

## HBCU Students' Perceptions of Their Readiness for College Composition

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### ABSTRACT

*A vast majority of sources examining Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) limit their discussion to the relatively low performance, low economic status, and low graduation rates of students at such universities. Research focusing on the voices of students in general is scarce especially, when it comes to students at HBCUs. This study is designed to examine the student's experiences in grades 9 – 12 and their readiness for college composition. Providing students with a voice in their learning experiences could help in the attempt to increase graduation rates at HBCUs, especially if students are treated as though they are the experts in their experiences. This study examined the students' perceptions of their abilities and their actual performance. Most of the students explained that they were adequately prepared. All except one of the students expressed their readiness English at the college. Although most of the students passed freshman composition, they did not gain some of the skills required in college. The study revealed that high school teachers place different degrees of importance on some skills. A lack of connection between high school English courses and college English classes exists. The students contended that they would have liked for the assignments given in high schools to be more similar to those assigned in college. Thus, collaboration between high school teachers and university professors could have decreased the fear that some students faced when they first enter college.*

**Key Words:** Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), graduation rates, students' experiences, perceptions, high school English, college English, actual performance.

### 1. Introduction

My interest in the academic performance of students, particularly minority students, is evident in my experiences at an HBCU in the southeast. As a student tutor, a Writing Center Instructor, and now an Assistant Professor, I have observed various types of students with various expectations, motivations, and abilities. The fact that many of the students are not prepared for university work is of grave concern. At the same time, I have observed university students who exhibit interest in and ability to succeed in any academic environment/university. However, many of those who were not prepared realized their academic inadequacies and struggle to obtain a college degree, so they sometimes end their college careers. Also, those who are not earnestly interested in an education or a degree leave prematurely. As a result of inadequate preparation, disinterest, finances, etc., many of the latter two types of students decrease their chances of social and economic success as the roles that they took on in school mirror the role they eventually take on in society. For these reasons, I engaged in a research project that could help to inform

stakeholders of the importance of providing meaningful educational opportunities to all students, regardless of the academic track, race, and economic status of students.

## **2. Background Literature**

The paucity of research on ethnic minority members' learner identities and the students' perceptions of their learner identities make it necessary to examine their perceptions (Howard, 2003). The continued gap between the academic performance of African American and White students at the secondary and college levels indicates the urgency of examining students' identities. Focusing on students' perceptions, views, and voices is one method of addressing the needs of an underserved group of students.

Students' perceptions of their own learning ability are crucial to their academic success. Unless teaching includes an examination of the thoughts and feelings of students whose perspectives are greatly influenced by school culture, efforts to improve learning are futile. All students, including minority students, are capable of providing educators an abundance of information designed to close the academic achievement gap among students. Since students' perspectives and self-perceptions influence their academic achievement, learning about both could help educators to understand students better (Fowler-Finn, 2003; Thompson, 2002). Some information pertinent to students and their perceptions does not include the students' own perceptions. Those who presume students' disinterest in school would discover, upon examining what students really think, that many of them are concerned about making the most of schools (Scherff, 2005).

Freeman (1997) studied students' perceptions of barriers to their participation in higher education, and the students cited the importance of the elementary and secondary school environments as factors. They believe that the provision of more information about the requirements, expectations, and other characteristics of college earlier in their academic lives would benefit them. My research examines the extent to which students in freshman composition classes felt their secondary schools prepared them for college.

Many studies focus on the perceptions of educators and other decision makers, but educators often make assumptions about students' perceptions of learning and of students' learning abilities. Educators could benefit from "listening; hearing what students themselves have to say about who they are, how they see themselves in the school environment, and what they believe is expected of them as learners" (Sadowski, 2003, p. 163). Part of narrowing the academic achievement gap is to address the mismatch between students' perceptions and their actual learning ability.

There is little attention placed on the complexity of students' lives (Stougohton & Sivertson, 2005), and this results in the scarcity of theories looking to students themselves as sources of information about their educational experiences. In particular, scholars argue that identity formation as it relates to identities as learners has not been adequately studied among African American adolescents even though students' perceptions about their learner identities are important in how they define and characterize themselves and others (Schultz, Jones-Walker, & Chikkatur, 2008; Stoughton & Sivertson, 2005).

For too long, education decision-makers have relied on every source to explain the problems facing literacy practices among college students except the individuals for whom these practices are designed. Increasingly, high-stakes tests have informed policy makers of strategies designed to enhance students' learning. However, most reform efforts are shrouded in attempts to blame rather than to deal genuinely with the problem. Teachers blame students for not putting forth enough effort to master skills, and teachers blame students' lack of prior exposure to adequate learning activities for students' failure. Students and society in general blame problems in education on poor teacher preparation and teacher apathy. Students can provide much, if not more useful, information about their educational experiences in an overall effort to improve

student achievement (Alvermann, 2006). Research pertinent to the academic achievement of African American students exists, but few research endeavors have allowed “African American students to speak on their own behalf and to offer suggestions, as the true experts on their own experiences” (Thompson, 2002, p. xx).

### **3. Rationale/Purpose**

Examining students’ perceptions and learning abilities are important because “substandard schooling has far reaching consequences that become most evident in the disproportionate number of African Americans who make up America’s poor and who are underprepared for university course work” (Thompson, 2002, p. xxi.). Among most ethnicities, a large number of those with college degrees earn more during their work lives than those who do not, and they are less likely to rely on public assistance programs as non-college educated persons (Richardson & Harris, 2004). Although the percentage of African American students graduating from high school is increasing, the inadequate instruction that some of them receive is cause for alarm. Only 40 % of African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students go on to earn a bachelor’s degree within six years (Miners, 2010).

The quality of students’ secondary educational experiences influences their future opportunities for social, economic, and personal growth. Employing pedagogy that facilitates the advancement of all students - regardless of their race, class, or gender - is important to improving the learning of all students (Johnson, 2003; McLaren, 2003). The kind of education that students receive is evident in their performance at the college level. Despite calls to accommodate for the diversity among students in traditional public schools, students from marginalized groups still experience difficulty navigating mainstream classrooms because they are more likely to encounter exclusion and discrimination. African Americans are at a greater risk of falling through the cracks of the K-12 educational system. Knowing the research pertinent to effectively teaching African American students is imperative to removing some of the barriers to their academic success, and a major part of understanding these barriers involves studying learner identity.

The research study examined in this paper is how HBCU freshmen perceive their ability to do college work and how these perceptions differ from their actual performance. One overarching question guided this study: *How do HBCU students’ perceptions of their ability to do college level work differ from their actual performance in a freshman English class?*

Overall, the student revealed many contradictions both in participants’ survey and interview responses and their actual classroom performance.

### **4. HBCU Students’ Perceptions of Ability**

Examining perception is important in empowering students and increasing their self-esteem. Students take their cues from teachers as far as belief in their abilities is concerned. Their views of themselves as learners impact their transition from high school to college. Research has found that high school teachers and college instructors have varied priorities in composition (Patterson & Duer, 2006), and these differences may account for the students’ performance in college composition courses. In an ACT survey, high school teachers agreed that skills in evaluating and judging texts are important, but they did not approach these skills as priorities in the classroom. In college, reading and writing processes are combined. College teachers of first year university students lament the students’ inadequate skills in reading and evaluating texts (Patterson & Duer, 2006). Reading and evaluating texts could help students to provide adequate details and examples in their essays. One of the participants in the study, D.J., explained that high school students could get a better understanding of what to expect in college if college teachers visited the high schools and engaged in some of the activities high school students complete.

Students themselves influence their learning in writing courses, for students' beliefs about their strategies affect learning outcomes. When the students' aim is to comply with task demands, the learning activity involves a low level of cognitive engagement such as memorizing, repetition, listing, or organizing. Students with low self-efficacy fear having their writing evaluated. Such students also have a poor writing self-concept involving sentence structure and grammar.

Also important is the collaboration between students and teachers (Leah, 2002).

In Lavelle and Zuecher's (2001) study of writing approaches of university students, they revealed that the self-efficacy of students influenced greatly the students' approaches to writing. In my study, it was apparent during the interviews that even when students were in standard as opposed to advanced courses in high school, the method their particular teachers used helped to determine the students' perceptions, efficacy, and performance in their college composition course. That is, most of the students who were interviewed passed their college composition course, but they were enrolled in Standard English courses in high school. The learning experiences and expectations, not tracking itself, improved the students' learning performance. The one student who failed college composition received training in a standard track that she claimed underestimated her ability and, consequently, affected her performance in college English.

## **5. Procedure/Methodology**

Mixed method research involves using one method (quantitative) in one phase of the research and another method (qualitative) in another phase (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Brewer and Hunter (1989) noted that "major areas of research in the social and behavioral sciences now use multiple methods as a matter of course" (p. 5). In many fields, "most researchers now use whatever method is appropriate for their studies, instead of relying on one method exclusively" (Tashakkur & Teddlie, 1998, p. 6).

This study is similar to one conducted by Thompson (2002) to examine students' perceptions of their elementary, middle, and high schools. The first set of data in this current study was based on a questionnaire; the second set was based on interviews and artifacts (students' writing assignments). One hundred and four (104) students in freshman composition took the questionnaire, and 10 of those participated in the interview phase. The first section of the questionnaire (Likert Scale) asked students to provide information about how they felt about their 9 – 12 grade experiences in English classes and their preparation for college. Participants chose from the following responses on questionnaire using a scantron sheet: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. These questions were designed to answer one of the Sub Questions of the study: What are the students' perceptions of their ability to do college work in a freshman composition class?

The second section of the questionnaire asked students to provide information about their experiences in certain tracks. These questions provided responses to Sub Question 2: How has prior academic placement in grades 9 – 12 influenced the students' ability to do work in a freshman composition class? The third section asked students to provide information about their experiences in college English and was designed to answer Sub Question 3: What is the students' actual performance in a freshman composition? The final section contained demographic questions. I needed to know the gender of the students, their age (for informed consent/assent purposes), and the students' willingness to participate in the interview stage to make sure that the study included a representative group of students.

In phase two (qualitative), I used standardized open-ended interviews. The goal was to obtain detailed information about the participants' thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations, and feelings about their past and present experiences and beliefs (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Asking all the interviewees (10) the same questions in the same order helped to identify themes and makes comparisons. The following are examples of types of questions:

1. How would you describe the difficulty of the work you completed in your high school English class?
2. What kind of activities did the high school teachers use to teach you about providing support and details in essays and paragraphs?
3. Was your college English class what you expected it to be? Explain how you thought it would be. Explain how it actually was.

I examined the students' essays in order to get an idea of the students' writing ability. Several of the students' essays and homework assignments served as artifacts.

## 6. Results/Findings

Most of the participants believed that they had been prepared to pass their college composition course, and their perceptions equaled their actual performance as evidenced by the data—they did pass the class. However, there were contradictions between the questionnaire, the interviews, and the students' papers.

For example, on the questionnaire, more than half of the students reported that they understood the rules of grammar/mechanics as they learned them in high school, but their answers during the interview and their writing samples indicated a need for further instruction in grammar/mechanics. When asked if the track she was in helped her to understand college English, participant Amanda replied, "Sort of. *High school could've focused more on grammar.* I'm pretty good at providing support." Understanding grammar and usage is different from actually putting this understanding into action in writing assignments. It is much easier for students to locate errors in grammar and usage while detecting errors in isolated sentences on a worksheet than editing *their* work for such errors. Using students' errors from their own papers could be more helpful in teaching grammar and usage. In some cases, high school teachers admit to not placing an emphasis on skills including writing strategy, organization of writing and grammar and usage (Patterson & Duer, 2007). Subsequently, students themselves do not prioritize skills such as grammar and usage. The students' reference to grammar/mechanics as "little problems" during the interviews proves this point.

Another issue is the conflation of marking papers and revision strategies. Students' responses in this study echo the findings of Scherff and Piazza (2005) who found that process writing—a cyclical process of drafting, revising, editing—was absent from most high school English classes, with 20% of students never going beyond a first draft. Data on process-writing suggests that "without feedback and revision as a routine part of daily writing lessons, students missed an essential part of the writing process—revision, the stage in which studying the writer's craft (strategies and skills) takes place (e.g., Applebee, 1981, 1986; Applebee & Langer, 1987; Atwell, 1987; Olson, 2003; Scherff & Piazza, 2005, p. 290). According to Leah (2002), "Revision might be considered the most important stage in the whole writing process...It is also the stage that many writers misunderstand or just don't allow time for" (p. 51).

On the questionnaire, students said that their teachers marked, graded, and returned their papers to them. The follow-up interviews revealed that some teachers marked papers via a circle or check marks but did not specify the error in grammar and mechanics. Again, the interview helped to clarify students' answers as some students considered a circle and a check mark without specification of the skill (error) as a teacher marking, grading, and returning the essay. The interview was more effective in grasping an understanding of the items on the questionnaire, especially those items pertinent to understanding grammar and mechanics and the teachers' markings on the essays.

According to a writing survey conducted by Patterson and Duer (2006) high school teachers and college teachers place different degrees of importance on grammar and usage. The skills under the headings "Writing Strategy," "Sentence Structure," "Organization of Writing Style," and "Grammar and Usage" were

rated most important by college instructors of entry-level English courses. The fairly low percentage of the aforementioned skills taught as reported by high school teachers indicates the genuine difference between the priority of high school teachers and the priority of college teachers. If skills such as grammar and usage are not prioritized in the secondary high school English classroom, it is difficult for students to grasp the skills when they arrive at college, and it is the reason that research participants referred to grammar/mechanics as “little problems.” Most college teachers mark students’ papers, indicate the specific error made, and make suggestions about improving the students’ work.

The students’ essays also helped to answer the research questions pertinent to students’ perceptions of their ability to do work in a freshman composition course. The students made a variety of types and numbers of errors in grammar and mechanics, but most interviewees who reported that they believed that they could pass the course were successful in doing so.

On the questionnaire, only one of the interviewees, Maranda, reported that she had not lost points on assignments because of errors she made in grammar and mechanics. Maranda’s college writing showed something different. Maranda had lost points as evidenced by essays she provided for me to review.

I believe that the other students realized quickly upon entering college English that they may not have understood errors in grammar and mechanics and other skills as they were discussed in their high school English classes. Their positive perceptions of their ability to do college work helped them to address their shortcomings and then to work on making improvements. This study’s findings indicate that the students’ perceptions of their abilities are just as important as their academic ability. Most of the interviewees believed in their ability to succeed in a college composition class, and most of them passed the course.

Maranda’s college instructor marked and specified several errors in grammar and usage, indicated areas that were not clear (particularly because of the grammar and usage errors), and pointed out the error in the structure. Students experienced some difficulty in other areas, also.

Three students indicated that the conclusion was the hardest part of the essay for them to write, one reported the introduction, one reported the literary analysis, and two reported the thesis statement. The following is an example of a student’s difficulty with the thesis statement: “In my essay I will discuss the similarities and give details to support my reasons.” Often, college freshmen find it difficult to express the point of their essay in a thesis without making an announcement (e.g., I will compare...). With further instruction and practice at the college level, the interviewees said that they mastered the skill.

## **7. HBCU Students’ Actual Performance**

This research study revealed that although students may pass a specific college English course, weaknesses in their writing still exist. The students must be cognizant of the skills that they did not master because not having a firm grasp of skills (e.g., grammar and usage) will affect the students’ performance at the college level and during their careers upon graduation.

Of the students who engaged in the interview phase of the study, only one did not pass freshman composition. In that sense, the results coincide with the responses on the questionnaire in which the students reported that they believed in their ability to pass a freshman composition class. Also, most of the interviewees’ writings revealed that they could pass a freshman composition class. Oddly, the one interviewee who did not pass the composition class reported on the questionnaire that she believed that her high school English classes prepared her to make a passing grade in college English, that she understood most of the rules of grammar and mechanics as she learned them in high school, and that she understood how to write essays with good content. After enrollment in a college English class, she learned otherwise.

Students completed the questionnaire near the end of the summer semester, so she may have thought that she would pass the course despite the marks on her essays in English 131.

College students in general believe that “effort” should play a large part in their final grade. In essence, even if their average grades equal a *D* or *F*, students believe that their effort should make a huge difference in the final grade that they receive in a course. During the interviews, the student who failed the freshman composition class admitted that she had not been prepared adequately for college English. She admitted that she needed to re-take English 131 because she did not grasp many concepts.

Most students (64%) reported on the *questionnaire* a belief in their ability to pass a freshman composition class, and all except one of the interviewees actually passed English 131. Most students (83 %) reported that they understood most of the rules of grammar and mechanics as they learned them in high school, that they understood how to write paragraphs with good content, and they understood how to write essays with good content. During the *interviews*, however, most students revealed that they did not understand grammar and mechanics at a level that they originally believed they did, and weaknesses in some areas of grammar and mechanics caused them to lose points on their college writing assignments. The students’ writing assignments revealed that most of the interviewees could provide enough details and examples to pass a writing assignment. The students overestimated their understanding of grammar and mechanics as most of them lost points for not proofreading and editing adequately.

## 8. Discussion & Conclusion

One of the main reasons I chose to research students at HBCUs is that I have rarely read journal articles or books concerning details about these particular students’ learning, their attitudes, and their perceptions. The results of this research indicate the need for middle and high school teachers to take more time learning about their students. Test results tell only part of the story; students themselves tell the rest. Teachers need to do more to encourage more students to take a more active role in their learning by expressing their perceptions. Perceptions influence behavior and performance in the school environment, and oftentimes the roles that students take on in middle and high school predict the roles they will play in society later in life. Academics is definitely not less important than students’ perceptions, but academics could be improved when students’ feelings about their abilities are more positive.

The fact that many students in the study revealed that they were making errors in grammar/mechanics and were losing points as a result is an indication that some high school teachers may need to re-evaluate how they teach students how to proofread and edit their papers—in other words, incorporate more true process writing and revision. Most of the students who fail essays and other writing assignments in college do so because they need a stronger mastery of proofreading and editing skills, which could also be accomplished through ongoing peer revision activities. I think that 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade teachers should collaborate more with college instructors in order to help students to strengthen all skills in all areas. I also believe that high school teachers need the support, resources, and time to provide detailed comments about students’ essays so that they will have a greater understanding of proofreading and editing, increasing their chances and degree of success in college English classes.

College teachers must not assume that earning a high school diploma means that the students know how to proofread and edit papers for errors in grammar/mechanics. Often, I hear college teachers complain about students’ inadequate proofreading and editing skills, and some do not think that it is their responsibility to teach these skills to students who have reached the college level. However, college instructors everywhere must work with what they have, and they must not “pass the buck” or “play the blame game.” Instead, as Leah (2002) reported, more collaboration between students and teachers is needed. As it is now, there are two cycles: in the first cycle, the students do all the work writing papers and in the

second cycle, the teacher does all the work grading the papers. Of course, there is no way to get away from this pattern completely, but with more give and take at various stages of the process, faculty-student communication would improve. Instead of two cycles, there could be moments between student writing and teacher grading when students help to propose ideas relevant to grading criteria, submitting papers, etc.

Further, both middle and high school teachers and college instructors must open the lines of communication with each other in order to learn how both educational levels can complement each other. As mentioned earlier, high school teachers place little emphasis on concepts that college teachers value and consider requirements in students' success in mastering course objectives (Leah, 2002; Patterson & Duer, 2006). Providing college instructors with more time to engage in the research of their student population is essential, also. An absence of such approaches leads to the failure of all of the stakeholders: students, teachers, administrators, future employers, and society in general.

A major part of facilitating writing at the university level is found in designing a high quality writing climate, emphasis on revision and meaning, scaffolding, modeling and integrating writing across content areas (Lavelle & Zuercher, 2001). Writing is crucial to success in most fields. Report writing is increasingly found in many of the jobs that students with a higher education pursue. Therefore, activities that require students to write from expository sources facilitate both academic learning and eventually workplace competence (Perin, Keselman, & Monopoli, 2003).

Parents and students must work on ways to encourage an interest in learning in the first place and then to work on figuring out how the students learn best. What takes one student two hours and one teaching method to learn and complete may take another student four hours and various methods to do so. The length of time does not necessarily mean that one student is less academically inclined than the other. What it means is that students must learn more about themselves and their own learning styles so that they can have more control over their academic endeavors regardless of the academic track the students and/or their counselors choose. The academic track that the students enroll in does not dictate the students' academic, social, or economic future. More of the students who participated in the interview portion of this study were placed in a standard track, but it was clear that their perceptions of their ability influenced their performance and final grades.

### **8.1 Recommended Teaching Strategies**

The most effective English language arts classrooms practice interconnectedness; they make connections between school and home, between explorations of key concepts and questions over the course of the semester or year, connections between canonical texts and other alternative texts, and revisiting related ideas and experiences (Applebee, 2002). Without connectedness, teachers, too often, present information about key concepts in isolation of writing and reading. Such is the case with students completing worksheets on random sentences with grammar errors in them without examining the whole essay (support, thesis, transitions, etc.). Knowledge about one aspect of writing (e.g., support) is futile without an understanding of the usage of grammar and usage to convey the message in the support. In my study, I discovered that some students provided adequate support, but the errors in grammar and usage detracted from the point the students were attempting to make in the paper.

Another strategy is cultural relevance in teaching. Ladson-Billings (1995) posited the importance of having students' home/community culture and the school complement each other. According to Landt (2006), for example, the literature in school remains mostly Eurocentric and providing an array of perspectives is critical, but exposing students to these works is a challenge. Students are aware of the absence of their culture in school. Truth, one of the interviewees, in my study, expressed a desire for more readings about African Americans. Educators should also consider the prevalence of multimodal tools that



make it necessary to redefine notions about reading, composing, etc. That way, educators can incorporate digital literacies in their English language arts curriculum since students use them on a daily basis (Doerig, Beach, and O'Brien, 2007). A major part of cultural relevance and listening to students is taking the time to find out how they communicate inside and outside of the classroom.

It is important for young adults to see how others experience life because they are in the process of becoming independents in a world beyond school and the communication; exposing students to varied texts allows them to engage in understanding the self. Also important is for students to consider who is missing from their textbooks and how this may influence the self-esteem of those who are not featured in the texts. Readers need to see images of those like them in order for them to make connections between literature and their everyday lives. If adolescents read about others similar to and different from them, they get to see that unfamiliar aspects of other cultures are less foreign when viewed through the lens of familiar issues.

A key practice, providing feedback to students, could lead to self-regulation among students. Feedback can be focused at the self-regulation level, including greater skill in self-evaluation or confidence to engage further on a task. Whether the students in my study made errors in grammar and usage because they simply did not take the time to proofread, their high school teachers did not establish proofreading and editing as a priority, or they do not have an understanding of grammar and usage, feedback from teachers could help to ameliorate the problem. A similar approach should be taken while teaching students other elements such as support, transitions, the thesis, creativity, etc. An example of a feedback could be, "You already know the key features of the opening of an argument. Check to see whether you have incorporated them in your first paragraph" (Hattie & Timperly, p. 93, 2007). Such feedback has major influences on self-efficacy, self-regulatory proficiencies, and self-beliefs about students as learners.

A final strategy could be more communication between high school teachers and college teachers and between students and teachers. A key element of successful schools is "shared responsibility which includes students, teachers, school administrators, parents, and policy makers" (Linn, 2003, p. 3). Collaborations lead to accountability, which empowers teachers to implement strategies that ensure academic achievement among all students. In one research study, many college students specifically identified their experiences and interactions in college as being essential in forming their felt identities (self-concept) (Kaufman & Feldman, 2004). Communicating with their teachers facilitates students' sense of confidence in the learning environment. The students in my study made few comments about their communication with their high school teachers, thereby indicating a need for more information about the way students communicate with their teachers and the degree of said communication.

Research indicates that parents and teachers sometimes have different meanings of success of students. When a parent was dismayed because her son had made *C*'s and *D*'s on his report card, his teachers inquired about the parent's dismay and encouraged her to stop pushing her son. The parent, who met with her son's teachers to discuss his academic performance and was always told that he was doing fine, had a different view of what the teachers felt was acceptable for her son (Delpit, 1995). There are other cases in which there is a distinction between what parents want and expect of their children and what teachers expect of the students. Communication between parents and teachers could remove any stereotypes some teachers may have about certain groups of students and improve teaching and learning in the classroom.

Collaboration between high school teachers and college teachers could influence academic achievement. Currently high school teachers and college teachers have different priorities in terms of concepts and skills that they teach. Both groups of teachers need a greater understanding in terms of what writing and reading skills each group considers essential (Patterson & Duer, 2006). As one of the interviewees in my study explained, high school students could get a better understanding of what to expect

in college if the college teachers visited the high schools and engaged in some of the activities high school students complete. According to a nationwide survey of secondary-level teachers and instructors of typical first-year college courses, "A good starting point for discussion would be the place of grammar and usage in high school instruction and in college instructors' expectations for incoming students." (Patterson & Duer, 2006, p. 86).

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