

THE PLACE-BASED CLASSROOM
IN TRANSITION

by

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ABSTRACT

In this exploration of *place*, *place-based pedagogy* and *transition*, the author confronts the meaning of place in education, questioning her own use and understanding of the places in which she teaches and the way in which traditional place-based pedagogy has been regarded. Calling attention to the lack of place-based pedagogy in the college classroom, using Robert Brooke's *Guiding Principles of a Place Conscious Education* (2003) as framework, she walks the reader through the design of such a course for a basic writing classroom. Taking a step back from the traditional usage of place, which places an emphasis on both naturalness and permanence, the author focuses the course on the unnatural and temporary environment of the University. Writings collected from the course allows the author to further contemplate her students' understanding of the University as a place, and who they perceive themselves to be in the place of the University. The author likens the experience of college to that of travel, suggesting college is a temporary place that provides a time of neutrality in which new identities can be explored, as Tourist Studies' White and White (2004) put forth of travel. This thinking lends her analysis of student writings collected during the course to a theoretical framework used in the analysis of place narratives in tourist studies, as well as William Bridges' work on life transitions (2004). She finds that students initially indicate they are located in an imaginary University in which they are working through the process of grieving. She also finds that the University becomes the backdrop for student performances which assist in the process of identity (re)construction. These analyses indicate the complex multi-functionality the place of the University serves for students and how it can be in opposition to how it is perceived and utilized by instructors. With *self* at the center of initial understandings of a new place, this research advises that students can be facilitated through grieving, with the assistance of writing, to a state of neutrality where awareness of new educational concepts and identity formation can transpire.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODCUTION

On the first day of Writing 101, a course usually taken by freshman at Montana State University (MSU), I ask my class of twenty-five to respond to the following prompt: What do you know about *this* place? Kelsey Thompson, a first year student, wrote the following:

College is the place that seemed fitting to go [to] but the fact that I don't know what I'm doing throws me for a loop sometimes. I find myself wondering why I am really here. Is this the right place for me to be discovering what I want to be doing with my life?...The places in my life tell me I need to be doing something creative with myself, and I have ideas, I just don't know how to get there. So by the words of Taylor Swift, "I'm just a girl trying to find a place in this world."

Kelsey's response was indicative of those made by many of her classmates, as she expresses a sense of disorientation and disidentification as she attempts to makes sense of *this* place. She relies on something more familiar to her (Taylor Swift) to help her make sense of her current situation. To make sense of the University she utilizes her previous understandings of the world—ones that don't always fit into the discourse of the University. These ideas point to the state of transition she is in along with her classmates.

Another first year student, Luke Higgins, responds to the prompt as well:

I am quite different from that of a freshman in college. I feel confident with my choices thus far. I feel as though I know where I am heading in life even though I know that nearly every adult would tell me otherwise. I have almost a sense of calm, for I have been waiting for my chance to move forward to college since my junior year of high school.

In this response, it seems that we hear a different story. Luke's narrative suggests that he is not experiencing the same uncertainties as Kelsey—he is not lost, he *knows where he is heading* and he does not question who he is, he is *confident*. While the telltale signs

associated with seemingly more daunting transitions like Kelsey's is not present, his narrative exposes a similar, but less noticeable type of transition brought on by a change in life—in this case, a move to the University. His change in life is asking him to define himself in relation to others around him and locate himself in his future goals, rather than confronting the vague situation of the present. Together, these two excerpts demonstrate how students are *working* through the psychological process of transition while in a classroom and that this process is evident in student writing.

This thesis examines how Kelsey, Luke and their classmates in a recent WRIT 101 course I taught at MSU, grapple with their own transitions to the University. Specifically, this thesis does the following: considers the current theory and meaning associated with the term *place*; demonstrates the design of a place-based course situated in a temporary environment; analyzes student narratives collected from the course under a theoretical framework of travel and transition; and discusses the implications of transitional accommodations occurring in any educational setting. In this thesis, I question traditional notions of “place-based education” that are not conducive to temporary place, meaning people who are temporarily in a place. In this, I am working under the assumption that for students to be successful in the discourse of the University they need to transition to a generally accepted idea of the University. Through the design and facilitation of a place-based course with the temporary University as the place, I am able to acknowledge how students in temporary situations confront their place. Their place, I find, is not the same as the instructor's, and their transition to it defines the University as a place.

Place-Based Education

Increasingly, the concern of educators, scholars, and community members is that students are being educated right *out* of their community as a result of globalization, and pressured into thinking better livelihoods can only be found in the nation's cities, or as Robert E. Brooke, a professor of English at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln and director of the Nebraska Writing Project refers it, "professional migration." As a result, rural communities, especially those which are isolated, have been some of the first to call attention to the crisis surrounding a sort of placelessness, or lack of "connection to human and non-human environments" occurring with youth (Gruenewald and Smith, xvi). A movement to sustain, and in some cases, *preserve*, a community's way of life, taking place now in both rural and urban school environments, is *place-based* or *place-conscious* education (Theobald).

Place-conscious education is a term linked to the writings of scholar and educational history expert Paul Theobald (1997), although the idea can be seen practiced throughout history, even back to the ancient Greeks who found that knowing one's place was crucial to an education. Theobald's usage of *Intradependence* is meant to point to the need of humans to connect to other humans as well as one's natural surroundings. *Then*, it is believed, one can truly live well and have the knowledge and skills needed to sustain a place. Students immersed in place-conscious education will interact with issues present or in relation to their own community, rather than with those that are distant in their content. Students are asked to look to the past, present and future of their place and see themselves not as helpless bystanders in a constantly changing world, but as *active*

participants in the change. The movement has become so successful in rural school systems that educators in urban schools facing similar issues of students caught in a sense of placelessness have also adapted a method of place-conscious education that looks to urban landscapes and human interaction with them as a way to help root individuals and see beauty and potential present in the urbanity (Gruenewald 309).

This movement from place-based educators' focus on rural to urban landscapes highlights the potential readings one could invoke of both the term *place* and the goal of a place-based pedagogy. It is this potential which leads me in this piece to analyze the usage of place comparatively by both scholars and students in a place-based course. This analysis naturally lends itself to a discussion of how place-based educators regard place, and thus teach place. This proves difficult however: the study of place has its footings in geology, subjectivity, history, politics, sexuality and gender (Cresswell) and the meaning of place has been the object of intense study. Within the field of education, however, place has more recently come to associate itself more closely with outdoor, environmental and ecological education (Gruenewald 309). As well-known scholar in the area of place-based pedagogy and professor of education at Washington State University, David A. Gruenewald points out, this focus has led to those positioned in landscapes less natural, such as urban ones, to be overlooked. Place has also come to associate itself with permanence—as, according to Jennifer Sinor, professor of English at Utah State University, place writers suggest a person only knows a place when they have been there for some time (7). The University however—a temporary and unnatural setting—the place I am situated in, makes it difficult for a traditional place-based course to succeed.

Thesis Overview

Wanting to experiment with a place-based pedagogy in a less natural and temporary landscape and to better my own understanding and facilitation of seemingly relevant educational practices, this study has a two-facet approach: 1) Explore the process of creating and teaching a place-based writing course in a temporary environment. Here I wanted to answer questions of *how* an unnatural and temporary place-based writing course can be designed and *how* students would respond to this course. 2) Use written narratives and discussions produced in the course to further my understanding of how students regard place in the hope of acquiring a deeper understanding of how a place-based course in a temporary environment could be taught.

Based on these two focal points, I came to the following conclusions, located in chapter five. I found that in written narratives students initially locate themselves within what they imagine the University to be in accordance to their state of transition to the University and write from a past, present, or future perspective. Initial student narratives also suggest the stage of ending that these individuals are located in, which can be considered in regard to Bridge's use of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' work on the grieving process: disengagement, dismantling, disidentifying, disenchantment, or disorientation (Bridges 114).

Contrary to my previous assumptions that students would discuss and define the University in their writings, I found that the University becomes the backdrop in which students participate in performances that assist in the process of identity (re)construction. This hints at the social aspects of the college experience which take the forefront of these

narratives as they show students continuing to work through their transition from their old place to the new place of the University. I also found that student narratives indicate a realization of the power place has over their writing. Narratives suggest that students are able to make themselves believe they are in a certain place simply through the act of writing it down. Writing, in this case, seems to bring clarity to the transition process for students.

In the analysis of course-end narratives, I found that these narratives are void of the details present in earlier narratives which display their contemplations of self and place. There is a moment in these writings which show a sort of ending of the need for this specific type of transition. Overall, these analyses indicate the complex multi-functionality the place of the University serves for students and how it can be in opposition to how it is perceived and utilized by instructors. With *self* at the center of initial understandings of a new place, this research advises that students can be facilitated through grieving, with the assistance of writing, to a state of neutrality where awareness of new educational concepts and identity formation can transpire.

In conclusion to this study I recommend that the need for a student's transition be taken into consideration in *any* educational context, and that it is *writing* specifically that can assist in the process of transition. While the recommendations of this study are a result of the practice of transitional methods in a *place-based classroom* and a *college writing classroom*, these are both only the backdrop for the larger implications of such a practice occurring in any educational setting.

Overview of Subsequent Chapters

I begin this research in chapter 2 with a consideration of scholarly use of the term *place* in chapter 2. It is here that the various and yet similar use of place is highlighted and the theme of “lack of place” or placelessness is a central concern to most in the field. I consider geographer and place writer Yi-Fu Tuan’s proposal that place is pause and space is movement. Conversely, I consider the writings of those who feel their life has *only* been movement, those who long for place and find value in migration. Along with professors and place-writers Jennifer Sinor and Rona Kaufman, I argue for a broadened understanding of place that acknowledges that places can be figurative as much as they can be literal, and temporary as much as they can be permanent.

In chapter 3, I discuss the context in which the course is situated, as well as the explicit methodology and thinking in which the course was designed. As place-based education, “lacks traditional theoretical tradition” (Gruenewald 309), this course is grounded in Brooke’s guiding principles of a place-based education (Brooke 13). Armed with these guiding principles, Brooke believes that educators will be able to create learning environments that foster place-conscious citizens, and in return, bring people and places to a more unified state of well-being. Brooke’s principles have been put to work in place-based education’s well-known context of rural classrooms (14), but my focus is on what happens when these principles are taken out of this context and applied to a first year writing classroom.

For the second phase of the research, located in chapter 4, I explore the theoretical framings of the analysis, as well as perform a chronological analysis of the narratives. In

doing this, I am using my students' response to the course and place to teach myself how a place course could be perceived through the eyes of the individuals learning by way of it. To do this, I employed a theoretical framework similar to that in the field of tourist studies (White and White), paired with research and writings on the topic of transition (Bridges), to perform an analysis of student writing and discussion which allows for a reassessment of place-based pedagogy. A theoretical framework of tourist studies was preferred for this analysis as the temporary place of the University can most closely be linked to the temporality associated with travel.

CHAPTER 2: LOCATING PLACE

In this chapter I provide an overview of several ways of thinking of place. First, I consider Yi-Fu Tuan's understanding of place in which space is movement and place is pause in which the senses can come to a full assessment and be stored in the memory. I point out that it is the goal of place-based education to develop this sense of place. Second, placelessness is discussed according to place-writers bell hooks and Edward S. Casey, in which idea of home is at the center of discussion here as both hooks and Casey propose that home needs to be refound whether in actuality or the imagination. I question how home or a sense of place can be found when one doesn't have any such home image to invoke. Third, I use Jennifer Sinor, professor and author of *Placing the Academy*, as an example of someone who claims placelessness and questions the current understanding of sense of place in which "staying put" is considered the standard. Fourth, I link this Sinor's notion of the fluid academy to the other places that are temporary such as the University, proposing that a student will be with the physical University for a short time, but the conceptual University will remain with them. I point to the current understanding of place among those who are place writers and educators who stress the natural thus physical qualities of place, but tend to overlook the less natural and conceptual places created by our imaginations. Finally, I suggest that attention to unnatural and conceptual places will allow for a more unlimited understanding of place which will transform our thinking about place-based pedagogies.

Space and Place: The Unknown and the Known

I began this course lacking a tight definition of what is meant by place. In my mind, for one to design a place-based course, they didn't need to know exactly how to define a certain place, they just needed to recognize how that place felt and *what* made it feel that way. It was the *what* that the course could be built from. I knew that universities were composed of people— from students, to faculty, to staff; universities were a landscape that were designed in a particular way, a sort of patchwork of buildings, grasses, trees, and pathways; and then there was the unseen university, the one that visiting parents attempt to envision, the university that is the course texts, the individual departments, hierarchy and power, the private discussions in offices, the separate motivations of professors and students. It is this conceptual university that comes closer to defining place than does the physical university.

Studies of place often begin with studies of space. Yi-Fu Tuan touches on one and then the other in his 1977, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. While he is a geographer, and my research may be considered more education and philosophy oriented, Tuan is not afraid to step out of the bounds of hard physical geography to explore more intangible concepts. Space is more abstract than place as it is considered to be an undefined emptiness. Space is a matter of perception, as a child may imagine the space of their new house to be huge, while the parent feels it to be a bit cramped for their liking, making space an abstract concept. We don't always realize that there is a difference between spaces and places in our lives.

So what makes a space a place? Space, as Tuan sees it, is the unknown, it can bring freedom, openness or danger; while place is something we know and offers a sense of security. He suggests that, “if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place” (Tuan 6). It is in this pause, in Tuan’s eyes, that the senses are allowed to assess, and eventually store, a person’s experience (Tuan18). For example, before I went to college, the school I was accepted to, Rocky Mountain College, was this space I was given a tour of my senior year of high school. I remember I was attracted to the broad, river-like, stone walkway that allowed for small streams of it to flow to buildings. There were trees forming what I believed to be a canopy above my head, something I never experienced on the plains, giving a sort of dense feeling to my surroundings. People would pass by, but they were empty. To me, each looked like a model student, perfect in every way. Now, when I return to my alma mater, I will never see the campus the same way again. I have memories of sledding late one night into the stadium bowl and walking back to my dorm freezing cold after being brutally white-washed by a supposed friend; the trees remind me of a lasso attempt to remove someone’s keys from the top of them; I look lovingly on the lobby areas I worked years on to renovate, still smelling the fresh paint, all while remembering the politics that came with it. I thought of the people I had come to know in my four years at Rocky, none of them being perfect. I had gotten to know this space and had assigned value to it.

We come to know the unknown, or space, through experience—thoughts, emotions, and sensations, that come to create what we know as reality (Tuan 8). Our

experience, or what is learned, can assist us in creating locations out of spaces. Just as when one travels to a new city, the streets can all look the same, but by the end of a few days, locations begin to form the landscape as we have had experiences in each space, and we are no longer lost and inexperienced. Tuan sees a place achieving concrete reality “when our experience of it is total, that is, through all the senses as well as the active and reflective mind” (18). He believes knowing a place only from the inside, such as an adult who lives in the same town they grew up in, or only from the outside, such as a tourist who only knows the Rome in guidebooks, both lack the “weight of reality” (18). Truly knowing a place has been deemed as having a “sense of place.” Those who have developed a sense of place have had enough experiences in that place that they feel they know what makes the place through all of their senses. A sense of place can be so strong that one can still feel as if they are in a certain place even when they are not in it physically. It has been the goal of place-based education to develop a sense of place in individuals, enacting a sort of comfort and confidence that only comes from knowing something well.

It is the concern of many, including writer and cultural critic bell hooks, as well as writer and philosopher Edward S. Casey, that people today long for a sense of place, but that they can’t locate it, which results in a sort of anxiety and panic. Placelessness has become just as common of a term as Place. In *Belonging: A Culture of Place* hooks longs to be “wedded” to a place. She begins by developing for herself a list of criteria as to what a place needs for her to feel at home and then selects locations that meet these needs. After traveling to each of the places in search of a certain feeling, she realizes she

has omitted her place of origin in Kentucky. In a series of essays which begin and end in Kentucky, she writes about family and the environment as ways to confront both global and local issues. It is as if she is able to find out what is real by making a complete circular journey from home to away and back.

In *Getting Back Into Place* (1993) Casey discusses the notion of Freud, Bachelard and Proust that places from our earliest memories need to be refound, if not in actuality, in the imagination (x). It is here that, what he calls, place-panic can be addressed, although not always relieved. hooks also finds that going home brings with it a different perspective, a more mature one, that reveals aspects of her Black home in a White neighborhood that she didn't fully comprehend as a child. Through this experience she can have the insider and outsider perspective Tuan associates with having a more concrete sense of reality.

Tuan too talks about the homeplace as being one in which what is real can be gauged. In relaying the story about a farm girl's experience of a honeymoon in which she comes back early because it doesn't feel real, he explains that, "The real is the familiar daily round, unobtrusive like breathing. The real involves our whole being, all our senses. On vacation, although our problems have been left behind; we become specialized and unanchored beings, sightseers who sample life effortlessly" (146). It may be why homecoming is a common theme of many novels and poems, as it is an eye opening experience for people as they confront a past self, present self and make decisions about their future self.

The idea of home being a place of rooting, or finding oneself, fuels a desire in people to *create* home or stay within a localized area, and have a place to call their own. In localism, as was discussed earlier, arises the thought that being connected to a place, having a sense of it, results in people having a better sense of reality and what is believed to ultimately be a better quality of life. Thus, a place-based education movement. But what about those who don't know their home or find themselves in constant movement with no pause to belong to a place?

Jennifer Sinor in *Placing the Academy* (2007) is just such a person. As a professor of English and newly relocated, she finds a desire to connect to her past place as a way to connect to this new place, but in remembering her military upbringing, in which she never lived in a place longer than five years, she finds herself unable to keep memories clear. She reflects: "I know so little about the places I have lived; so many of my memories are unplaced, as if the box of family photo albums were upturned and pictures scattered underneath the table and the bed" (4). Are we to classify a person like Sinor as placeless with no place to return to? Sinor is aware that place has formed who she is and that her teaching and writing respond to such changes, but in comparing herself to those who call themselves *place writers*, she feels unable to claim a connection to place by their standards. She is aware of the weight that placing oneself can hold. Time, as she points out, is what place writers afford the greatest value to in defining the authenticity of a person's connection to a place. She hears most often, that it is by "staying put" that place becomes one's own (11). But without the ability to do so, in *Placing* she goes in search of how migration too can offer a person a sense of place. Her focus is on a place in

which she currently finds herself, which is fluid in nature: the academy. She points out how academics leave the physical location of the university at the end of the day, but they do “not stop being teachers or writers or researchers the moment [they] leave campus, as if our scholarly selves were coats that could be checked at the door” (15). Even though the place of the academy is considered fluid by Sinor, she still sees it as local. In *Placing* we are offered a series of essays by those who live the academic lifestyle; each relates how the academy is something that stays with them wherever they go.

While Sinor, along with her colleague Rona Kaufman, work to develop a vocabulary of place that allows for a broader understanding of place that I too am seeking, another valuable idea in this text that connects to my work was their discussion of academia as a place. The language in which they discuss the placeness of academia also can translate to certain aspects of the university. Her understanding of academia is also that of Plato’s: it is less about the physical location and more about “a way of exchange” (15). She proposes that, “Each person experiences place differently, and no one understanding of place can fit an entire department, campus, field, discipline or profession. The place of the academy *shifts* between people and even with a person” (15). And as a result of this, those who belong to the academy, belong to both a universal and local academy at the same time.

If we think about the University for students, we may describe it as a sort of temporal place, one in which they will leave after their education is complete. But what if we think less of the physical University, and more of the conceptual one? For a short time, students will be in the University’s physical location, but because of the way in

which the place becomes them and they become the place, the University will move or *shift* with them. *Shifting* is movement, and if we think of Tuan's idea of space and place, it would seem to imply that by accepting the idea of shifting among places, we are accepting that we are constantly in space. However, Sinor sees place as something that is also in movement, just as she finds herself as an academic carrying the academy throughout her life. Both Tuan and Casey see migration as natural to human existence (Casey xii, Tuan 157). Can we stay local while migrating?

It appears to be down to definition of place. Place educators and writers tend to focus on natural landscape, and this makes sense. Naturalists such as the beloved Terry Tempest Williams bring landscapes to life, comparing a dessert to her lover, a dying swan to her mother; through her writing she inspires others to save physical places by making them conceptual, personified places, while she as the writer is saving the *idea* of the place in her memory. Rockwell Gray offers that it is not the physical places that become most valuable, but the ones in our memories (Sinor 14). Each year I walk through the front door of my childhood home, I am flooded with memories and I tend to find myself disappointed at not always finding the same smells—my Dad's stuffed mushrooms (he is trying something new this year) or touching the same things as they somehow feel different—a childhood blanket less soft. We think we become attached to physical places, places we think stop moving, but in reality, we become attached to the ideas of a place, which changes as the place changes, along with ourselves. By narrowing our focus on physical landscape or places we think are or can be permanent, the definition of place also becomes limited.

General usage of “place” in the place-based education movement has come to mean a natural place in the environment that is in danger of being lost. Students in Caldwell, Idaho at Albertson College of Idaho revitalize the town’s eye sore, Indian Creek, turning it into a community gathering place. At Green Mountain College, a school that takes an environmental, place-based approach to areas of study, Laird Christensen’s class takes trips down the Hudson, journaling their observations of human impact (Christensen and Crimmel). Places in need of saving, writing, or remembering, though, can be much more complex than a physical landscape. All places, literal and figurative, are in danger of being lost. People can be places. We use the phrase, *“You’ll always have a place in my heart.”* Goals can be places. *“I will be a published author of children’s stories by the time I’m forty.”* Writing is a place we create. We lose our place in a story we are reading and must get back to it. If we think of writers in the way that Sinor thinks of academics, shouldn’t it be that writers are writers wherever they go? So when we teach places, can’t we teach that a place can shift with you, rather than informing students that unless they remain in one place, they will not have one?

These ideas of place have allowed me to think of the University in terms of a very fluid definition of place—one in which students are located on many different planes of mental location within the same classroom. Understanding place in this light has allowed my design of the class to acknowledge the accommodations which are necessary for students in many places to transition to a more unified idea of a place. This fluid understanding of place also makes more obvious the limitations an instructor faces, as

they are not able to know exactly where a student is coming from in comparison to the place they are arriving.

Believing the benefits of such an understanding of place outweigh the limitations it creates, like Sinor, I am beginning this research by advocating for a vocabulary and understanding of place that is broad, one that allows for our tendency to get restless legs. To add to this though, I am also asking for one that doesn't ignore temporal, unnatural places, permitting knowledge of the place to be considered insignificant, but that contends that critical thought about any place has value.

“Place,” as public historian Dolores Hayden claims, “is one of the trickiest words in the English language, a suitcase so overfilled one can never shut the lid. It carries the resonance of homestead, location and open space...as well as a position in a social hierarchy” (Powell and Tassoni 9). If I consider teacher and conservationist Alan Gussow's definition of place as “a piece of the whole environment claimed by feelings” to be one in which I begin, I *can* envision the University as a place, certainly claimed by feelings, worth basing a first-year composition course.

CHAPTER 3: DESIGN OF A UNIVERSITY-BASED WRITING 101

In this chapter I discuss the thinking and methodology that went into designing a temporary place-based writing course. First, I position the WRIT 101 course within its contextual surroundings with the intention of conceptualizing the circumstances in which this specific University course was created and facilitated. Second, I explain my reasoning for framing the course with Brooke's guiding principles, suggesting that these principles can make such a course more tangible for students. Third, I discuss the process and potential complications of designing the course guided by Brooke's principles. Finally, I explicitly outline the course curriculum.

Context of Project

My current place in life is as a graduate teaching assistant and student at Montana State University, Bozeman (MSU). MSU, founded in 1893 as the state's land-grant university, was first named the Agricultural College of the State of Montana. In 1965, it was renamed to its present title, as the college became known for its scientific research endeavors. Today, MSU strives to be known for its liberal arts, as much as its sciences. As the vision statement for MSU states, though, *this* education will be "distinguished by its innovation and discovery *in a Rocky Mountain setting.*" And as the school slogan is famous for making clear, "*Mountains and Minds*"—it is the land that is the selling point here, according to MSU. MSU's website encourages a prospective student to "explore Montana State," but accompanies this request with a picture of the snow-covered mountains. The school boasts a long list of "press accolades for its beautiful

surroundings.” While it is the university which is being intended for promotion, it is the surrounding area that has been made the enticing centerpiece of an education at MSU.

It is this place where I find myself faced with a class of mostly freshman students who are, for the first time in their lives, out of their element. Some have come with giddy excitement at getting away from parental eyes and being where they have “dreamed of” for some time, and others are unsure of each step they take, as it looks nothing like where they came from. It is this environment that has caused me to grapple with connection again. As a graduate teaching assistant for WRIT-101, I am given fifty minutes, three days a week in which I am expected to form enough of a relationship with students that they will write for me—essentially opening themselves up to certain vulnerability specific to writing—as Murray (1991) claims, *all writing is autobiographical*. I am also one of the few teachers with whom they will have a chance to form a relationship during their first semester of school, as most of their classes have too many students for professors to even know their names.

Not only are most students in a new *physical* location, they have to adapt to a new *conceptual* place as well. The University requires students to adapt quickly to its academic culture, one that does not always make its expectations clear. The University is unlike any place they have either lived or studied before. It is no surprise that in an environment such as this, freshman retention rates at MSU-Bozeman are at about seventy percent for first time, full time, degree seeking freshman. Students have to find a connection to the place or risk a sort of academic and social alienation.

Writing, in particular at the University, requires a way of thinking and “speaking” that is foreign to new students; it requires knowing how to “be” or acquire a discourse. The curriculum of a course such as WRIT-101, with its focus on reading and writing to specific rhetorical situations, as well as the nature of the course being for writers new to the academic environment, lends itself the potential of an environment in which students *could* find a sense of connection. If students can connect to this place, just as they might a more traditional place, they could work toward a more “sustainable” University environment—a university in which students form a lasting connection with and continue to enhance the well-being of the academic community. It is this chemistry that turned my thinking to the kind of action rural and urban educators have taken as a way to help students find their roots: place-based pedagogy.

In choosing the University as a place, rather than the more traditional places found in most place-based educator’s lenses, such as a town or city, I realized that it would require looking at what “University-as-a-place” meant specifically. The University is unique in many ways, one of which is that most students come here for a specific period of time and leave. The writing at a university is unique; the writing they will be doing will most likely be for an academic environment and not for the environment they will find themselves in after college. Unlike living in a more traditional community in which you are a more permanent part, while at the University, there is more of a temporary feeling to relationships which are formed, especially between students and faculty. I also have to look at the “landscape” of the University differently. Within the more traditional place-conscious education and sustainability movements there is a

constant focus on the natural surroundings. Universities, as in the case of mountain-enveloped MSU-Bozeman, are surrounded and shaped by a natural environment, yet connecting to the University as a place, is not the same as connecting to Bozeman as a place or the mountains as a place. Students may have chosen MSU-Bozeman as a result of the natural surroundings, however this is not the case for all students; all students *have* chosen (whether or not willingly, cannot be known) MSU-Bozeman as their place of education. By separating Bozeman from the University, I am able to make the University its own place, thus putting emphasis on what specifically is required to be a part of *this* place. Essentially, a major component of this research became defining the University, and its many landscapes, as a place. A University's landscape can be the physical classrooms or dorm rooms students find themselves in, as well as the conceptual landscape created through the various discourse communities and their conversations which happen through several textual mediums.

In many ways, objectives in WRIT 101 were prime for linkage with a place-based approach. According to the former WRIT 101 syllabus, students were to use the course to get comfortable writing in the academic environment by exploring the "nature of writing," navigating rhetorical situations through reading and writing, and experiencing "collaboration in communities of writers and readers." Already, reading the previous course objectives with the place lens leads you to believe the course is begging for the connection to place be made; the nature here is not fauna and flora, but the wilds of written text; students are not learning to navigate a physical landscape, but a conceptual landscape; and the community they are collaborating with is not that of a more permanent

town or city, but that of temporary, yet always present, community of fellow readers and writers. Students who are in WRIT 101 are being shown what it takes to be a part of the academic Discourse community (Gee). So in a sense, this design of WRIT 101 is already focused on the idea of place. What more is needed then for students to find connection with the university and live well in this environment?

Believing that “learning and writing and citizenship are richer when tied to and flow from the local culture,” (4) Brooke (2003), brings Haas and Natchtigal’s “five senses to instill in students,” (1998) into a more tangible set of three guiding principles educators can use to form a place-conscious learning environment and essentially a framework (Brooke 13). The following is a condensed version of Brooke’s guiding principles, based on my interpretation of key elements of the principles.

1. Active students...

- a. Need to have a say in the civic works of their education
- b. Need experience identifying local issues they want to affect
- c. Need experience negotiating with other students and community members in developing and completing meaningful projects
- d. Need time for self reflection and evaluation

2. Deep understanding of local place...

- a. Needs active citizens by engaging with local issues
- b. Needs to be interdisciplinary

3. Aimed at specific kind of citizenry

- a. People who can live well in intradependence
- b. People who know enough of a natural and cultural region to enhance the communities located there
- c. People who know how to live well in the local community

I believe a bit of a translation has to occur here. Just as Brooke took Natchtigal’s “five senses” and made them more tangible for educators, I wanted to take WRIT 101 and make it more tangible for students. The very motivation for an education with an overarching theme or focus is to bring the content into the context; to make the bits and

pieces of learning connect to something of which students can make sense. If students can take a part of who they were in this other place they were before coming the MSU, and look at MSU not as a mysterious Pandora's box, *but as a place*, just as the place they came from, they may use what they already know of places to connect then to this place. I wanted for each new idea introduced in the course to be connected to an idea they already understood, just as implied in scaffolding. Everyone comes from somewhere. Why not make this the connection between the new and the old?

I am also making a connection here between critical pedagogy, the new writing about writing pedagogy and place-based pedagogy in which the course I have previously taught was centered. In doing this, I am in part attempting to respond to Gruenewald's call a place-based education that takes into account the social aspects of a place. While most place-based pedagogies focus primarily on the *natural* environment an individual is located within as a way to bring awareness to the issues concerning that environment in hope of sustaining it, I will be basing my course on the environment of the University which is composed of much more than what is typically considered natural. The "natural" environment of the university includes not only the buildings, but also structures of power which are located within discourses. While this could still be considered a critical pedagogy, as it strives to bring awareness to the individual, it is also doing this while tied to the writing that occurs in this place, beginning with the place of the writing classroom, which means writing about writing and concluding with writing in their specific discourse.

Laurie Glover has touched on the possibility of this very idea since 1999 in her University of California Davis composition course. In “Not *What* but *Where* the Stakes Are,” (2009) she hints at the possibility of a composition course “based on the university,” but goes on to say that she means “based on the place in which the university is located” (Powell and Tassoni 57). She means the university as “watershed and plant community and topography.” She does point out that “a composition class “on the university” could mean one that considers the university as the construct it is: the matrix of power relations, the knowledge bank, the enclave of privilege, the panopticon, the mill, the tower,” but that this “ignores its impact on the place in which it is located” (Powell and Tassoni 58). So with this, I ask, why not spend the short amount of time we have (approximately two and half hours a week in class), solely on the place or the environment that students will be spending the majority of their time interacting with during their temporary stay—the University?

Course Design

I began my process of designing a new course by breaking apart the previous WRIT 101 objectives and making them the foundation of the course. I found the course could be divided into “The Nature of Writing,” “Reading Rhetorical Situations,” “Making Rhetorical Choices,” and “Research Literacy.” From these, I was able to further clarify what learning objectives occurred within each foundational element. With what I believed to be the framework of the course, I could now be “guided” or inspired by Brooke’s principles of a place-based education. My students needed to be active, they

needed to have a deep understanding of the University, and I needed to aim this course at a “specific kind of citizenry.” Having a classroom of engaged students who are getting acquainted with MSU seemed to be an easy image to grasp; aiming this all at a “specific kind of citizenry” posed a few issues.

Specific citizenry, according to Brooke, “should be people who live well in intradependence—that is, people who know enough about their natural and cultural region to fashion lives that enhance the communities located there” (Brooke 13). In this description is the implication that a person is being this “specific kind of citizen” because they are planning on being a part of the place for some time. As stated previously, there is a sense of temporality in coming to a university. Freshman students in particular, come to college with their clothes packed in suitcases. Many leave for the summer and they usually want to be done with school in a certain number of years. How could I cultivate a certain kind of citizenry with a class of students who are at MSU with the intention of eventually not being at MSU? Is it not *leaving* equipped which is considered success in the environment of the university?

I decided that I couldn’t begin the course imagining or assuming I was teaching to a class of students ready to become well-adjusted “citizens of the University.” I had to give them the chance to see what the university had to offer as a place, and then they could choose whether this was a place they would want to invest in, and not just monetarily. So in a sense, I didn’t want to blindly promote MSU. I didn’t want to say, “This is your community. You should want to live well in it.” Here is where Brooke’s principles are beginning to show how they work differently in a temporary environment.

Freshman students, probably for the first time in their life, are given a “choice” of where they want to live. Traditional place-based pedagogy in K-12 schools faces the reality of the student most likely not having a say in where they live. It makes more sense here to promote a better way of living; there may not be any other option. But students at the university *do* have options, whether they realize it or not. Occasionally, I have run into students in town from previous semesters who have told me they decided to quit school as a result of the WRIT 101 project in which they looked at writing in their field. Cassie, a student in my first semester WRIT 101 who was interested in photography, stopped to chat with me as she was stacking boxes at the local grocery store. She said that after she learned what was involved in photography in the academic sense while doing research in WRIT 101, she decided she needed to take a year off to think for a while. While there was the possibility of students not coming back to MSU as a result of discoveries they made in WRIT 101, I wanted to students to have the freedom to decide, or at least explore, whether or not MSU, or academia in general, was a place they wanted to be. I believe it is only when one *chooses* to be a part of a community that there will be truly intradependent citizenry.

It was also a predetermined decision of mine to avoid, as much as possible, the blatant insertion of the word *place* throughout this course. By overtly using place and then hoping for students to connect to the University as a place, I may be making the connections for my students, rather than them making it on their own. While in some situations, I needed to use the term place for my students to go in a certain direction, I chose not talk about place in connection to the ideas we were discussing in class. In my

data collection, I am not looking for students to use the word place, but for them to discuss ideas in terms of how they would discuss a place. How do they talk about the places they are from, where they are now, and the places they plan to go in life? Place-based education can be just that, *without* having to tell students it is place underlying all that we do in the course. I do speak about the University throughout the course, just as a teacher in a K-12 classroom may refer to the town or city they are learning within. If there is to be any benefit to a place-based writing 101 curriculum, it will not be found if students unnaturally talk about place as if they are expected to by the instructor.

In assisting students in their understanding and exploration of this place, I decided to begin the course with an exploration of the place they know best: their self. The idea I am working with here is: start local; then go broad; a bit of a scaffolding approach in which we are always moving forward, but not without first making a connection to the individual before approaching the wider context. Give students something they know, then use it as a path to something they don't know. They do know about Hardin, Montana or Oakland, California. They know about their work-ethic inspired family farm or their high school with seven students. To cultivate this environment, I began by asking students to reflect on the place they came from as a way for me to understand where they are coming from in this process and their interpretation of place. I also asked them to reflect on the place they are in right now as a way to understand what the university means to them as a place. We looked at who we were as writers. *What was our earliest writing memory? How did writing play role in home life? What did it mean to us at school?* We looked at how we function as writers and explored our writing process. By

connecting students first to who they are as a place, one in which writing occurs, it was my intention that students would find themselves ready to take steps forward.

For the next section of the course, we needed to become broader: the writing classroom as a place. If students are going to make a connection to any place, we needed to begin with why they were here in this place called WRIT 101. It is answering the age old question of, “why are we doing this?” or “why are we here?” In acquainting the students to the writing classroom as a place, there needed to be a history of writing pedagogy. We explored writing movements in the U.S. beginning with the General Writing Skills Instruction (GWSI) classroom and ending with the writing about writing classroom. Students were given the chance to look into why and how writing tests became a part of the classroom environment. Students found out why this writing class was located in this University. By taking the time to get to know the writing classroom as a place, it was my intention that students could develop sense of purpose and grounding in the course.

Before we begin to get into the idea of the University as a place, I thought it was crucial that students first become acquainted with the idea of rhetorically reading a situation, or a place. We began by rhetorically reading what they were exposed to in places they had been before. Students were able to bring in items they thought they were the audience for as a way to get at ideas inherent to rhetorical analysis. Students were brought to different physical places and were asked to write for that situation. Once students had a grasp on rhetorically reading their own places, we moved to rhetoric at MSU.

In this section of the course, students, in a sense, immersed themselves in “blue and gold” (MSU’s school colors) and then were asked to rhetorically analyze these colors as *choice* made by someone. Students were asked to look at the MSU website, look at the design of the campus, and ask how writing was used in these places. A question we asked was: “How is MSU, the rhetor, persuading me?” Thinking critically about the very foundation of a place through its written word can allow students to be active participants in their surroundings. It can also allow students to begin to identify local issues they may wish to affect. Deep understanding of place, according to Brooke, can be accomplished through engaging with local issues. For the major project in this section, students were asked to find an issue at MSU that was of interest to them, collect writing that was involved in the issue and rhetorically analyze it to get at how writing functioned within the issue. And then they were asked, not for a solution to the issue, but to propose a way that writing could be involved to further the issue. As students were new to the campus, it became apparent to me that issues would be hard to spot. I decided I would invite a speaker to the class who was a part of MSU for some time and who would be excited to share with the students multiple sides of various issues. While students wrote a report to go along with their findings, students also presented their findings to each other as a way for all students to get a feel for issues on campus and how writing is involved in all of them.

Now that students had a sense of the University as a place through analyzing the writing of various issues, we retract again before stepping into their specific area of the University. These specific areas are the various Discourse communities (Gee) which have

their own sets of value, belief, action, word combinations—their own rhetorical situation or place—that students are expected to adopt as their own if they want to be an “insider” of the community. The idea of students observing and mimicking the traits of their chosen Discourse community, or in this case, field of study, is getting at the idea of the specific kind of citizenry Brooke is hoping will want to enhance the community in which they live. Here we associate place with the environment a Discourse community creates; just like a town or city, a Discourse community has its own landscape which individuals can learn to navigate. With the Discourse Community project, in this section of the course, students asked: “How do people become a part of a place or a Discourse community?” Through observations, interviews and data collection, students analyzed a Discourse community of their choosing; this can be anything ranging from a badminton club to a live action role play community (LARP).

By first analyzing a Discourse community (most of which are non-dominant (Gee) or not status or money driven) which is not part of their chosen field, students were able to gain understanding of the goals and characteristics of these communities which may seem to be less threatening. Once students were comfortable with the idea of analysis, they looked to their own field of study by analyzing the various places and the characteristics of those places that their Discourse inhabits. Through the collection of journal articles, informal writings, observations and interviews students designed a brochure describing writing in their field.

Throughout the process of developing and reworking each of these sections, as well as during the semester, I stayed in check with Brooke’s guiding principles by asking

myself, “*Are my students active?*” Are they being given the “power,” so to speak, to decide what is important to them in this course? Am I giving them time to reflect and evaluate their experiences? Are they working as community of writers? Also, “*Are we taking the time to develop a deep understanding of place?*” Here I want to know: are we not just identifying issues, but are we engaging with them through writing? And finally, I need to ask myself: “*What kind of community member/writer am I promoting?*” This is where I cannot avoid personal ideology playing a role. As the teacher of this course, I need to be aware of my own hopes and desires in teaching this course. Am I promoting a specific kind of college student? One who wants to be a part of this community temporarily? One who wants to live well temporarily? It seems that by teaching this course, I am. Underlying all of this for me is the hope that students who are introduced to the idea of place, and how places are all different and yet in some ways the same, will not just know how to be temporary citizens of a place, but that they will be able to live well in any place regardless of the length of their stay.

The collection of data in this exploration of a place-based approach to a basic college composition course is comprised of in and out of class writings and reflections of class discussions. Throughout the course, I kept a journal in which I would reflect on my students’ or my own reactions to an idea related to place. My main focus during this initial run of “the University as a place” WRIT 101, was to look at how students were talking *about* place.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

OF STUDENT PLACE NARRATIVES

In this chapter I describe the theoretical frameworks employed in the analysis of student narratives and I analyze student writings collected at four separate points throughout the semester. First, I discuss the two closely related frameworks which I use: a *tourist studies* framework in which traveler's narratives of place have been analyzed, and a *transition* framework which is employed as part of the tourist studies framework, but that is also considered separately and more extensively here. Second, in the section, *First Collection of Student Narratives*, I analyze the writings from the prompt: "Talk about the place you are from. Then tell me about the place you are right now." I analyze their responses in two separate frameworks: tourist study's "imagined" place and transition's "grieving process." Third, in the section, *Second Collection of Student Narratives*, I analyze the writings from the prompt: "Does place affect you as a writer? If so, how?" I analyze their response using my own framework of word choice and usage, along with transitional theories. Fourth, in the section, *Third Collection of Student Narratives*, I analyze writings from the prompt: "How does the University function as a discourse community?" I analyze their responses using both tourist study's notion of the "social" and transitional theory's idea of "neutrality." Finally, in the section, *Fourth Collection of Student Narratives*, I re-ask the first prompt given in the course and analyze it under similar frameworks already employed.

Traveling and Transition: Frameworks in Which to Analyze Place

In this analysis of student place narratives collected during my University-based writing course, I will be looking to theoretical frameworks associated with travel narratives, such as those employed by White and White (2003) and Tucker (2005), as well as the work of Bridges (1991, 2004) in regard to transition, as a way to begin to understand how students regard the place of the university and how they see themselves engaging with it as writers. The notion of travel is preferred because students are on journeys: they are leaving behind their home for a long trip where they will stay in accommodations that they will not be able to permanently call their own and they will participate in activities that the college provides. Some may be coming to college for similar reasons as to why individuals travel; maybe they want to “find themselves,” or postpone adulthood, it can be an escape from the mundane (White and White 216). Just as travel acts as a rite of passage, so too does college in today’s world; it is the first step one takes toward “becoming.” As Arnold van Gennep, a Dutch anthropologist who first used “rites of passage” denoted, “such rites were the way in which traditional societies structure life transitions” (Bridges 103). By employing the use of a tourist studies framework and a concept of “student as traveler,” I do not mean to imply that students should remain in a traveler’s mindset, never becoming part of the community, or “unanchored” as Tuan suggest travel induces, but hope that through this analysis of student place narratives, I can begin to locate ways in which a place-based course such as the one I have attempted can be more aware of the place needs of our students who are here for a short stay. In conclusion, I will reflect back to Brooke’s guiding principles of a

place-based education and access their role in the composition of a “temporary” place-based course.

In examining the writings within the field of tourism studies, many comparisons can be made between the language used to describe travel and that of college. In an exploration of place narratives of travelers through the Australian Outback, White and White (2003) attempt to “discern whether [travel accounts] can be illuminated by the notion of “transition”...whether [traveler’s] stories provide evidence that long-term travel provides a neutral, transitional zone sandwiched between voluntary or imposed endings and new beginnings” (200). Their findings conclude that long-term travel seems to allow for a neutral zone amid one’s life journey in which one could assess or reassess their past and future identity. According to William Bridges, whose work focuses on transitions, in the state of transition past social contexts have been eradicated and new ways to identify one’s self have not yet been located (201). Transition, in this light, is an in-between space that lacks the familiar pillars of support that a well-known place does. This notion of travel as a transitional state in which markers of place are absent, also hints at the transition that one experiences in coming to college for the first time.

Similarly, Hazel Tucker’s (2005) research on the narratives of place and self that occur during packaged coach tours through New Zealand works to understand the interactions that people have with the places they are travelling through. Through observation and interviews with passengers on both an older and younger packaged tour group, she finds that for the older group the trip brought a sense of closure to and a realization of their ultimate mortality, while for the younger group the trip brought “an

opening to new aspects of their identity” (267). Both groups’ narratives “reveal how culture and identity become incorporated through travel, the kind of selves people find and lose while away from home, how identities are made as people confront others, and the peculiar and paradoxical ways that everyday life reappears as people seek to escape in their journeys” (Neumann 178). As research in the field of tourist studies such as Tucker’s illustrates, a journey is a time of identity (re)construction as a person confronts a past, present and envisioned future self, and if we regard our students as individuals on a journey in which they will be in the act of identity (re)construction, it may illuminate further thinking toward the student/University relationship.

Also employed in the theoretical framework of this examination of place narratives and classroom discussions is William Bridges’ (1991, 2004) research on the “the underlying and universal patterns” of humans in transition. Drawing from ancient cultural rituals of major life transitions such as a boy transitioning into a man, Bridges explains how one first had to leave what was familiar, in order to experience a symbolic death. Then followed a time of isolation, a neutral state of moratorium, where one had time to dream and contemplate visions that would appear. When the inner changes came to fruition the person was ready to be reintroduced to their old society; although, it is no longer familiar, as they are now a new person and a new beginning has occurred (104). While we rarely get sent to the forest today to clear our minds, Bridges believes many of us still need to remove ourselves in times of transition. The constant movement we have become accustomed to without the acknowledgement of loss causes us to get stuck in lifelong patterns, instead of taking the time for an inner chaos to occur, allowing for

personal growth. In Bridges' understanding, we most frequently, have a realization of change, but not quite the psychological occurrence of a transition (xii). Many change in order to leave the past behind them, but as Bridges points out, "even when we set out to change the present, the past defines the possibilities and the limits of the change" (146). College is an especially monumental transition in our society, yet there is little time once one arrives at college to do the inner work that is required to meet the gravity of the change that has occurred.

First Collection of Student Writings

In this section I discuss the idea of the *imagined college* and the *grieving process*. In the section *College: The Imagined Destination*, I explain how students' description of their old place is physical, it highlights the good and the bad aspects of the place, and it claims loyalty to the place, all while it distances themselves from it. I found that students were commenting on the imagined University—an idea based off of symbolic aspects of the college experience they think need to be commented on. Student writings in this section indicate past, present and future perspectives of this place.

In the next section, *A Process of Grieving*, I continue to analyze the narratives from the first writing prompt, but I focus specifically on the process of ending that students indicate in their descriptions of their old and new place. Taking from Kubler-Ross' work on the grieving process, I discuss the five aspects Bridges finds in this process of loss and then consider these in regard to my student's narratives. I find most students to be presently working through all different stages of ending or grieving their

old place. I offer that a few narratives were found to be in no stage of the ending process and suggest that this may be a result of already having gone through it prior to the move to college or they are avoiding a recognition of change and of the need to grieve a loss.

College: The Imagined Destination

After having been in class for less than five minutes, I asked my students to tell me where they are from and what this place is they find themselves right now. The first question was a piece of cake for students: they eagerly described for an outsider such as myself where their town was located, the approximate population, what the people are like, and what they do for fun. Some go into description of family dynamics, while others describe in elaborate detail their house and/or land in which they grew up—all very physical descriptions of place. In these narratives there is a sense that students are still at home, everything is still the way they imagined it; yet, in the same moment for some students, as a result of me asking them to write about this place, there is a moment of removal from their old place and a realization of the new.

After a brief physical description of place, most of my students take a few lines to sum up their home place, almost as if a snapshot were being taken in their memory. Lara, who describes the place she comes from as “complicated” as she has had lived in both Germany and Oklahoma as a result her military upbringing, is able to take a step back from her experience of living abroad and concludes that “living overseas definitely has a lot of perks.” Such a conclusion as this is one that can be made by a person who has *lived* an experience. Definitive statements about their overall experience of living in a place can be found right after statements in which students still described the place as if it were

the present. Kevin switches from a perspective of still being in his home town—“if you need something from the store, it is just a five minute drive away,” to a sort of reflection back on it, as if he is now removed—“the kids all have their own dramas and the kind teachers attempt to inspire.” To make a statement about the “kids” having dramas implies that he is distanced enough from it to notice that he is not one of these kids.

This removal from their previous place serves to both highlight the good qualities of where they are from, as well as what is not as good. Maya revels in the beauty of her home’s seasonal changes, but disdains at the effect the largely elderly population has on the town’s emotional landscape. Savannah takes the time to tell us about the memories that made her home what it was for so long, and then in the last line lets us know that was until her father “left the family.” Despite the positive and negative becoming more apparent, many students conclude their summaries of their old place with statements such as “it will always be home.” It seems that in the act of creating a written narrative about the place they came from students are confronted with a situation in which they must make sense of a place that is no longer their current place; they make note of their separation from it in their summarizing statements of the place, yet feel the need to claim their loyalty to it.

In answering my second question of “what do you know about the place that you currently find yourself,” students discussed in great detail the place that they imagined college to be. Even though they were already at college, they described it in ways that played into their previous understandings of it or their current state of meaning making. In other words, students are performing their narrations in a way that “situate themselves

in relation to the symbolic qualities associated with the site” (Tucker 269)—in this case, the site being the university. One student fresh from California, Tate, focuses on how “refreshing and exciting” Bozeman is in his narrative, where “everyone is friendly” compared to his hometown where they were too busy to care. His positive outlook will never change, he vows. Later on in the semester though, we hear a different tune from Tate: people have been asking him question such as “What is it like to be colored?” as well as other racially motivated comments that make him unsure of this place. “Why are people so uninformed about how to talk to people of different races here...I’ve never experienced this any place before,” he brings up in class one day. Suddenly what he once imagined to be a positive place, one better than his old place, now has its flaws. When he first came to college he saw a place that *appeared* to be different, thus causing him to conclude that it was better. It seems that upon analysis this conclusion was one of his imagination that wanted the place to be better.

Other written comments such as the one by Rachel: “College is freedom, college is crazy and college is new faces” speak to this idea of the university that students have imagined, the symbolic university—having not actually been able to live in it long enough to make similarly conclusive statements as they had about their home places. By their senior year at college, it may not seem quite as “crazy” as it first did and the idea of a real job may seem like “freedom.” It was within this classroom prompt that I found my students situated in three different general categories—those who talked about the university in regard to the past, those who connected it to the present and the students who did not see the university, but saw their future beyond it. Their descriptions were of

not an actual university, but more of a symbolic one—one in which they imagined what needed to be commented upon.

Strong connections to a past place, such as the battlegrounds of a war, played a part in student narratives of this place by becoming a sort of gauge to measure up against. Joe, a twenty-eight year old war veteran sees the student body as a collective whole that are “constantly on the move interacting with one another, all told they can be anything they want.” Joe’s narrative indicates he sees the symbolic university—one where students behave similarly. In all of his descriptions he explains the college environment from an observer’s standpoint, sharing he doesn’t feel a part of the experience. It is his past place of coming from the war, he shares, which shapes his perspective of all things. To him, the university is an “alien” environment in which he will explore in the only way he knows to—using his senses—which to me, sounded like an almost primal act, one of survival.

A loss of the familiar has caused more than a few students to feel the need to orient themselves both mentally and physically. Many students share their inability to let go of their previous place, finding themselves “confused and disoriented.” Savannah describes the change as leaving her “turned upside down.” And others such as Kelsey, “lost and found at the same time” or Allison who feels like a “lost puppy.” Just under half of my class wrote about their current state of disorientation; this place did not make sense in regard to where they came from. Some even strive to make it as much like home as possible, creating as Kate says, “a home away from home.” After admitting their current state of confusion, some students were able to conclude with a statement which showed that they were willing to try to find out how to “fit in to this place”—assuring themselves

that it was for the best. However far away from their home place students created the appearance of, “home” was a commonly reoccurring theme throughout the semester.

While some were still grappling with their loss of the past, a sense of seeking a new beginning was evident in those whose narratives exhibited a willingness to fully plant themselves in the university—or at least the appearance of such. For James, coming to MSU is a second chance after attending CU where he only “went through the motions.” He imagines that Bozeman is the “chill” that he needs. He has learned that he can’t “fake” who he is anymore, but realizes that there are certain expectations of the university. Mark shares that, although college is unfamiliar, he feels that his old place is routine and college is who he is “truly” meant to be. It is a chance for people like Rachel to “write her own story.” While the individual who is experiencing the transitional state of entering a “new beginning” appears to be moving toward a more positive or easier experience than those who are clinging to home, Bridges explains why even those who are in a perceived “good” transition still are faced with similar difficulties (21). When an individual has a new beginning it can surely be assumed that they have just faced some kind of an ending. Composing a hopeful, fresh-start narrative is still creating one of the imagined place: an anticipation of something better from which they came.

In several students’ writings, present state narratives also showed themselves as a form of assessment; a sort of mental, physical, and emotional check of wellbeing. Most students who wrote these narratives were goal focused—they realized that for their goals to be accomplished each of their places needed to be in check with the next. Kerry describes her current place as a “collaboration.” She realizes that her “personality,

attitude and perspective are all altered depending on the physical place [she] may be.”

She doesn't ignore her past or imagine this place is something better, but she uses her past places as a way to access her actions and notice patterns, hoping that this may lead to more knowledgeable choices in this place.

The “place” within me, on a mental level, is what I would define as my cognitive processes... For this “place” to be in a constant state of being steady is crucial because it has the ability to affect where I am in other forms of “place.” As of now I am suffering from a cold. My immune system is in a place of disarray and it combats to work this virus from my body. As for intelligence and the ability to make smart, healthy, decisions, I am at a higher level than I have felt I have ever reached before, this is intertwined with my physical place because now I have the freedom of being an adult and relying on myself which has caused a heightened sense of awareness about my mental “place.” As for emotionally, I have surprised myself with what “place” I currently entertain. I am filled with very opposing feelings, excited and stressed, full of energy and exhausted, content and worried. However not once have I yet felt homesick or disappointed with any of my decisions. It seems like every day I always have something new to keep me busy or look forward to that captures my attention. This positive emotional “place” has benefited all the aspects of who I am and what direction I will go and what “places” I will end up in the coming as well as more distant future.

In this response there is a recognition of the past, but not one of longing, as well as an acknowledgement of what is needed to function in this place so as to reach other places. Her mentioning her cold as having an effect on her other places shows her heightened sense of place awareness; she realizes each factor of her physical, mental and emotional being affects the next like dominoes. College is not one emotion or feeling, but constantly a combination both good and bad—more of a neutral state of being.

One student, Luke, a member of the AFROTC, shared a very different narrative from his fellow classmates that spoke to this place locating itself in the future. Unlike most students, his narrative rings with confidence. He “knows where he is heading in life

even though ...every adult would tell [him] otherwise.” By living mentally in the future he assumes he will not face similar difficulties other students will.

Another place that I am in is a place of always looking forward. I feel as though whenever I am doing something natural such as walking to class my mind always runs back to the future. I never enjoy being caught off guard, not many people do, so my mental state is also in the future. Sometimes I become so engrossed in what is ahead of me, what is to come, that I completely neglect the present.

His admittance of a “complete neglect of the present” shows him to be aware of the potential pitfalls of his perspective, yet he views this as better than what most eighteen year olds at college are choosing. Luke’s narrative shows what Neumann meant by identity formation through the confrontation with others (Tucker 270). He is able to be self assured in his future state because to be in a past or present state, as he sees his peers being situated in, is worse because neither is making choices that move a person toward an end goal. As the university is place in which the social plays a significant role in making it what it is, many students such as Luke, compare themselves with what they imagine the other students to be like. Just as Joe shared his thoughts on all students imagining they could be whatever they wanted, Joe too was participating in the act of constructing the university into what *he* imagined it to be. In her New Zealand tour package study, Tucker shares that in her collection of narratives from the younger tour group, unlike the older tour group, coming on the tour with forty people of a similar life stage “developed and enhanced these younger persons’ sense of ‘social self’” (272). Thus the place becomes only the backdrop for the performances or the trying on of identity roles which are about to transpire. This is a difficult reality for instructors or professors at

any level to grasp—the students are not in the same school, education, place, dream they are.

The importance of the social university is evident in most student narratives as they prepare for their upcoming “performances.” Several student place-narratives focus solely on the acquisition of friendships; in such narratives, successful transition to the university place is directly linked to social success. Savannah, who feels “lost” looks to orient herself socially: “I look at myself as an individual and try to figure out where I fit into society. Luckily, I feel like the place I am in gets better every day. Little things make this happen. A smile that is given when I walk by someone that I met the day before gives me a feeling of warmth.” Beth describes the overwhelming nature the social experience the university presents: “The place I am right now is surrounded by new faces everywhere I look. These new faces include: new friends, strangers walking past me, and new teachers too. It is interesting because we are all doing the same thing: looking for friends...” Notice, Rachel too imagines people in this place searching for something similar: friendships. In the constant search, there is also concern for how they come across as to others; a fear of being misinterpreted (this may be because they aren’t sure of who they are themselves). Charles shares that “The decisions that I make, make me and that is how I represent myself in a positive way and also gives no one any reason to not like me as a person. I don’t want people to judge anyone or me before they get to know them or myself...” As narratives like this demonstrate, the weight placed on becoming socially competent at the university brings to light the unseen university which students are just beginning to confront. Students in these social narratives of place envision a

place where people are connected to one another and function as community, and in arriving at the university, they look to immediately position themselves within it. Place, in these narratives, becomes the perceived social environment of the university.

A Process of Grieving

Whether students were discussing *this place* in terms of a past, perceived present, present or future self, *all* narratives show students to be in a state of change, with some contemplating transition and others in the beginning stages of transition. Bridges discusses how any change in life means the end of something before it means the beginning of anything. He encourages a “letting go” of the old before embracing the new, and this work is primarily internal where we “keep our connections to people and places that act as definitions of who we are” (11). It is almost a grieving process that students have to go through when coming to the college environment.

Similar to Elisabeth Kubler-Ross’ (1969) work on the process of grieving, in endings, Bridges finds five aspects that are present in a natural ending experience, which can also be linked to our students’ states of transition: 1) Disengagement from the things that were previously important. 2) Dismantling the old world we knew. 3) Disidentifying or letting go of the bonds we held to the person we once thought we were. 4) Disenchantment as to the discovery that some part of our world is no longer real. 5) Disorientation as what we once knew as signs of location are no longer available. For a person to fully arrive at a neutral state in which they can begin to accept the new, they must first transition through each of these stages, though there is no particular length of time in which it will take; several may even be happening at once. Each person will have

their own way of confronting change. However, the ignorance of a stage, or lingering too long, can make the process of a true transition impossible, as Bridges suggests we will continue to reenact our past selves rather than becoming the new person the situation calls for. A person has to fully come to terms with their loss before they can move on. The real task for students may be even noticing there was a loss of something in coming to college, even if the move was perceived as positive.

Within student narratives we can see students at all stages of the ending process—some recognizing their ending, their loss; others attempting to jump straight to their beginning without looking back. In this portion of the analysis I looked to how students discussed the place they came from in comparison to where they were now, attempting to notice an explicit recognition of an ending and then the phase of this ending they were most closely identified with at the time of this writing. In this prompt I did not ask students to talk about where they came from as they already did this; I asked them to describe this place. Without prompting, in coming to terms with this place, will there be a recognition of the past they just recently left behind?

Indeed many students couldn't avoid discussing their past, their ending, in this prompt as well. For some students, separating from a familiar social matrix such as parents or previous friends who were not agreeable to their current self was an opportunity that moving to college provided. Those in the stage of disengagement participate in an act of a shunning-like behavior in regard to their old way of life. Rachel who writes of college being "freedom" is abrupt in mentioning the freedom from "parents telling her what to do and how to act." Mark noticed that he is free here of expectations

that people held him to in high school. He found that his life back home consisted of “doing the same things with the same people.” Paul too shows his attempt at disengagement with his old way of life: “My original home was full of chaos with not one place to escape from it all. Here and now my place feels more at home with all the fun of a city and the chaos that comes with it, but also the bliss that comes with the ability to hide away from it all.” Possibly Paul hasn’t disengaged, but is only *hiding* from a place he knows he is still connected to. A true disengagement is something most students don’t indicate in their narratives. There is “talk” of separating, but still the signs are present of their own self recognition of an attachment whether they want it or not. For most students, needing to turn to home for financial assistance or emotional support does not allow for a complete disengagement; as Rachel who writes of freedom exhibits in the same narrative: her parents are “only a phone call away for help.”

In dismantling, I looked for students who appeared to be in the act of taking apart each aspect of their old life one at a time and examining it. Not many indicated such a process, but two of my students were willing to share their self examinations of the artifacts they were unearthing. Charles talks about his parents and their hit and miss approach to education, how they tried college for a while and dropped out. He finds this to be the reason he is so motivated to continue his education. Another, Allison, examines high school where clear markers were always provided. She was comfortable in this situation. Her high school teacher Mr. Albertson asked his students to write in a formal way and now because of being provided with clear expectations, she doesn’t know how to perform here where the expectations are not as clear. Her previous comfort has lead to

her current discomfort. Both students were able to view a previous part of their life analytically and link it to some current understanding of self.

Most of my students could be considered in the act of disidentifying. This is no surprise, as students anticipating college may begin the process of ending before arriving at school. If students have already gone through a process of disengaging and have examined their previous lives piece by piece, upon arriving at college they may find themselves immediately positioned in a state of no definition of self. Being prom queen or president of student council in high school is no longer applicable to a new place where no one expects that role of you. Ally, a student from a nearby town, writes how “College...has a *way* different feel than high school so it will take time getting used to because [she] was one of the fortunate ones to actually like high school, so the transition has been a little odd for [her].” Ally has had to leave behind a place she liked and the person she was in that place and take up this new space that is void of connection or understanding. The only contexts she knew have been removed from her life and this is how she was able to know herself. Suddenly, without high school she has to begin to confront the end of her previous self. Lara who is entering the competitive field of nursing says how college is a change from her old life where she had time to “live a life.” With the change, there is suddenly more responsibility than ever before. When she was younger she just lived in the moment, enjoying life. She wonders if she can *be* the nursing student she is going to need to identify with to stay here. Old identities in both cases are standing in the way of the transition to the new identity that could form.

Disenchantment for students happens in several ways. One is that they are disenchanted when their imagined college comes crashing down when the reality of the place becomes apparent; the other is a recognition that their old place wasn't what they had imagined as they had when they were in it, but see it differently now that they are away. Scott, a student who writes that he is "not a momma's boy, but still misses his family," shows how disenchantment can happen at any stage of an ending.

Everything about this place is new. The city, twenty times bigger than my hometown, is new. My room, which someone else calls their own as well, is new. My neighbors, sixty other people, are new. It's a scary thing to be exposed to, especially being from a place where my entire high school could fit in Leon Johnson Hall. Most people should be terrified by this, but I love it...It makes me realize how dull and unexciting my town is.

While one may think they can predict where this narrative is headed, we are given a different sentiment than imagined by the end of it: his new place has brought to light the flaws of his old place. For other students such as Ray, who has made the decision to live at home for his first semester, he still expresses "experiencing a dramatic change as the first week comes to an end [when he] realize[s] how much different college is from high school." In going back to his high school to pick up his diploma recently, it is then that he becomes disenchanted with it. Savannah shares her realization of the actual college experience: "I was so excited for college. Finally, I was able to make decisions for myself and feel all grown up. This excitement soon transformed into stress. I thought the dorms would be a lot of fun and social. Yes they are both, but I wasn't aware of the little quirks that came along with it." This *transition* Savannah experienced from excitement to stress is a sure indicator of her process of ending.

As noted earlier, physical and psychological disorientation is described in several student narratives. The reality that students have left in coming to college also harbored a sense of direction which no longer functions properly in their new reality; this can be a physical direction as much as it might be a sense of a moral direction. In Rachel's "freedom-themed" narrative she weighs her options in sort of a good vs. evil fashion in regard to the "path" that she wants to travel down: she can make right or wrong decisions, fail or pass, party or study—there is no one telling her which is correct so she attempts to orient herself by weighing them out and possibly trying them out. Kelsey too finds herself in limbo: "The place I find myself at now is lost and found at the same time. College is the place that seemed fitting to go but the fact that I don't know what I'm doing throws me for a loop sometimes...It feels wrong writing about my uncertainty of school to my teacher, but someone has to know." We can even look to her plea for someone to hear her struggles to recognize that this is steeped in the signs of disorientation—if she could speak to someone about her lost and found feelings she might be able to better navigate, it says. While for Terry it is matter of knowing how to get around physically that will help her inner state of disorientation: "Right now I am in a state of mind that is slightly confused and disoriented because I am still trying to figure out where all my classes are and the quickest routes to get there." Students may have begun the college experience feeling as if they were "going somewhere" but in entering the reality of the experience may actually feel as if they are no longer headed in a similar direction. This may be the result of them, in their previous reality, basing their "path" on

the directions of the imagined college or directions that were the same ones they used to orient themselves within whatever current reality they imagined college.

While most students' narratives could be linked to one or several stages of the ending process, there were some narratives in which no recognition of an ending was made. This could be for several reasons: one is that students have progressed through the ending process and are currently in a state of neutrality in arriving at college, and the other is that students are avoiding or don't even notice that a loss has occurred. One student of interest to me in my analysis was Kerry, who had shown the most present state in her writing compared to her classmates; she was able to most completely reflect on her current state. Yet her narrative hints at an avoidance of loss, a sort of moving forward without looking back. She shares that, "Every day I have something new to keep me busy or look forward to that captures my attention." She too mentions orientation and states that this "positive emotional place has benefited all the aspects of who I am and what direction I will go and what places I will end up in the coming, as well as more distant future." Keeping busy and moving forward are considered positive things in our society; the busier you are the less chance you have of making the wrong decisions. Luke who was discussed earlier as in a future state in his narrative also discusses the "multiple crossroads ahead [with]...chances to go array and destroy my future with bad decisions," but then he disregards the chance for other paths because he is "different from other college freshman [because]...he know[s] where he is heading in life."

Bridges views this notion of the ending process as one that is not enjoyable even if the surrounding circumstances appear to be. In getting to a point of separating from a

past, analyzing, letting go of an old self, losing the rose colored lens, and getting lost, a person is ready to empty themselves for a period of time which is considered a neutral zone. As Frost says, you have to “get lost enough to find yourself.” But as Bridges points out, emptiness is not something many people embrace or seek, yet it may be just what they need. Narratives like Kerry and Luke’s may first be interpreted as the right attitude toward the college experience—*always look to the future to reach your goals*. These are the students who will most likely excel in the college experience and then move on to the next place in life with the same approach. And they will be rewarded for their constant eye on the next better thing. This narrative is one that is usually ignored—there is no need for attention because nothing is “wrong” with it—they aren’t struggling. These students are not holding on to a past, but they may not even be acknowledging a past. Bridges suggests that “the most important differences between a change and a transition is that changes are driven to reach a goal, but transitions start with letting go of what no longer fits or is adequate to the life stage you are in.” And a person needs to know “what exactly that no-longer-appropriate thing is” (128). They need to confront the emptiness that is the start of a new identity.

Through analysis of initial student narratives in which they write about the place they are at now, location of a current “place” is a matter of both perception and priority. Writing about place serves as a ground on which students can work toward locating themselves. This place, to most, wasn’t the university, it was their sense of self that became their object of analysis. It was as if the question was “How do you fit into this place?” rather than, “What do you know about the place you are in right now?” It also

translates into: What do you know about yourself? Student responses show them actively working through identity constructions prompted by their state of transition to this place. A student of mine who had returned from eight years in Afghanistan shared in class discussion one day that he hadn't taken the time in the last eight years to think about who he was and just now was he starting to contemplate such things; it was as if his identity was on hold. Just as in Tucker's study of package tour participants, narratives of place in this classroom were based on the role of self in the place rather than the place (280).

The analysis of the narratives brought to light the situation that was created by having students *write* their thoughts on place. Written narratives allowed for a unique perspective on my part of student's thinking. Unlike a verbal narrative, students could reflect as they wrote and revise before they turned it in to me. Writing, in a way, made permanent their thoughts at that moment in time. While students may have had a change in idea as soon as they finished writing, it did make me wonder if students were able to make themselves believe they were in a certain place simply through the act of writing it down. Because they told themselves, *this* is what is this place is, it is what they worked to make it become. And as a result of the imagined place students created, in one classroom, we have students who were working to make the university their home, some their place to start over and make themselves anew, while others were here to be somewhere else. With priorities of family, fitting in, having fun and reaching future dreams, the university serves multiple roles for students when they first arrive at college. I looked forward to how these narratives would or would not transform throughout the semester in which they would be affected by my pedagogical approach and the experiences of the

university that were to happen outside of the classroom. In a lot of ways, my pedagogy of place was in direct conflict to the place that students first envisioned—what would they do with it?

Second Collection of Student Narratives

In this section I discuss the narratives collected from early in the semester in which students respond to the prompt: *How does place affect your writing?* I explain how student narratives indicate the substantial power they believe place has over their writing. I also question and provide a preliminary explanation of the role of transition in the process of writing.

Place's Effect on the Writer

Once students had settled into the class structure, and into the idea that they would be writing about themselves and the places they encounter, I thought it essential to ask about their relationship to writing. In a pre-write to their Literacy Reflection, I asked to students to write about how place affects their writing as a way to get them thinking about how their personal writing process happens. In answering the question, many students discussed place in a way that implied a certain lack of control over a place's effect on their writing. It was as if they were powerless as writers to the conditions created by the place.

Place, to many students, is an active force either working with or against their process of writing. Kerry discusses places, both conceptual and physical coming together: “All of these places merge to create a piece of writing that is usually stiff and somewhat

forced.” The place *merges* and it *creates*. For Savannah, place puts up a barrier: “I actually think that “place” or audience could prevent some people from writing to the deepest amount they are able to.” She envisions it actually stopping people from writing a certain way. It is implied that the ideal place is required to write well. Will too shares his occasional struggle with place: “Normally, I will produce the same quality of work no matter where I work but it definitely helps if the place where I am allows me to think properly.” The place has to *allow* for a certain type of thinking. Terry, who relates the impact of travel on her writing, expresses a physical place which played a part in her writing ability. “Greece let me see how beautiful other parts of the world are but also showed me how to express my feelings though letters.” Greece, the teacher, *showed* her written expression. Jake, on the other hand, sees place as a non-active force that harbors unseen powers over his writing: “For this reason, I must plan carefully where I am when I begin writing, just so that I can get more of the good and less of the bad from the atmosphere.” Whether place is actively or passively playing a part in the writing process of students, it is a force that students see as a major factor in their process and eventual product.

This perceived powerful nature of place on the writer led me to also wonder how transition to new places had effect on student writing. If students were in a disidentification stage of the ending process, would they be able to develop say, a voice, for a writing assignment? Or if they were internally disoriented, would organization of ideas also suffer? Terry’s narrative on how place affects her writing is a fascinating

image of a person whose writing becomes a reflection of a recently performed transition on a trip to Greece a year and a half previous.

Starting a month before I left I had been fighting with my mom almost every night, something that never happens. My mom and I have the best and closest relationship I have ever seen. While I was in Greece I had a lot of time alone with my thoughts on plane rides, bus rides, and on the cruise ship. During these long spurts of time I thought about [how] I had been treating people in my life, ending the trip with balling my eyes out in the Frankfurt airport to my friend apologizing for how I had treated her, my family and all of my friends. When we got home my English teacher had us write a paper about what we learned on the trip. My paper took on a letter format, apologizing to my ex-boyfriend who had always been a good friend to me and my mom.

Not only is this a prime example of a person in a life transition (it probably wasn't coincidental that her change in behavior lined up with a year before a major transition to college), it shows the transition's effect on her school writing assignment—a place that a letter format to an ex-boyfriend may seem somewhat out of place. And the audience is no longer the teacher, but the ex-boyfriend. Ironically, it also showed the neutrality the experience of travel provided her; she was able to re-access her past place because of her distance from it and time provided for emptiness. If we consider our students as constantly in transition, as they are in a new classroom place each year, with different expectations and identities to discover, then their writing will not only be affected by their transition, it will tell the story of their transition. Maya was a student of mine who didn't show any sign of a process of ending in her initial narratives. It was in her Literacy Reflection however, that she began to tell the story of why: several months prior to her coming to college her boyfriend died in a car accident. While she was writing a Literacy Reflection, she actually was in the process of another ending that was not one of her

home place, and this was what she wrote about amid her describing her writing and reading. We can consider Murray's notion that "All Writing is Autobiography," but it is life's *changes* that can make some writing *more* autobiographical than others.

In an average college classroom, Maya may have been told she didn't respond correctly to the prompt, she would receive a lower grade as a result, and maybe, she should go visit with a counselor. If place has power over writing, then transitioning to a new place one doesn't know and being asked to write within it, could be an experience that renders writers completely powerless. This is especially the case within a system that works under the notion that educational transition is the only transition that one needs.

Third Collection of Student Narratives

In this section I continue to discuss the role of importance the social University holds in student narratives. In a section of the course in which we are discussing Gee's notion of a Discourse community I ask students to respond to the prompt: *How does the University function as a discourse?* I explain that by commenting on Gee's ideas is a way for me to see student's own transition to the University discourse. In my findings I show that there are students at this point who are still writing about the imagined University and those who are being to grapple with the reality of the University, which I suggest they show through questioning their old identities. In conclusion I suggest that it is time for emptiness away from the forces of the place of the social University that can allow students to obtain a state of neutrality that is needed to transition to this place where learning can happen, and propose that this can be accomplished through writing.

New Aspects of the Self are Formed

By mid semester my students in WRIT 101 are beginning to become accustomed to the notion of sharing what they write with their classmates and myself, as well as comfortably participating in discussion. Just as in any classroom, students begin to adjust to their surroundings, they learn how to *be* in this community, just as Gee proposes one might acquire what he calls a Discourse—a “saying(writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combination” (6). In *learning* though, students are not experts: each individual’s writing and classroom discussion shows a myriad of personas, opinions, and overall identities being tried on for size. Even the intentional choice of where a student sits in regard to others in the class is a reflection of this role play.

Gee’s notion of a primary, or a home Discourse, as one which must be set aside in the attempt to claim secondary Discourses or truly “liberating literacies,” is comparable to what is meant in Bridges’ suggestion that one must go through the *process* of transition, leaving behind their old identity, to truly be free to experience the new. The idea of Discourse is something that is introduced to students in WRIT 101; for most, it is the first time. As a result, students have to come to terms with ideas that are directly related to their current internal state; as students are reading and discussing Gee’s “identity kit,” or a sort of theatrical costume and character, they are engaged in this very act themselves. Just as we hear of the role that one is required to accept in travel. In travel there are no familiar points of identification within the symbolic domain one is passing through; thus the traveler is thrown into a “state of “outsiderhood,” situationally or temporarily set apart from the social system” (White and White 202). As we do not want

our students to be merely travelers or worse, passengers, starry-eyed and gazing at the sights, but instead truly living with them, knowledge of Discourse acquisition is suggested by Gee so that students become “insiders” to the University community.

Curious as to how students are confronting overt suggestions as to how transition can occur, I asked them to respond to Gee’s article by writing about how the University functions as a Discourse community. In considering the University as a Discourse, students are commenting on the nature of the University as place as they see it from their two months in residence and as well as how they perceive acquisition to the University Discourse to occur. Again, they are asked to describe the University as a Discourse, but if the previous narratives are an indicator, I will be able to hear how their own identity is either transitioning into or acquiring the University Discourse.

At this point in the semester, some students are beginning to recognize the “reality” of the University, while some are still creating a picture of the symbolic or imagined University—the University that is composed of those who are here to study and be successful and those who are here to party and will fail. While there might be some accuracy in this belief, students are still creating generalizations in an attempt to show a complete grasp of what college is. In these narratives specifically, students show college to be black and white; as one student put it: if a person attends games, wears Bobcat apparel, shows up to class, and spends time in the outdoors, you *are* a college student. To this student, this appears to be all that it takes. Gee might note that just by doing what others are doing does not necessarily result in successful acquisition of the discourse.

To other students, the University is a place they can say *something* about in regard to Discourse, but do not attempt to locate it fully as they did at the beginning of the semester; rather, in being a part of the University they accept its complexities. Scott recognizes the danger of attempting to fit into the imagined University: “The stereotype of college kids might pressure students to act this way to fit in. If you start to think of college as a discourse, it might give you an identity that you are not accustomed to.” Rachel too makes evident her awareness of what it means to accept the stereotypical nature of certain college discourses: “...the athletes on campus are thought to be the popular people...this is a general statement that our society is made to believe, not my opinion.” Both students are no longer accepting the symbolic or stereotypical elements of the University “society is made to believe.” Students here show evidence of “coming into their own,” by making statements of rejection in regard to what society thinks. In one sense, students are saying what the discourse is by saying what it is not, but in another sense, there is still a recognition of the power that the symbolic University Discourse holds.

On a relevant side note, I find the words students wrote privately to me on this topic to be somewhat contrary to classroom discussion. In discussing ideas of university-wide issues for the Campus Issues Project, I suggested the possibility of certain components of athletics as an issue, as there had been many recent writings in regard to this and pointed out several scenarios. In doing this, I did not foresee the strength of “the social self” in how students would respond to this. Positioned in the front row of the classroom were two football players who are regularly the first to speak in class

discussion. The class as a whole disagreed with any of the issues I brought up, as if they were not issues, but faults of the people who had brought them to the attention of others. Several students who were not in athletics then defended football specifically, explaining to me how *not* supporting football was actually the issue. While students took a position of attempting to identify with me or the author of an article in writing, while in class, being part of the student discourse was much more important and again showed the significance of the social self students are looking to identify at this time. To agree with me that there may be any sort of issue with athletics would be a social failure on their part—one that several students expressed no concern over in writing, but avoided in discussion.

While some students openly questioned “fitting in” within their narratives and viewed it negatively, other students saw it as an opportunity to reflect on how they could try on new aspects of themselves and attempt to become a part of the University. Savannah was able to grapple with the concept of Discourse when she viewed it as “some sort of play script that we must try to follow as closely as possible in order to fit in.” As Tate sees it, “the only way to describe transition from any sort of learning environment to the University, would be through Discourse....the University is a new environment that requires a tweaked Discourse to have any sort of success through the rigid journey to acquiring a degree.” Both see nothing “wrong” with the pre-established University Discourse and are willing to “follow the script” and “tweak” themselves in order to become a part of it. As Kate puts it, before she came she was a “fish out of water,” but

now she must change in order to “swim with the other small fish” and that by doing this, she “will succeed in this new world.”

“Fitting in” to these students is directly correlated to success—the meaning of success to each is different, to Savannah it is friendships, to Kate it is academic. Even so, *not fitting in* was viewed as aptly equal to success to others. Again, it is a matter of perception. The variability in perception is evident also in how students regard time at the University within this narrative. Kevin views the college experience as long enough in which he envisions himself changing: “college is just one place where a person could be for a long period of time that is very different from their comfort zone.” While Ray does not envision change possible, as the time is too short: “College, as a secondary discourse, I do not think can be mastered in the amount of time most students spend at it.” Both at the same university, both with the same actual amount of time, though each views the time involved, as well as what identity change involves, differently.

There is a definite sense of leaving behind the “ways of old” in both the narratives of those who deny the University Discourse and those who accept it. While denial may seem to indicate a holding on to the past, it is clear in their distinction that it is *society’s* lens that they are denying, that they view themselves as removed from something they were once part of. In the narratives of those who are choosing to accept a new Discourse by way of figuring out how to acquire it, they are acknowledging a letting go of an identity that was acceptable elsewhere, but not in the new environment. Thus both of these narrative types are engaging in the process of transition through their questioning of some previously known self.

Who is not in transition then or struggling to recognize it as such? As noted previously, the theme of *home* was reoccurring throughout the semester. Mention of home does not necessarily mean that students are not in a process of working through their internal transition—it can mean that they are very much in the process, but still need more time to consider their loss. Most students indicate the latter to be the case, all while showing that they are working toward their new beginning. At this point in the semester, students such as Kate who were very home-centered at the start of the semester show how they are coming to rely on the past less as a reality and more as a memory.

My personal primary discourse or the places which I am most comfortable are with my family and friends. According to Gee this is very common, but then I threw myself into the college world. At Montana State University, I did not have my original family and friends at first. My whole world became secondary. This could be why many students end up dropping out of college the first year...yet as time goes on I feel more and more at home...in meeting my new friends in college, my primary discourse is finally beginning to resurface.

There is a noticeable amount of process going on in Kate's narrative. First, she notices how she now sees her initial state of being at college as "very common." Her description of "throwing" herself into the college world indicates a recognition of a sudden and violent change, at which point she acknowledges her loss of family and friends. She then steps back and makes the association between her state and the pattern of others. The key point of interest in this though, is when she attempts to make this place home and her primary discourse is able to "resurface." Bridges may step in at this point and caution allowing the way of life that is most familiar to Kate to resurface. While Kate may see this as a good thing, it may not be allowing her the identity growth a transition

like college has to offer. Travelers who take to the road so that they can feel just like they do at home are missing the very notion of travel.

Another route individuals may take when dealing with transition according to Bridges, is for them to “turn away from the opportunities for development provided by transition and instead deal with the times of transition as temporary and accidental disruptions in an otherwise stable life” (Bridges 38). Unlike my student Kevin who views college as something of great length in which a person will go through immense change, other students such as Ally view college as another step along the path: “When I think of the university as a discourse, I think of it as just another place in my life.” Comparing one place in life to another may serve to orient one’s self initially, but long term comparison may result in missing the place as well as the person you are in respect to that specific place, completely. Ally was a student who, at the beginning of the semester, shared that she was one of the few who liked high school and college was a considerable change that she was not quite comfortable with yet. Making a statement to the tune of *just another place* may serve as a way of coping with the change, by first repressing it and then passing it off as something of less significance. If college can become another high school it may appear to be familiar territory in which she can renew a previous sense of self.

What is still unknown in these narratives is whether students could be experiencing a neutral state in which they can embrace a new beginning or if they are still in the initial stages of transition still dealing with their ending—it is a fine, invisible line between the two, and as Bridges explains, it is not a linear process. Some may be well on

the process toward accepting their new identity when another, unexpected, change occurs in their life, adding layers of new complexities to the original transition. Also important to consider, is that students may put on the appearance of transition because it is what they see others around them in the process of, or, it is what they are *expected* to do when they come to college: *When I was in college I...* What is of use, is the realization that performances are essential to discourse acquisition as students themselves admit and exhibit. When Rachel proposed during class investigating the discourse of marijuana users for her Discourse Community Project, she did so confidently, but later confided that she wasn't sure if that was what she *really* wanted to do. When she stepped away from the heat of the classroom stage she was given the time she needed to think. She later assured herself and myself that she could indeed do it (after which I cautioned her to be safe). In choosing a topic such as marijuana, Rachel's sense of her old self or primary discourse may be in conflict with this new secondary discourse she is considering entering into, whether is the discourse of marijuana itself or just an identity with the class of a certain "edginess," causing her uncertainties of which "Rachel" she wants to be in this situation.

What if we afforded students that time to think during class? And if we did, can they actually remove themselves from the need to perform? While writing to think is not a new pedagogical concept, *writing to transition* is afforded little notice except in the form of expressivist journaling. Through the act of writing students may be able to locate the neutral zone that is needed to "empty" or "quiet" themselves that is not allowed for during the busy process of identity reconstruction, as was shown by their change in

tone/persona from a written reflection to a classroom discussion. If, for some reason, I had chosen to collect student narratives of place by verbally interviewing students while they were in class, I would have probably accumulated a very different, yet still valuable story of students and place. Students in performance may show the act of transition through identity play, but not until they are free of the constraints of the stage can we get a feel for how a student assesses and feels about their identity performances. Of course, in responding to my prompts, students are writing not only to themselves, but to a teacher, in which the need for performance may also be felt. For this reason, I did not attach a grade to these writings, only credit, and worked to develop the sense of trust that is crucial for actual learning to occur.

Fourth Collection of Student Narratives

In the final section of this chapter I discuss the results of the final narratives collected in the course in which I ask my students again to reflect on what they know now about this place. With answers claiming total acceptance of the place, I briefly describe the lack of depth and sharing of internal thoughts students display compared to their previous reflections in the course. I suggest that this may be a result of students' need to transition out of the ideas this course has focused on, and that their need to transition disappears with their need to write about transition. I conclude by suggesting that courses that are place-based and thus encountering transitioning students, notice when the focus of the course needs transition as well.

New Beginnings at an Ending

Contrary to how I envisioned this analysis of student narratives, the most fruitful data appears to be from students' beginning of the semester and mid-semester writings, rather than their writings at the end of the semester. While I initially had my eyes on the beginning to end transformation—the monumental change I was hoping for upon completion of my course, I almost missed the quiet, but important moment of students “getting acquainted” with a new place, and the varying degrees and methods to which all students do this. By the end of the semester, in written narratives I heard more of a collective body of students who were on equal footing with one another.

When asked “What they know about this place, now?” student narratives at the end of the semester gave less personal and detailed insight into their life and responded with the voice of a person who belongs to a place, rather than someone who is still getting to know it. In simple, short responses, they claim they are “comfortable,” “confident,” and “aware.” They feel “good” about writing in college and realize that it is going to get more difficult and it is going to change, but they can too. They have “friends and acquaintances in this place” and many even say they plan to stay. Maya shares a sentiment on the end of the imagined University: “The place goes deeper than just looks and thoughts. It is much more than it appears.” Where did the lengthy contemplations of their identity and society go? In a sense, I got the response I wanted by the end of the semester, students are comfortable with this place, they want to stay—yet, oddly, I find myself dissatisfied.

What if the lack of writing and pat answers has less to do with how students actually feel about this place and more to do with students no longer needing to use writing to work through this specific transition to the University? At some point, students need to let go of being in a new place, they need to be in that place. I need to let go too. The course has come to an end, students have discussed the University-as-a-place to no end and have explored their thoughts and opinions toward it. Just as in any transition process, at some point, the processing needs to thin and allow for new births. I may or may not have gotten students to a position of accepting the University and working toward living well within it—students may do this naturally on their own without the assistance of a place-based course, but this course may have provided a place where transition could be assisted through the act of writing. And with the transitioning coming to an end, so does the writing. A place-based course that plays the role of acquainting students to a new place needs to be able to recognize when it is time to move on.

Another reason for my initial dissatisfaction may be that while student writings show them all to be in a stage of accepting their new beginning, they may actually be in a state of neutrality, where they will remain through their time at college. In internal processing, there are no clear answers. Neutrality, in our society has come to imply a certain stuckness or indecision, but as I now believe, a time of emptiness can also be a time of continued growth, not necessarily the absence of such. In White and White's analysis, travel appeared to provide a time of neutrality where a person could explore endless possibilities of the self. Maybe this is where the college as a temporary and yet, permanent place, fits into all of this. It is a new beginning for those who choose to

completely engage their being while they are within it, but it is also a neutral place, floating apart from the strings of the past and future, where multiple identities can be explored.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Upon analyzing student narratives from this place-based Writing 101 course we are left with an image of the *new college student* who is busy taking in sensory information and feedback from their surroundings, making sense of it by comparing it to where they came from and then making their own contributions to the University's social structure through performances—similar to an individual during the experience of travel. We are left with the image of the *college instructor* who is trying to figure out how to reach students who appear at times to be in another place. How can students and instructors begin a course each in different places?

I turned to my own recent change in life to begin to answer this. When I moved to Bozeman two years ago as student I *imagined* I was moving to Bozeman for school, a *temporary* experience. Being busy with the demands of teaching and studying, I did not realize what I had left behind because I didn't think I had left anything; *how could I leave something when I wasn't really in a new place*—I could go back to Billings any time I wanted and pick up my old life right where I had left off.

Places change a person though and people change places. I met who would become my husband, we were married and suddenly, I realized I was staying in *this* place longer than I had originally anticipated. This illustrates the idea that place is not static, it is dynamic, as it is something a person can take with them. As a result, I found myself having to go through the process of actually letting go of my previous self and the places that I came from in order to find out who I was in this new place. It was in the process of *writing* about transitions that I realized I was going through a major one myself. Just like

my students, I had to feel the insecurity that comes along with being lost before I could truly be found. The temporary place of the University as it is for students *became* a more permanent place, as it is for instructors. This example illustrates how the perception of a place defines it as much as the location.

To many, the mistake is that we are a temporary, “lost in transition” society—we are placeless because we can’t sit still. What if though, we are creating the situation of placelessness in our language concerning place? Within education specifically, our mistake is in our failure to recognize that instructors and students can be in two different places, causing a gap in understanding the needs of the other. We understand what place means to us, but no to our students. The other half of the mistake here for the University, as well as society at large, is in accepting the belief that we *are* a temporary, “lost in transition” sort of society, a belief in which temporary places don’t require transition. This leads to constantly moving forward through one new place after another with no regard to our inner places—the ones crying “placeless” we allow to go unheard. It is *not* that we are placeless physically—we are placeless *psychologically* because we never allow ourselves to come to terms with how a place is asking us to change. And when we don’t, we feel like the place doesn’t fit who we are, so we move on. We try another place on for size and will most likely find that it just doesn’t fit.

Attending a University is becoming more and more of a necessary transition for individuals—it is both expected and promoted. It is a transition that pulls students from their roots and then asks them to continue forward full speed ahead. The closest comparison we can make of this situation is that it is like travel or migration, yet neither

of these can fully explain the complex situation that the place of the University creates for students. We can know that it is the start of something new, but we rarely notice that it is the end of something. And in ignoring the place that new students to the University are entering, we are losing a sense of this place.

Place-based education is increasingly becoming appealing to educators and communities: it attempts to take the weary, over-worksheeted student and enliven their minds with what is relevant to where they find themselves. It finally allows them the chance, and maybe the only chance, to learn about their surroundings, before either their surroundings are gone or they are. Place-based education is like a meditation for the West; *being aware of the present, I know I am*. Ever since Europeans relocated to North America and continued this trend across the vast expanses of new land, always needing to move to the next best place, education has needed to find the resting place, where there is pause enough to find place. While some provide it only as a rest, others intend to leave lasting paths back to the place. We like to imagine that there is one path, back to one place: home. Yet today our paths are muddied from the many travels we engage in to places that are temporary, and eventually, we find even *home* to become less permanent than we once imagined. The need for place-based education is evident, but how and where do we begin?

When designing a place-based course, it is important to begin by acknowledging that what a place means to an instructor may be different than what means for students. In the creation of a place-based University course, I initially imagined a University myself. It was one that was somewhat permanent—there was something consistent about it, yet

by nature it was always changing. I imagined that this University could be taught. I imagined that my students were entering the same place I found myself in. My definition of place needed to be broadened. To my students, this permanently temporary University did not exist. The University that they found themselves coming into was an initiator of transition, a stage on which their identities could be explored, a place to begin and end several times over. The University was the absence of something, while it was the birth of something else. The University as a place was about them. In a course I assumed we would be learning about place, we learned about ourselves—which is really the only reason place exists. Which leads me to advise: *When we teach place, we can't forget about the people.*

My students needed time in this course. They needed the chance to figure out where they were before academic learning could occur. Typically, when we are designing a course for college students we might first consider what the overarching goals are, what objectives will help them meet those goals, what books will be read, papers will be written, what will give them a sense of the area of study—we might consider what previous knowledge a student may have. What may *not* get considered is the transition that a student will have to go through to actually be present in a course—to truly engage with the texts and ideas. We need to consider what Bridges so aptly suggests to us, “... Some of the feelings [we] experience today have nothing to do with the present ending but are a product, instead, of the resonance set up between situations in [our] present and those of [our] past” (14). If we continue to plan our courses, especially those based on place, in a way that dismisses the past as behind us, we may end up with a product that is

unfamiliar, and not only to us, but to our students. Transition processing in education is necessary because students need to know where they came from before they can know where they are going. They need a chance to grieve their loss before embracing the high volume of new information we throw at them and ask them to automatically accept.

Consider how students in WRIT 101 noticed the power that place held over their writing. They knew that the environment in which they surrounded themselves could change how they felt and in turn, how they wrote. Some recognized specifically that it was about their mental place more than anything. In this recognition, they are so close to tapping into another source of learner's block: the effect that transition has on their whole person. Just as I called attention to place's effect on their writing through having them write about it, what if attention were called to the process of transition and how this too holds the possibility to greatly affect their abilities as learners?

Given the context that I was in was a Writing 101 course, although this study aims for broader applications within education, it is first pertinent to briefly discuss specifically what complimenting writing curriculum with transitional methods does for student writing and their understanding of themselves as writers. It needs to be mentioned that the role of teacher in a transitionally-oriented classroom is quite unlike that of the student. A person amid a transition is not always as aware of the effects the transition may have on them as a trained outsider who is able to link specific actions to that of transitional stages.

Foremost, the course instructor is a catalyst in the process of student writing through their *response* to student writing. An instructor can use written and verbal

comments on student writings which respond directly to a student's stage of transition. For example, a student's writing is indicating that they are in a process of ending, specifically in a stage of disorientation. Perhaps, they not only write about being disoriented, but their work is a reflection of this and is poorly organized. An instructor can comment in a way that is first: aware that their transition may be a key factor in how they are writing and second: promoting a way of thinking about their writing that may lead to the next stage in their process.

Secondary, for student's understanding of themselves as writers, transition as a concept can be introduced as a sort of side note—it should not be the focus of the writing curriculum. Students can learn about transition in conjunction with learning about their writing process. Students can write about their writing experience as a way to understand how the act of writing happens for them and then write about how life changes have affected their writing. Students could collect writings from throughout their life, as was done in their literacy reflection project, and then write about what was happening in their life at the period in which it was written. Through this, students can become aware of how their life context directly influences their writing, and hopefully they will be more accepting of their process as a writer and a person—allowing themselves greater power over it.

In any educational context, transition as a learning tool needs to consider the place that students are coming into—whether it is a place they have lived for a long time or one in which they are brand new. The University as a place is much different from other places; as stated before, one way we can view it is likened to the experience of travel. If

college is a place that provides a sense of neutrality like travel, we need to ask ourselves if we are providing students the time for emptiness, time to look out the window and actually think about who they are and where they have been and are going. Or is college just a time to try on new identities for students, no transition provided—a sort of hit and miss approach? The appearance of slowing down in a place like the University is not typically a welcome sight, but a true sense of place and learning can only happen when we have transitioned. How can we best use transition as a *learning tool* though?

We must begin by using what we already ask students to do: write. How it is different from how we already go about this is that it needs to be in line with their process of transition. Through the act of creating written narratives of place in a course such as WRIT 101, students have been able to engage in the psychological act of transitioning both as a student and a writer, as college requires both transitions to occur. While reflecting on their writing, students are also reflecting on the places they came from and the place where they are right now. And through writing, they are able to do this without the pressure of performing that classroom social spaces encourage, essentially allowing the writer a break from the stress of peer-oriented identity construction. Writing for transition to occur, however, is not something that is partial to the writing classroom. Introductory courses across the University, elementary teachers looking to initiate community values from the start or junior high teachers preparing their students for the move to high school—any time that an educational shift in location or thinking is about to occur, students' transitional processes should be acknowledged.

By incorporating Bridges' ideas of transitions into any place-based course, including those at a University, may allow students the time to process and not force a new way of being on them without finding out who they are in this place first. Writing is an act that gets at us in the most intimate of ways, thus an education that ignores the person and their need to transition, will not serve to benefit the student. For this notion of transition acquisition to occur in a course, the place a course is located needs to be recognized and this can be done through the design of a place-based course. By aligning Brooke's guiding principles of place-based education, which are ripe for allowing natural transition, alongside specific transition initiating activities such as writing, any classrooms can foster an environment of real learning in which students are present enough to the material that they are about to learn.

Teachers are going to have to restructure their curriculum to accommodate for the time required to transition through new ideas. If they can locate students in either a stage of ending, beginning or neutrality as was done in this study, they can tailor their assignments and class discussions according to these stages within the process of transition. This will require that teachers are trained to recognize this process and the stages that accompany it, and be able to address each as it occurs. Teachers will have to perform *active* classroom assessments, (this can be written, verbal, or observational) to be able to meet student's individual needs. This may require that a standard classroom curriculum be allowed more flexibility to spend time where needed. If students can reach a process in their transition where they are "experiencing the weight of reality" and are present to the place of the classroom they may be able to progress in their learning more

rapidly than when transition is neglected. While this may seem unreasonable in our current educational system, these recommendations are meant to demonstrate how transition in a place-based pedagogy in particular is not only possible, but needed. *All pedagogies* though can benefit from such a shift in perspective.

Before I get too far off on this idea of a place-based, transition-centered educational pedagogy shift the reality of such a pedagogy needs to be taken into account. First, just as any pedagogy that considers the person before the content, and feelings before “facts,” comes up against opposition from those who deem it inappropriate for an environment of high academic standards, so too will a pedagogy that ties *transition* onto the end of *place*. Place-based education is just beginning to become accepted in wider academic circles and the “self-help” ridden language of transition may initially cause some to back away. But just as any discipline in the University knows firsthand, times change. In a lot of ways, we tend to be moving toward more user-friendly approaches to learning. The place-based education format will need to make the transition as well, to a broader definition of place, a recognition of not only the place, but the learners within it, and a respect for their need to transition into the ideas, the places they are attempting to acquaint themselves with.

And finally, we need to know to what degree the transition process is needed. If we attempt a place-based course for college seniors, it is obvious in many ways that it needs to be different from one we design for college freshman. What may *not* be obvious is that for freshman major transitioning to *both* place and ideas needs to be accomplished, while for seniors transitions only need to be made to new ideas. By not recognizing when

students have internally “moved on” from our ideas, we lose the personal connections and insights that students offer when they are connected. It is not the only the students who are transitioning to our course, the course needs to also transition to the places of the student.

In suggesting a place pedagogy that seems to take a detour from the traditional, proposing that we make a place what it is through internal effort, in no way does it mean we should lose sight of the idea of calling a place home. Even if home is just in our imagination, it is appealing to us in so many ways. The theme song from Cheers “Where Everybody Knows Your Name,” accurately captures our longing for such a place.

*Making your way in the world today
Takes everything you got
Taking a break from all your worries
Sure would help a lot
Wouldn't you like to get away?*

Getting away is synonymous with the notion of home—get away to a place where you are who you want to be and where everyone knows who you are. Isn't it funny, and all to true that we need to get away to be at home. That place of home is only home when you aren't there. When we *are* home we aren't imagining home—which is what home is: an idea of a well-known place in our imagination that is made even richer by our story-like internal narrative. We must leave home to know home. As Tuan remarks, only when we know a place from the outside, can we feel the “weight of reality.” If we are ever going to have that “sense of place” we are all longing for, we have to leave our places in more ways than one.

We know what it is like to leave something. Many of us were once a student like Savannah, sitting in her dorm room, “lingering in a place trying to make sense of everything...feeling as if life has suddenly been turned upside down.” We remember what it felt like to be in that place of feeling lost and alone our first few days at school. It is a point in time when the University is more of a space and less of a place. But going back to college, *in my memory*, I’m pretty sure it was the best time of my life. Reading my journals though, I’m reminded of a different story.

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