

Howard Tinberg's and Jean-Paul Nadeau's *The Community College Writer: Exceeding Expectations*

The Community College Writer: Exceeding Expectations is an informative study on the challenges, expectations and adjustments facing first semester, two-year college students.

Authors Howard Tinberg and Jean-Paul Nadeau surveyed students and instructors at various two-year colleges in addition to closely following a small cohort of first-year community college students. Detailed profiles are given of several cohort students, compiled from interviews and multiple drafts of numerous writing assignments. Tinberg's and Nadeau's work is novel on two accounts: First, the authors position themselves as teachers/researchers, an uncommon role at many two-year institutions. Second, their study addresses an important research gap by looking at community college writers, an underrepresented body in rhetoric and composition studies.

Their case studies present a wide-range of students, including a number of non-traditional students. One of the writers profiled works two jobs, forty-five to fifty hours a week and two older students work full-time and care for family members, requiring them to take evening and weekend classes. In spite of these commitments, the profiles reveal students who want to be challenged by college writing assignments. Kim, a cohort student, when told by an instructor she would need to write a perfect paper to receive an A, responded, "That's absolutely fine. And you need to define what a perfect paper would be in [first semester composition]." The profiles also document student writers at times struggling with the often unfamiliar and more complex tasks of college writing such as metacognition, revision and taking ownership of their writing. Tinberg and Nadeau posit that while community college students desire challenges, they also require clear instruction on how to achieve expectations. The authors give recommendations

on designing assignments with explicit criteria and models for student success. They advocate providing students with suggested writing processes, incremental stages for complex writing tasks and ample opportunities for drafting.

Further, the authors offer English, Non-English, and Basic Writing instructors strong guidelines for responding to students' work. The case studies reveal instructors' feedback often makes mistaken assumptions about the student's knowledge of writing or may not relate to the assignment's criteria . The cohort students were also ill-served when instructors failed to critique the content of their work. As the authors state, “[Students] want to know the extent to which they’ve met our expectations. They also want to know what we think of their ideas.”

In addition to these practical applications, Tinberg and Nadeau call for further research particularly into student writer development and the ways in which faculty expectations, institutional missions and student aspirations affect that development over time. Hopefully other community college faculty will engage in this important research. Tinberg and Nadeau hope to follow their research cohort as the student writers continue at the community college or as they transfer to other institutions. This follow-up study could provide a chance to view two-year college writing instruction in a larger and vital context.