Investigating Academic Literacy Expectations: A Curriculum Audit Model

By Sonya L. Armstrong, Norman A. Stahl, and M. Joanne Kantner

The college and career readiness movement in the United States has prompted some significant shifts in research foci.

Sonya L. Armstrong
Associate Professor of Postsecondary Literacy
Department of Literacy and Elementary
   Education
sarmstrong@niu.edu

Norman A. Stahl
Professor Emeritus
Department of Literacy and Elementary
   Education

Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, IL 60115

M. Joanne Kantner
Dean
Division of Adult Education and Transition
   Programs
Kishwaukee College
21193 Malta Road
Malta, IL 60150

ABSTRACT: *Although much research has examined students' readiness levels as they prepare to transition from high school to college, little published research exists on the specific literacy expectations students will face in their early college experiences. This article provides an overview of a model for determining the reading demands and expectations in such early-college courses. The evaluative model allows faculty teams to examine the academic literacy expectations for introductory-level general education and career technical courses and simultaneously explore the curricula in developmental reading courses. Using the model, evaluators can determine the degree of alignment of text difficulty levels, expectations for student literacy competencies, and standard literacy practices within and across courses.*

The college and career readiness movement and P-20 pipeline reform efforts have been, in part, catalysts for the development and adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Major goals of the CCSS have been clarifying standards beginning with what is considered college and career ready and systematically backward-benchmarking each educational grade level down the ladder through kindergarten (Common Core State Standards, 2010). Of significant concern throughout the language of the standards are academic literacy development and proficiency, with a goal of having students exit high school ready for literacy expectations of the workplace or placement directly into college-level courses. Of course, having students college-text ready upon exit from high school is–and should be–a focal goal; however, it is important to realize that the field has encountered a number of similar literacy movements over the years that have had only moderate success (e.g., Right to Read, Goals 2000, No Child Left Behind).

Indeed, at present, increasing numbers of first-year college students are being placed into one or more developmental reading courses prior to beginning their college-level courses (Boatman & Long, 2010; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011; Quint, Jaggars, Byndloss, & Magazinnik, 2013). Further, it will be at least a decade before students who have had full benefit of the CCSS or other reform-oriented curricula based on the college/career-ready philosophy will enter either the workforce or higher education. In the meantime, there will continue to be nontraditional students returning for postsecondary training and education. For these reasons, professionals associated with developmental reading will continue to be called upon to provide assistance in transitioning students to the rigors of postsecondary academic literacy practices. Therefore, as changes in PK-12 emerge in response to educational reform efforts, it is critical that experts within the field of college reading actively engage in college-readiness conversations for purposes of informing developmental reading curriculum and instruction. Equally important is that college reading professionals engage in research on and evaluation of postsecondary literacy practices and expectations in order to ensure that college-readiness, alignment-focused dialogues are reciprocal in nature.

Examining Key Educational Transition Spaces

The college and career readiness movement in the United States has prompted some significant shifts in research foci. One other reform movement has emerged that parallels the college and career readiness movement but focuses more specifically on degree and certificate attainment (or, more generally, graduation) in higher education. This latter movement has prompted calls for an increase in earned postsecondary credentials. In short, these educational reform movements have prompted a critical examination of some key educational transition spaces. For instance, the college and career readiness movement has been a catalyst for investigating the transition space between PK-12 education and college. As a result, research centers and nonprofit organizations across the country have begun to examine the issue of college readiness (Barnett et al., 2012; Conley, Drummond, Gonzalez, Rooseboom, & Stout, 2011; Sepanik, 2012). Scholars in these areas of policy and scholarship are carefully examining readiness levels of students as they prepare to transition from high school to college.

Similarly, the higher education attainment movement has urged new interest in the transition space between beginning college and graduation (Adelman, Ewell, Gaston, & Schneider, 2010; Complete College America, 2011; Scrivener & Coghlan, 2011). Indeed, recent research has focused on the experiences of students transitioning from developmental education toward college completion (e.g., Maggs, 2011). Also, the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) has recently released a report (2013) on what it means to be college-ready in English/literacy and math in community college settings. However, college reading experts have thus far not been particularly active in publishing reports of research on students' specific academic literacy needs in their developmental education and introductory-level general education/career technical education (GE/CTE) courses. It should be noted that research focusing on the literacy demands of higher education has been conducted previously (e.g., Burrell, Tao, Simpson, & Mendez-Berrueta, 1997; Chase, Gibson, & Carson, 1994; Orlando, Caverly, Swetnam, & Flippo, 1989; Stahl, 1982). However, previous and current research do not provide a curriculum audit model that might be adopted by faculty for determining whether, how, and to what extent current developmental reading programming aligns with GE/CTE coursework.

Informing Developmental Reading Programming

Developmental education programs—under a variety of labels—have been an integral part of higher education since the middle 1800s, and, despite current reform efforts (e.g., Complete College America 2011, 2012), they are likely to be continued on the college reading and learning front well into the future (Brothen & Wambach, 2012). Indeed, with the changing requirements of the job market, even more individuals will require a postsecondary education of some sort, suggesting the continued need for literacy instruction at the college level well into the future (Pimentel, 2013; Stein, 2001). Furthermore, whenever a new set of rigorous standards is implemented in education, there is every expectation that there will be a new set of students falling into an "at-risk" or "remedial" classification.

One way that professionals in the field of developmental education can move ahead to improve this programming is by continuing the alignment work that is being initiated elsewhere in the educational system (i.e., CCSS, 2010). Specific to developmental reading, the field's collective energy needs to be directed toward establishing comprehensive college reading programs, especially programs that shift the focus from "remediation" to authentic preparation for postsecondary success (Paulson & Armstrong, 2010). Such programmatic reform

efforts begin with having a conception of college reading readiness at the local institutional level.

This understanding of the local context is precisely what the senior administration at Southside Community College wished to ascertain. Specifically, they wanted to learn about how the reading instruction—including text expectations and goals—within the existing developmental reading courses aligned with the text expectations and goals for introductory-level GE/CTE courses. Therefore, an investigation was designed to examine the academic literacy expectations for both the developmental reading and the GE/CTE courses. Because this project involved experts from outside the institution gathering information about existing programming in order to evaluate its efficacy, we adopted English's (1988) terminology in calling it a "curriculum audit." This curriculum audit was intentionally designed to determine the alignment of skills, competencies, and faculty and student expectations at the local level across the representative target courses. The purpose of this article is

---

Programmatic reform efforts begin with having a conception of college reading readiness at the local institutional level.

---

to provide an introduction to and overview of the development of the curriculum audit model that was employed so that other programs might adopt or adapt similar procedures to ascertain the reading expectations in courses at other institutions.

Audit Context

Southside Community College (SCC), located just outside a major metropolitan area in the Midwest, served 31,401 students in 2010. Twenty-nine percent of freshman sections offered by the English Department in 2010 were developmental reading course sections. Of the fulltime entering freshmen, 37.8% placed into developmental reading courses, as determined by scores achieved on the ACT-COMPASS placement assessment. For SCC students placing into three developmental-level subjects (reading, writing, and mathematics), only 6% completed a certificate and none earned an associate degree within 3 years. The administration of the college desired to address this troubling trend by assessing the efficacy of the developmental education programming and, in particular, the reading curriculum. Still they understood that, first and foremost before a corrective plan could be implemented, the question "what are the local constructs and demands of college reading in the

disciplines comprising the introductory general education and career technical education courses" had to be answered. The administration, therefore, sought out a team of researchers in the field of postsecondary literacy to design an investigation of the current state of reading instruction at SCC and carry out the resulting curriculum audit.

Theoretical Perspective on the Development of the Model

The development of this model has been driven by a view of literacy that is informed by sociolinguistic and sociocultural theories (Barton, 2000; Gee, 1996; Heath, 1983/1996; Langer, 1992; Street, 1999). From this perspective, academic literacy practices are complex, dynamic social practices that are situated and dependent upon disciplinary values, models, and norms, as well as learner schemata. Thus, literacy practices must be investigated in context. Also informed by recent scholarship on disciplinary literacy pedagogy, a key assumption underlying this model is that the context-specific nature of academic literacies is generally not explicitly taught, either in high schools or in colleges (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Therefore, one's perspective needs to be informed by explicit modeling and apprenticing for learners new to academic literacy practices in the community college, whether they are placed into developmental reading courses or directly into GE/CTE coursework (c.f., Bartholomae, 1985). If the theoretical goal of developmental reading instruction is to provide access to higher education, and specifically to academic modes of literacy, then developmental reading courses must be informed by and aligned to the actual literacy practices expected of students in their future courses (c.f., Simpson, 1996). Hence, we have developed an audit model that examines literacy practices in a variety of disciplines and fields and looks at alignment across levels.

Audit Methods

The curriculum audit model described in this article focuses on literacy practices primarily considered to fall under the purview of reading instruction. The audit was driven by the following overarching questions:

1. What constitutes college-level text-readiness at Southside Community College (SCC)?

2. What are the text expectations, including text types, tasks, and goals in developmental reading courses, in general education courses, and in career technical education courses?

3. How do these text expectations align?

4. What is the culture of reading at SCC?

Although these guiding questions were rather broad in scope, the audit was intended to provide

insights about the overall state of reading instruction and expectations at this institution. Thus a protocol was designed to incorporate both qualitative and quantitative data sources and analytic approaches. The design reflects the need to gather information from a large number of faculty and students (via a web-based survey instrument) as well as more in-depth information from smaller samples (i.e., focus groups).

Data Collection Overview

The purpose of this article is not to provide a detailed report of procedures or findings. However, an overview of the data collection and analysis approaches used is needed to provide an overall sense of the various aspects of the audit model. We undertook this audit over the course of 2 years, with the bulk of the data collection occurring in a single semester. The audit included a systematic protocol consisting of three foci.

The first focus, on GE/CTE courses, provided information on what constituted text-readiness both at the disciplinary level and, to a degree, at the institutional level. Here the goal was to determine the implicit or explicit local definition of college text-readiness by surveying, interviewing, and holding focus groups with faculty members across the college who teach introductory-level GE/CTE courses. In addition, we gathered course materials from representative courses (e.g., course texts, syllabi, lecture notes, instructor PowerPoints), and observed targeted class sessions to gather data on in-class text usage, textbook-reading strategy instruction, and discipline-specific literacy instruction.

Simultaneously, we employed the same data-gathering protocol with a second focus on the developmental reading courses at SCC. Just as with the GE/CTE audit, we gathered data from faculty members teaching various levels and types of precollege-level reading and literacy courses, course and program-level curricular materials, and classroom observations.

The third component focused on the voices of students. Through an online survey, interviews, and focus groups, we gathered data on student perceptions of institutional literacy expectations, college-text readiness needs, current developmental reading preparation, and specific gaps in their own literacy transitions.

Instrumentation

The instruments employed in this audit included a classroom observation checklist, a faculty focus-group questionnaire, a student focus-group questionnaire, an online faculty survey, an online student survey, and a series of text analyses. Each instrument is described following.

Text-readiness classroom observation checklist. The classroom observation checklist instrument designed for this audit was intended to allow the auditors to gather information on whether course texts were being referenced, the content explained, or the text incorporated during a typical class session. Development of similar observation instruments has been detailed in prior research investigating the literacy environments of elementary classrooms (Hoffman, Sailors, Duffy, & Beretvas, 2004; Smith, Dickinson, Sangeorge, & Anastasopoulos, 2002; Wolfersburger, Reutzel, Sudweeks, & Fawson, 2004). Although classroom observations have been a key methodological approach previously (i.e., Grubb, 1999, 2012), far less research has focused on the development of instruments for assessing the literacy environments of postsecondary classrooms.

Using the instrument with the targeted course sessions, the auditors recorded the absolute use (yes or no) as well as the frequency of use of 11 instructor text-usage references (as well as student usage). These references included observation notes such as whether the instructor's copy of the text

---

Students who had taken developmental reading courses were also asked about their perceptions of the preparation they received.

---

was visible, displayed for students, and directly referenced; whether text organization or structure was mentioned, explained, or supported by a strategy for navigating; whether the class discussions and homework appeared to be text based or text driven; and whether multiple texts or multimodal texts were incorporated in the course readings.

The checklist instrument allowed for an overall tally of whether these text-based activities occurred within the classroom context and, if so, who initiated them (instructor or students) and how frequently they occurred. Beyond this tally, the instrument provided space for comments for each item as well as any relevant observations of text-based activities beyond those listed in the instrument.

Faculty focus-group questionnaire. In order to identify the explicit and tacit academic literacy expectations of faculty teaching the GE/CTE and developmental reading courses at SCC, semistructured group interviews of 45 to 60 minutes each were included in the data-gathering protocol. Similar to previous focus-group research (Brockman, Taylor, Kreth, & Crawford, 2011), each of the focus-group sessions in this study grouped faculty from similar disciplines, departments, status (full-time/part-time), and typical course type taught (developmental/credit-bearing). In order to allow for an overall replicable structure for these focus groups across disciplines, the auditors developed a list of 11 guiding discussion questions. These questions aimed at gathering information on specific text expectations and text-based activities in courses at SCC. Also, faculty were questioned about their perceptions of students' attitudes toward reading, reading habits and practices, and specific strengths and weaknesses related to academic literacy. Another inquiry topic for the focus groups emphasized the extent to which explicit instruction was being provided on the associated and expected discipline-specific literacy practices. Finally, questions were posed regarding the efficacy of the existing developmental reading curricula in preparing students for next-level courses.

Student focus-group questionnaire. Just as with the faculty focus groups, the student focus groups used a semistructured conversational interview approach. According to Billups (2012), specific methods for conducting focus groups with college students have not been detailed. However, as part of prior research from a range of disciplines associated with higher education, focus groups have been used as a way of getting feedback from students (e.g., Barbatis, 2010; Frailey, Buck-Rodriguez, & Anders, 2009).

As the basis for the 45 to 60 minute focus-group sessions, the auditors developed a list of 11 guiding discussion topics. In order to dovetail with the information gathered from the faculty focus groups, the student focus groups allowed a space for gathering similar information about the amount, frequency, type, and tasks associated with their required course readings. Follow-up questions provided opportunity for participants to discuss how these actual text practices compared with their initial expectations as well as their previous high school experiences, and whether and to what extent those experiences were effective in preparing them for the text expectations in their current courses. Further, students who had taken developmental reading courses were also asked about their perceptions of the preparation they received in those courses.

Online faculty survey. We gathered survey data using an adaptation of Simpson's "Academic Literacy Questionnaire" (see Simpson, 1996), which was formatted for online use through Survey Monkey. This survey gathered data on faculty demographics and prompted identification of a specific target GE/CTE or developmental reading course as the context for responding to the subsequent 23 survey questions. The latter items requested information on text usage, expectations, course assignments, assessment practices and the relationship to text assignments, course lectures and the relationship to text assignments, and

faculty perceptions of students' reading abilities and associated attitudes on reading.

Online student survey. We also gathered survey data from students online through Survey Monkey. Student surveys have been a staple in past research on reading demands on college students (e.g., Chase, Gibson, & Carson, 1994; Orlando, Caverly, Swetnam, & Flippo, 1989). Just as with the online faculty survey, we initially asked students to identify a specific target course as a lens for answering the remainder of the survey questions. The bulk of the questions focused on reading expectations within that target course, including amount and frequency of required reading, text type, and associated text-based tasks. As well, a group of questions prompted students to provide information on the instructional approach, to include the extent to which the instructor taught about text organization and structure and taught specific strategies that represented expert reading approaches within that discipline.

Textbook analysis. Rather than using a single instrument for the textbook analysis piece of the audit, we applied several well-established measures to the textbooks gathered from the GE/CTE and developmental reading courses. Although some readability and content analyses of developmental reading textbooks have been done (Williams, 2013; Wood, 1997) and a few readability and content analyses of college-level textbooks have been done (Stahl, Brozo, & Simpson, 1987), comparative analyses of developmental reading and GE/CTE course textbooks have not.

To begin, we conducted a basic genre analysis to determine the types of texts being used across different instructional areas and disciplines. Next, for each textbook, we identified and sampled four full-page selections at quarterly intervals throughout the book (i.e., first full page and one page at one-quarter, one-half, and three-quarters of the book's length).

Traditional readability indices. Following the genre analysis, using the text-readability scoring program available at http://www.readability-score.com/, we ran the following standard and traditional readability indices for each sample:

- Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level
- Gunning-Fog Index
- Coleman-Liau Index
- SMOG Index
- Automated Readability Index
- Average Grade Level Estimate

As indicated previously, all of these indices use character- or syllable-level, word-level, and sentence-level aspects (usually syllables per word and

---

Comparative analyses of developmental reading and GE/CTE course textbooks have not [been done].

---

words per sentence) in a mathematical equation that provides a grade-equivalency estimate of a text's readability. (Generally speaking, the assumption underlying these indices is that words with fewer syllables as well as sentences with fewer words

are more readable, so a reader at a lower grade level would be able to comprehend.) It is understood that readability analyses are not without inherent faults (Benjamin, 2012; Goldman & Wiley, 2011). Nevertheless, these formulae are used by reading professionals across all educational levels.

Lexile text measure analysis. As a second measure of readability, we analyzed each text sample through the Lexile Text Measure Analyzer available at http://www.lexile.com/analyzer/. Although Lexile text measures do differ from the traditional readability indices in that they do not correspond with a grade level estimate (for more information on the limitations of grade-equivalent scores, see Flippo & Schumm, 2009; McKenna & Stahl, 2009); Lexile text measures do examine syntactic and semantic text characteristics (for Lexile text measures, length of sentences and frequency of words are measured). For this reason, Lexile text measures are highly correlated with most traditional readability measures (Williamson, 2008; Wright & Stone, 2004). Because Lexile text measures are increasingly adopted in the scholarly literature, it was important to use Lexile text measures to establish a solid baseline of data for future additions to this research.

Friendly Text Evaluations. In addition to these quantitative measures of readability, a Friendly Text Evaluation (Dreher & Singer, 1989; Singer, 1992) was completed independently for each text. A Friendly Text Evaluation examines a text's features (i.e., organization, explication, conceptual density, metadiscourse, and instructional devices). The Friendly Text Evaluation was added to this audit to ensure that text content, structure, and style were being considered, as well as the more quantitative and linguistic aspects that are addressed in the readability indices.

Data Analysis Overview

Data analysis involved two separate phases: an individual analysis of all data from within each data source (phase 1) and a full data analysis that examined findings across all data sources (phase 2). Phase 1 of data analysis began with full transcription of all focus group and interview sessions, allowing for initial identification of patterns. Following this, the observation and focus group and interview data
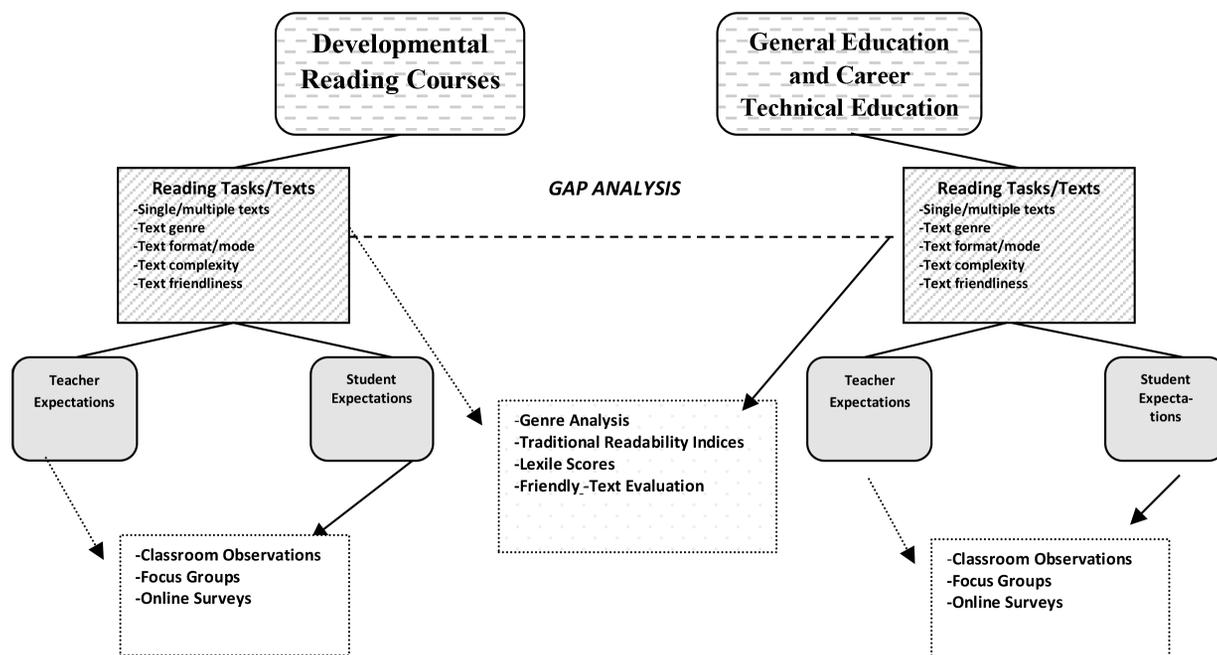
Figure 1. Graphic representation of interactions and layers embedded in the audit model.

were analyzed separately using standard qualitative approaches, including open coding and the constant-comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Analysis of the numerical survey data involved descriptive statistical analysis that provided frequency counts, response percentages, ranges, and means. For all texts, we undertook a multipronged text analysis, as described previously, to determine any potential gaps in readability and complexity between developmental reading and GE/CTE courses. Analysis within individual data sources was followed by triangulation between and across data sources in phase 2.

During the phase 2 integrative analysis, all data, including the observations, focus-group transcripts, survey data, and texts, were analyzed together using the constant-comparative method and cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1998) to identify emerging themes and patterns.

The Resulting Curriculum Audit Model

By examining representative introductory-level courses across the broad instructional areas at SCC (GE/CTE and developmental reading), we were able to ascertain a fairly comprehensive view of the overall culture of reading at the local level and with the entry-level courses. As well, even within these instructional areas, we accounted for disciplinary differences in text expectations. And finally we examined these three areas from both faculty and student perspectives. The audit model allowed for a multipronged, multileveled, triangulated exploration of the text expectations at SCC across educational areas, disciplines, and stakeholders (see Figure 1, p. 6).

We found multiple instances in which instructors seemed to have decreased..

Deliverables of the Audit Model

This audit model of reading instruction and demands for the community college has the potential to provide sufficient information to answer the types of audit questions listed previously. This article focuses on a general overview of the audit model rather than an in-depth explanation of the methods and results. However, in order to give a sense of the kinds of insights to be gleaned through application of such an audit model, the audit questions and a few key observations are included in Table 1.

Related to the first audit question, a consistent definition of college-text ready does not exist at SCC. A majority of the GE/CTE faculty assume that students should be ready for college-level texts by being able to read their college-level textbooks independently upon entry to their courses. However, there is another group of faculty who expects students to be able, upon entry, to master independently the specialized types of text practices found in their respective discipline-driven courses upon entry. Class observations suggest that there does not appear to be much explicit discussion by the instructor of what is considered college-text ready in the introductory-level GE/CTE courses.

Responses to the second audit question reveal different text expectations for the developmental reading courses and the GE/CTE courses. For the developmental reading courses, two types of texts are predominant: workbook-style practice texts and novels. By contrast, expository texts are used in the GE/CTE courses, including field-specific textbooks and, in some disciplines such as history, primary and secondary sources as well.

Table 1

Information and Observations Available From the Audit Model

Questions	Data Sources	Observations
What constitutes college-level text-readiness at Southside Community College (SCC)?	• faculty surveys • faculty focus groups • classroom observations	• No consistent definition of college reading readiness exists. • Faculty expect students to be able to read text independently. • Faculty expect students to have an understanding of disciplinary literacy practices.
What are the text expectations, including text types, tasks, and goals in developmental reading courses?	• faculty surveys • student surveys • classroom observations • faculty focus groups • student focus groups • text analyses	• Mostly workbook-style practice texts and novels (narrative texts) are used. • The text-associated tasks are generally geared toward comprehension checks. • The goal for text usage is providing practice with identifying main ideas, developing vocabulary, and reviewing strategy use on a primarily procedural level.
What are the text-expectations, including text types, tasks, and goals in general education and career technical education courses?	• faculty surveys • student surveys • classroom observations • faculty focus groups • student focus groups • text analyses	• More expository texts are used, including field-specific textbooks. • The text-associated tasks are generally quizzes and tests. • The goal for text is to be used as a support or instructor supplement. • There is a heavy reliance on PowerPoints and other textbook replacements.
How do these text-expectations align?	• comparison and triangulation of data sources intended to answer the second audit question	• The types and difficulty levels of texts used in the developmental reading courses are distinctly different from those being used in the introductory-level general/career technical education courses.
What is the culture of reading at SCC?	• comparison and triangulation of all data sources	• There is wide variation in the extent to which instruction is text-based or text-supported.

In the developmental reading courses, the instructional purpose for students' use of text was aimed at comprehension checks and discrete skills such as identifying main ideas, developing vocabulary, and reviewing strategy usage on a primarily procedural level (that is, reviewing the steps needed to do a particular strategy). By contrast, the goal for students' use of text in the GE/CTE courses was as a support, and in a few cases a supplement, to the instructor for learning the course content. As well, in many cases, text alternatives, such as instructor lecture notes, PowerPoints, and outlines, were made available to students. In such situations, although the text was assigned, it may not have been read. On a related note, we found multiple instances in which instructors seemed to have decreased their text requirements (to a shorter text, to fewer texts, or to easier texts).

The third audit question, regarding alignment of text expectations, identifies a definite variance; however, the existing variance may promote the already existing academic skills gap. There is a potential mismatch between what is thought to be required reading in GE/CTE classes and what text practices are actually enacted in developmental reading classrooms. Also, there is an overall conceptual gap, which is partly communication based. Not only are content-area faculty unclear on the purpose, scope, and goals of the developmental reading courses, but so too are the students. Similarly, developmental reading instructors may not be communicating with content-area faculty so as to design a college reading curriculum with a clear sense of what students will be faced with in their introductory-level GE/CTE courses.

Finally, the last audit question supports several observations about the culture of reading at SCC. One important observation is that the introductory-level GE/CTE faculty at SCC are incorporating texts in their curricula; however, the extent to which the instruction is text based or text supported varies widely. Primarily, in the GE/CTE courses, the focus of instruction is on the content, not the literacy practices (even in terms of disciplinary literacy practices). This focus indicates an expectation that students read at the literal/factual level rather than at a deeper level of meaning. In addition, in some courses, the instructor's notes and PowerPoints are so rich that assigned texts are deemed unnecessary by students.

Findings From Model Development

Based on our experiences in developing and employing this model, we have identified some strengths and weaknesses with the model, all of which we intend to consider further in moving forward (Table 2 provides a listing of all methods, as well as notes on the utility of each approach).

First, one major strength of this audit is its multifaceted, multimeasure approach as it allows

for a fuller, richer description of the culture of reading at a particular institution. We are aware that many institutions use traditional readability formulae to help faculty choose appropriately leveled texts. However, the use of such analysis in isolation does not account for disciplinary differences, varying expectations, and perceived and actual text uses and purposes, all of which are critical for examining scaffolding and alignment both forward

---

The instructor's notes and PowerPoints are so rich that assigned texts are deemed unnecessary by students.

---

and backward. Indeed, there has been very little published work to date of how college-text ready is defined, including the institutional culture of reading, especially as informed by actual course

curriculum. Thus a major strength of the audit model presented here is the integration of various approaches to get at triangulation and provide a thick description of what literacy demands students will actually encounter as they transition from developmental reading to their next-level courses.

In terms of instrumentation, several improvements are already underway as a result of our initial model development. For one, the classroom observation instrument provided information on various types of text-related instruction as it occurred in classrooms, including a frequency count on how many separate instances were observed. However, future iterations of this instrument may need to account for the amount of time devoted to each instructional activity type. (For an example of such an instrument for STEM fields, see Smith, Jones, Gilbert, & Wieman, 2013.) Finally, given our strong support of a multipronged analysis, especially with regard to the textbook analysis aspects, we have begun working with additional and alternative text-analysis tools such as CPIDR, a computer program

Table 2

Utility of Methods Used

Method/Instrument or Procedure	Notes on Utility
Class Observations • Text-readiness classroom observation checklist	• Observations, ideally, should be conducted multiple times over an academic term. • Observations should include notes on faculty usage as well as student usage within the observed class. • Observations are useful for comparisons of text usage across sections, courses, and disciplines/fields.
Focus groups • Faculty focus-group questionnaire • Student focus-group questionnaire	• Offer multiple faculty focus groups, even within a single department, to ensure all voices are heard. • Offer multiple opportunities for focus group sessions convenient for full-time and part-time faculty, as well as daytime and evening faculty. • Assemble multiple groupings of students, depending on whether and when they took developmental reading. • Offer multiple opportunities for focus group sessions convenient for full-time and part-time students, as well as daytime and evening students.
Survey • Faculty survey • Student survey	• Surveys should include brief demographic data requests to later identify full-time/part-time status, discipline/field affiliations, and other data. • Surveys should, for deeper insights, allow participants (faculty and student) to identify a focal course to frame their responses.
Textbook analysis • Traditional readability indices • Lexile text measure analysis • Friendly Text Evaluations	• A combination of readability, complexity, and friendliness measures are needed. • CPIDER, an idea-density measurement tool was also attempted; however, further work is needed on the inclusion of such tools (also Coh-Metrix) for triangulation purposes.

for measuring propositional idea density (Brown, Snodgrass, Kemper, Herman, & Covington, 2008), and Coh-Metrix, "a computational tool that measures cohesion and text difficulty at various levels of language, discourse, and conceptual analysis" (Crossley, Dufty, McCarthy, & McNamara, 2007, p. 1).

Limitations

Some limitations should be noted regarding the audit model. First, such a comprehensive audit is time consuming, and there are potential costs involved. Indeed, if a similar project were undertaken internally by faculty or staff teams, release time would almost certainly be needed in order to undertake a comprehensive audit.

Implications for Practice

The audit model has provided a framework and a clearly delineated data-collection and analysis protocol that may serve as an exemplar for other college programs looking to initiate similar audits of text readiness and alignment of curricular reading expectations. In addition to exploring the culture of reading at a given postsecondary institution, this audit model is intended to allow for solution-oriented investigations that will uncover insights on whether and to what extent current college reading programming needs to be adjusted for students who are not ready for college-level texts.

This model helped us to present a fairly comprehensive response to the overarching inquiry posed by SCC administration (and of interest to many institutions): What are the local constructs and demands of college reading in the disciplines comprising the introductory-level GE/CTE courses? As acknowledged by the SCC administration, it was far more productive and efficient to identify an audit team from outside the institution. It became clear that faculty schedules (5-5 semester course loads) simply could not allow for release time to undertake such an intensive project. In addition, and as with any institution, local issues and relationships might have hindered this process had internal faculty been assigned to it; there was a sense of greater objectivity by an outside team.

Also, although we collected data for developmental reading, GE, and CTE courses simultaneously, a protocol that examines alignment between developmental reading and one course type (either GE or CTE) would allow a more in depth audit. This may entail an extensive audit of one discipline or program area per year. If the goal of the audit is a comprehensive understanding of the literacy demands across the institution, a deeper examination of each unit will be of far more use in the long term. In particular, such examinations could proceed from reforming course- or program-level reading expectations and objectives to developing appropriate corequisite delivery models that integrate college reading and learning strategies instruction into GE/CTE courses.

In theory, this model could provide similar information through audits at other institutions, other educational levels (e.g., middle school or high school), or even in other phenomena of interest beyond reading (e.g., writing, math). Given the larger national context and emphasis on developmental education and higher education reform, it is clear that the most comprehensive audit of a single local context is a good starting point but certainly not an end goal. For that reason, we have begun identifying ways of expanding the model for a richer, fuller audit.

Expansion of the Audit Model

The next step in developing this model is expansion toward a second generation. Specifically, the model must look beyond introductory-level course and program-level text expectations by investigating the literacy practices required at the next levels. For instance, this work would entail including

---

Local issues and relationships might have hindered this process had internal faculty been assigned to [the audit].

---

students who have completed certificates or degrees at the local institution, or who have transferred to four-year schools. In other words, targeted workplace and university audits may provide essential information for back-mapped alignments in the spirit of true college and career readiness, specific to literacy instruction. For instance, such an advanced audit might account for the impact of current practices on students who have moved into the workplace. Similarly, an audit of reading expectations and practices could examine forward alignment between, for example, community colleges and universities or workplaces. As well, in order to identify gaps related to alignment across postsecondary literacy instruction, students who do not complete courses, sequences, programs, or degrees would also need to be accounted for in this expanded model.

An expanded audit model could then inform further examination of the text expectations at feeder high schools and, ultimately, middle schools. In this way, the audit's extensions might be modeled similar to the structure of district or regional college-readiness alliances or partnership programs, which are becoming increasingly popular as college and career readiness initiatives (Douglas & Schaid, 2010).

This expanded model would provide a structure to allow research and evaluation teams from community colleges across the country to recreate and implement audits to inform their own programming needs. More importantly, such a structure would encourage a broader scope that considers educational transition spaces beyond the immediate local context, with a goal of informing a comprehensive approach to appropriately scaffolded literacy instruction at all levels. Such a structure, too, would allow for the development of cross-disciplinary, cross-institutional teams who could be trained to adapt this model for ongoing investigations aiming toward curricular redesign and alignment.

Conclusion

The current national emphases on issues of college and career readiness and credentialing and completion have continued to shift scholarly attention. Similar issues are represented in past research and practical literature (e.g., Stahl, 1982; Burrell, Tao, Simpson, & Mendez-Berrueta, 1997; Chase, Gibson, & Carson, 1994; Orlando, Caverly, Swetnam, & Flippo, 1989), but the present urgency has prompted a need for renewed inquiry. Although literacy researchers have played a major role in the current reform efforts in the PK-12 educational levels, postsecondary literacy researchers and institutional evaluation teams must also be active in this work. Using the audit model described here, and expanding the model as suggested, will allow postsecondary experts to work toward providing a fuller picture of the process by which students become college-text ready. With this fuller view, informed curricular innovations can be developed at multiple levels, including developmental reading courses. Only through such informed curricular development can students' literacy learning be appropriately and effectively scaffolded as they transition to academic literacy expectations in college.

References

Adelman, C., Ewell, P., Gaston, P., & Schneider, C. (2010). *Degree qualifications profile*. Indianapolis, IN: The Lumina Foundation.

Barbatis, P. (2010). Underprepared, ethnically diverse community college students: Factors contributing to persistence. *Journal of Developmental Education, 33*(3), 14-18, 20, 22, 24.

Barnett, E. A., Corrin, W., Nakanishi, A., Bork, R. H., Mitchell, C., Sepanik, S.,… Clabaugh, N. (2012). *Preparing high school students for college: An exploratory study of college readiness partnership programs in Texas* (National Center for Postsecondary Research Working Paper). New York, NY: National Center for Postsecondary Research.

Bartholomae, D. (1985). Inventing the university [Electronic version]. In M. Rose (Ed.), *When a writer can't write: Studies in writer's block and other composing-process problems* (pp. 11-28). New York, NY: Guilford Press. Retrieved from http://astro.temple.edu/~sparkss/bartholmaeinventing.htm

Barton, D. (2000). Literacy practices. In D. Barton, M. Hamilton, & R. Ivanic (Eds.), *Situated literacies: Reading and writing in context* (pp. 7-15). London, UK: Routledge.

Benjamin, R. G. (2012). Reconstructing readability: Recent developments and recommendations in the analysis of text difficulty. *Educational Psychology Review, 24*(1), 63-88.

Billups, F. D. (2012). Conducting focus groups with college students: Strategies to ensure success. *Association for Institutional Research-Professional File, 127,* 1-12. Retrieved from http://scholarsarchive.jwu.edu/research_methodology/2

Boatman, A., & Long, B. T. (2010). *Does remediation work for all students? How the effects of postsecondary remedial and developmental courses vary by level of academic preparation* (National Center for Postsecondary Research Working Paper). New York, NY: National Center for Postsecondary Research.

Brockman, E., Taylor, M., Kreth, M., & Crawford, M. K. (2011). What do professors really say about college writing? *English Journal, 100*(3), 75–81.

Brothen, T., & Wambach, C. A. (2012). Refocusing developmental education. *Journal of Developmental Education, 36*(2), 34-39.

Brown, C., Snodgrass, T., Kemper, S. J., Herman, R., & Covington, M. A. (2008). Automatic measurement of propositional idea density from part-to-speech tagging. *Behavior Research Methods, 40*(2), 540-545.

Burrell, K. I., Tao, L., Simpson, M. L., & Mendez-Berrueta, H. (1997). How do we know what we are preparing our students for? A reality check of one university's academic literacy demands. *Research and Teaching in Developmental Education, 13*(2), 55-70.

Chase, N. D., Gibson, S. U., & Carson, J. G. (1994). An examination of reading demands across four college courses. *Journal of Developmental Education, 18*(1), 10-12, 14, 16.

Common Core State Standards Initiative. (2010). *Common core state standards for English language arts & literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects*. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices.

Complete College America. (2011). *Time is the enemy.* Washington, DC: Author.

Complete College America. (2012). *Remediation: Higher education's bridge to nowhere.* Washington, DC: Author.

Conley, D., Drummond, K., de Gonzalez, A., Rooseboom, J., & Stout, O. (2011). *Reaching the goal: The applicability and importance of Common Core State Standards to college and career readiness.* Eugene, OR: Educational Policy Improvement Center.

Crossley, S. A., Dufty, D. F., McCarthy, P. M., & McNamara, D. S. (2007). Toward a new readability: A mixed model approach. In D. S. McNamara & G. Trafton (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 29th annual conference of the Cognitive Science Society* (pp. 197–202). Austin, TX: Cognitive Science Society.

Douglas, A., & Schaid, J. (2010). From curiosity to results: The creation of a summer bridge program. *OCCRL Newsletter, 22*(1).

Dreher, M. J., & Singer, H. (1989). Friendly texts and text-friendly teachers. *Theory into Practice, 28*(2), 98-104.

English, F. W. (1988). *Curriculum auditing.* Lancaster, PA: Technomic.

Flippo, R. F., & Schumm, J. S. (2009). Reading tests. In R. F. Flippo & D. C. Caverly (Eds.), *Handbook of College Reading and Study Strategies* (2nd ed.; pp. 408-464). New York, NY: Routledge.

Frailey, M., Buck-Rodriguez, G., & Anders, P. L. (2009). Literary letters: Developmental readers' responses to popular fiction. *Journal of Developmental Education, 33*(1), 2-12.

Gee, J. P. (1996). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses.* London, UK: Taylor & Francis.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research.* New York, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.

Goldman, S. R., & Wiley, J. (2011). Discourse analysis: Written text. In N. K. Duke & M. H. Mallette (Eds.), *Literacy research methodologies* (2nd ed.; pp. 104-134). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Grubb, W. N. (1999). *Honored but invisible: An inside look at teaching in community colleges.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Grubb, W. N. (2012). *Basic skills education in community colleges: Inside and outside of classrooms.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Heath, S. B. (1983/1996). *Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Hoffman, J. V., Sailors, M., Duffy, G. G., & Beretvas, N. (2004). The effective elementary classroom literacy environment: Examining the validity of the TEX-IN3 observation system. *Journal of Literacy Research, 36,* 303-334.

Hughes, K. L., & Scott-Clayton, J. (2011). *Assessing developmental assessment in community colleges* (Working paper). New York, NY: Community College Research Center.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

Langer, J. A. (1992). Speaking of knowing: Conceptions of understanding in academic disciplines. In A. Herrington & C. Moran (Eds.), *Writing, teaching, and learning in the disciplines* (pp. 69-88). New York, NY: Modern Language Association.

Maggs, J. C. (2011). *Keeping it real: The experiences of underprepared students in a two-year for-profit college.* Unpublished doctoral thesis. University of London.

McKenna, M. C., & Stahl, K. A. D. (2009). General concepts of assessment. In M. C. McKenna & K. A. D. Stahl. *Assessment for reading instruction* (2nd ed.; pp. 24-40). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

National Center on Education and the Economy. (2013). *What does it really mean to be college and work ready? A study of the English literacy and mathematics required for success in the first year of community college.* Washington, DC: Author.

Orlando, V. P., Caverly, D. C., Swetnam, L. A., & Flippo, R. F. (1989). Text demands in college classes: An investigation. *Forum for Reading, 21*(1), 43-49.

Paulson, E. J., & Armstrong, S. L. (2010). Current issues in postsecondary literacy instruction: Toward coherence in terminology, theory, and practice. *Journal of Developmental Education, 33*(3), 2-13.

Pimentel, S. (2013). *College and career readiness standards for adult education.* Washington, DC: United States Department of Education Office of Vocational and Adult Education.

Quint, J. C., Jaggars, S. S., Byndloss, D. C., & Magazinnik, A. (2013). *Bringing developmental education to scale: Lessons from the developmental education initiative.* New York, NY: MDRC.

Scrivener, S., & Coghlan, E. (2011). *Opening doors to student success: A synthesis of findings from an evaluation of six community colleges.* New York, NY: MDRC.

Sepanik, S. (2012). *Getting ready for success: Bridging the gap between high school and college in Tacoma, Washington.* New York, NY: MDRC.

Shanahan, T., & Shanahan, C. (2008). Teaching disciplinary literacy to adolescents: Rethinking content-area literacy. *Harvard Educational Review, 78*(1), 40-59.

Simpson, M. L. (1996). Conducting reality checks to improve students' strategic learning. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 40*(2), 102-109.

Singer, H. (1992). Friendly texts: Description and criteria. In E. K. Dishner, T. W. Bean, J. E. Readence, & D. W. Moore (Eds.), *Reading in the content areas* (3rd ed.; pp. 155–168). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

Smith, M. W., Dickinson, D. K., Sangeorge, A., & Anastasopoulos, L. (2002). *Early language and literacy classroom observation (ELLCO) toolkit.* Baltimore, MD: Brookes.

Smith, M. K., Jones, F. H. M., Gilbert, S. L., & Weiman, C. E. (2013). The Classroom Observation Protocol for Undergraduate STEM (COPUS): A new instrument to characterize university STEM classroom practices. *CBE: Life Sciences Education, 12,* 618-627.

Stahl, N. A. (1982). The basic skills levels of undergraduate students and resultant attitudes of a university faculty. In *Quest of the Student Success: Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Colloquium of the Council of Graduate Students Education.* Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh. (ED 221494)

Stahl, N. A., Brozo, W. G., & Simpson, M. L. (1987). Developing college vocabulary: A content analysis of instructional materials. *Reading Research and Instruction, 26*(3), 203-221.

Stein, S. (2001). *What adults need to know and do in the 21st century.* Washington, DC: Equipped.

Street, B. (1999). Academic literacies. In C. Jones, J. Turner, & B. Street (Eds.), *Students writing in the university: Cultural and epistemological issues* (pp. 193-199). Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins.

Williams, J. L. (2013). Representations of African Americans in developmental reading textbooks: A critical qualitative content analysis. *Journal of College Reading and Learning, 43*(2), 39-69.

Williamson, G. L. (2008). A text readability continuum for postsecondary readiness. *Journal of Advanced Academics, 19,* 602–632.

Wolfersberger, M. E., Reutzel, D. R., Sudweeks, R., & Fawson, P. C. (2004). Developing and validating the Classroom Literacy Environmental Profile (CLEP): A tool for examining the "print richness" of early childhood and elementary classrooms. *Journal of Literacy Research, 36*(2), 211-272.

Wood, N. V. (1997). College reading instruction as reflected by current reading textbooks. *Journal of College Reading and Learning, 36*(1), 10-20.

Wright, B. D., & Stone, M. H. (2004). *Making measures.* Chicago, IL: Phaneron Press.