indicates that the frames influential to FYC pedagogy are not applicable to all, or in this case even most, of the students in any given classroom. This makes FYC a shared space with varied exigencies. What can FYC offer to students that are no longer freshmen? What are the skills and agendas of non-FY students? Are they different enough from freshmen to warrant concern and or action? What are effective, fair, and reasonable ways of engaging these differences within one course? In what ways are multilingual student populations specifically impacted by placement procedures and their subsequent inability to enroll in FYC in a timely manner? Reports from students as they make their way through FYC courses is the primary source material to explore these questions.

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