

Reading Practices and Perceptions of College Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

Undergraduate perceptions and practices for reading are important to how they interact with information both in and out of class. Undergraduate reading is underresearched and underrepresented in rhetoric and composition scholarship. This research attempts to fill that gap through analysis of five student surveys on their reading practices and perceptions. This survey was followed up by a focus group to collect a breadth of student reading experiences.¹ I overview literature on the topic of undergraduate reading practices and perceptions, describe the method(ology) of the research, describe my own positionality as a researcher, analyze the survey /focus group data, and conclude with recommendations for future research and a synthesis of what can be learned from the study.

¹ This research was funded by The Reading Project at Miami University. The Reading Project is an interdisciplinary group of faculty that came together to study reading perceptions and practices of undergraduate students.

Introduction

Reading is changing rapidly. Undergraduate students' practices and perceptions of reading evolve as they encounter diverse reading situations. In an age of reading acceleration and accumulation (Keller 2013), the monolithic view of reading and "deep reading" as best practice, propagated by many faculty in higher education, does not support today's students in critically analyzing and engaging in 21st century rhetorical reading. I argue that reading focus groups conducted in locally situated college communities can help to reveal the perceptions and practices of undergraduate readers in today's climate and offer a path to guide change in each reading community. Through a mixed-methods study using a survey and focus group of five university students², I identify, describe, and contextualize diverse participant experiences so that instructors might acknowledge the varied and changing practices and perceptions of undergraduate student readers.

I am a graduate student in English, specializing in rhetoric and composition. My mother is an elementary school teacher with a specialization in English and Education. Lately, we've been excited to discuss and share knowledge about our experiences in coursework and working with students. On a recent weekend trip home, we told stories about our experiences with learning to read. I recounted experiences with sight words, word walls, and phonics. She told

² Four total focus groups with a combined total of 20 students were included. This paper reports on only one group of 5 students, with a pre-survey and the focus group data.

stories of her early education in reading and gave some examples of her students' experiences. The difference in our reading education became apparent and that sparked a look into the history and literature around reading. While she could readily recount scholars in the field of English and Education, I was left scrambling between some popular news sources and a smaller body of scholarship. Despite both studying English, our familiarity with the literature on reading was notably disparate. While education scholars have done valuable work to understand reader development, much of the work centers early learners and basic comprehension skills. The work that has been done in composition often takes a cultural and continuing skill development approach but is often eclipsed by developing writing skills. This concerns me as faculty expectations for reading change by discipline, context, and level. Students are effectively taught a monolithic, mechanistic view of reading in their early education yet still expected to adapt to the reading practices of whichever community with which they are engaged. These differences in reading perceptions and practices may be better understood and taught with the understandings and sensibilities in modern scholarship on rhetoric and composition.

Different populations, especially across disciplines in academia, differ in their needs for reading texts. As such, their instruction should acknowledge the diversity of practices necessary for “good” reading. A literature course, as many scholars in English know, might require a deep and reflective or slow reading of a text. However, in business analytics or data-informed contexts, effective reading might involve understanding the rhetorical choices present in a data visualization and require different strategies for approaching such a text. A research course in biology, with a high density of reading, might require strategies for skimming so as to quickly move through texts and determine what is important to their research. Communication professionals or students may need to read quickly to summarize a text for a colleague. Approaches to reading necessarily differ depending on the context and purpose involved in the reading of a text.

I argue for a stronger relationship between rhetorical reading instruction in composition courses and beyond, in disciplinary courses. Further, the rhetorical reading instruction should acknowledge the local practices and perceptions situated in each reading community. Identifying these situated practices and perceptions might be achieved through implementation of a similar mixed-methods study with the researcher’s population in mind.

Literature Review

College instructors often give little attention to reading in their courses. Reading is understood as a basic faculty—something prerequisite to college scholarship. Scholars in rhetoric and composition such as Dan Keller and Ellen Carillo have recently recentered the study of reading as deserving a space in the field. They understand reading as dynamic, context dependent, and not naturally understood. As such, both Keller and Carillo advocate explicitly teaching and acknowledging reading strategies with undergraduate students.

Reading is overlooked in college, generally. Robert Scholes (2002) explained college reading as difficult to study because of its “invisibility.” Instructors can evaluate how students write from the physical product produced while they engage in the practice. However, the process of reading leaves little to no traces except in the mind of the reader and, potentially, any written annotations. The invisibility of the reading process inhibits the type of feedback that can be provided. As college instructors enter an undefined landscape of reading pedagogies, Scholes reminds us of the importance of reflecting on the interdisciplinary work of reading scholars. William Thelin’s “Peculiar Relationship to College Reading” (2009) recognizes the segmentation

of reading between education and English studies and advocates a strengthened relationship between K-12 educators and post-secondary instructors. This relationship, he says, will draw on the knowledge about how students read and what motivates them to read in service of their higher education. Equipped with this better understanding, college instructors will be better equipped to develop sound reading pedagogies.

Reading practices and perceptions have only a brief literature in the field of rhetoric and composition. Interdisciplinary scholars, specifically those in educational studies K-12, have paid attention to reading but with a lens geared toward early development and mechanistic principles. The monolithic view of reading propagated by instructors across the curriculum makes sense for those who do not specialize in rhetoric and literacy. It even makes sense for many English studies practitioners who engage primarily in deep reading for their courses (Murray 1991) and thus understand deep reading as an “institutionalized” and “inextractible” best practice for reading. Deep reading as best practice always does not extend to all other disciplines. I argue that for scholars of rhetoric and composition, the lack of attention paid to reading is negligent and does a disservice to students who will need rhetorical reading skills to write in their future classes and lives. Reading is an essential piece to research and is often understood as part of the writing process (Horning, 2013). Still, reading remains un/under taught in writing courses. As writing across the curriculum initiatives develop in universities, an understanding of the necessity for reading across the curriculum should duly emerge (Horning, 2007). Some scholars in rhetoric and composition have heeded this call, such as Ellen Carillo in her monograph *Securing a Place for Reading in Composition: The Importance of Teaching for Transfer* (2015). Carillo similarly argues the importance of reading in first year writing and traces some of the scholarship in the field. Her annotated bibliography is an important step to integrating rhetorical reading as a value and area needing more scholarship in order to support student learning.

Student perceptions of reading are important to how they engage in a reading task. David Jolliffe and Allison Harl (2008) asked early college students to keep a reading journal for two weeks in which they were to report their reading habits and how they perceived or felt about the reading. The study revealed that students were passionate about reading but not about the reading they were doing for their classes. They were able to draw text-self connections but struggled to draw text-text or text-world connections, suggesting a gap in instruction that encourages students to engage reading or research as a process of discovery and interrelation. Scholes (2002) aforementioned study of the invisibility of college student reading affirms this, suggesting that students read in ways that assimilate texts into their own experiences and try to make texts mean what they expect them to mean. Effectively reading and research ceases to be a process of discovery and becomes a limited practice of self-reinforcement. Instructors can combat this by investigating the reading processes of students, making sure they understand the purposes of reading, and how they make rhetorical choices in understanding connection between texts (Warren 2013).

Instructor perceptions of student reading have a similarly influential role. The instructor's perceptions determine how reading is assigned, presented, and its value is communicated to students. A miscommunicated or misaligned perception of value for the reading may influence student affect and compliance in engaging the task. Brian Brost and Karen Bradley's “Student Compliance with Assigned Reading: A Case Study” (2006) situates student reading compliance as originating with the instructor. When instructors play into the apathy students show when asked to read, the disposition is reinforced and results in students foregoing or not engaging with the reading (Brost, 2006).

Even when students are compliant in reading tasks, they often lack knowledge of the practices that will help them succeed in a particular context. Instructors often have a cultivated practice for reading that contributes to their success in their discipline but might not be aware of it or communicate it well to students. A study of three faculty readers in history, mathematics, and chemistry revealed shared practices among faculty in these diverse disciplines, but some rhetorical strategies that set them apart in order to function more appropriately for disciplinary texts (Shanahan et al., 2011). Don Bialostosky, an English professor, questions whether even English should maintain a strict regime of “close reading” (2006). Bialostosky argues that with the critical bend of English studies, scholars often oscillate between close reading of texts and broad readings of political and social frames. These oscillations, he says, are evidence of diverse reading practices within the English discipline that should be taught. Ettari and Easterling’s “Reading (and) the Profession” (2002) takes the labor of reading beyond professional scholarship. They argue that faculty members’ reading includes institutional documents, student writing, and disciplinary scholarship, all of which demand different stances and strategies. In this way, reading involves adopting particular values, affective dispositions, and tacit norms about what “counts” as effective or sophisticated reading. All said, reading practices are central to how faculty understand themselves as professionals and how they imagine legitimate participation in their fields. Students may not be privy to the moves scholarly readers have developed to engage in their disciplinary communities and that must be acknowledged in classrooms with reading.

Student practices for reading are important for instructors to investigate as well. If instructors are unaware of the processes students use, then it will be difficult to respond beneficially. Christina Haas and Linda Flower, in “Rhetorical Reading Strategies and the Construction of Meaning,” studied graduate vs undergraduate rhetorical reading strategies (1988). They found that undergraduates rarely used rhetorical reading strategies while graduate students often engaged these strategies. Daniel Keller’s *Chasing Literacy* (2013) recognizes that students in the digital age have to accommodate an accumulation and acceleration of reading practices. Accumulation refers to the diverse types of reading in which students are expected to engage (social media, literature, web-texts). Acceleration refers to the increasing amounts of texts to interact with and the speed at which those interactions are expected. Richard Haswell et al (1999) repeated Flower’s and Haas’s study with a diversity of texts; included in these were topics familiar to the undergraduate students. Haswell’s study found that undergraduates use rhetorical strategies often when reading through texts they are more familiar with. Despite these changes in the way students read and are expected to read, many classes still teach only a monolithic deep reading (Keller, 2013). Heidi Estrem and Linda Adler-Kassner (2007) reviewed the purposes for reading in a study of their first-year writing program. Their analysis identified four distinct purposes for which instructors asked students to read: content, practice, structure, and process-based. Attention to these purposes, they argue, helps students and instructors demystify the process of reading. In analyzing these complex reading interactions with a rhetorical lens, students and instructors are better prepared to engage a text critically in service of learning.

Understanding the necessity and variable strategies for reading across disciplines is a first step in adapting student and instructor practices for more effective learning. Jason Tham might call this a “Wicked Problem,” or a valuable problem with no obvious, correct, or single solution (2021). Instructors use many different approaches to introduce reading processes in the classroom. For example, Ellen Carillo’s “Making Reading Visible in the Classroom” details a

“passage-based paper” assignment in which students are to identify a roughly five sentence passage from a textbook or course reading (2009). Students then analyze the section for what it says and how it says it, concluding with a roughly two page summary of how the passage works in the context of and contributes to the rest of the text. In this way, instructors can use written student work to assess a reading skill. Jeanne Henry (2009) recognized the importance of “reader as identity” narrative on performance and worked to incorporate texts in which students had already found pleasure in the class. Some of the texts included religious texts, fiction books, or community newsletters in which students were interested. By drawing on student literacy practice in pleasurable text, she was able to cultivate positive associations with reading in the classroom (Henry, 2009). Mariolina Rizzi Salvatori, in “Conversations with Texts” (1996), argues that which texts students are reading doesn’t matter much to build reading skill. Rather, to build reading, instructors should focus on encouraging reflection on the metacognitive processes involved in reading, researching, and finding connections in texts.

These strategies vary in approach but all do something to address the necessity and interdisciplinarity of teaching rhetorical reading in college. With some of these strategies in mind, I encourage instructors to analyze, ask about, and reflect on student reading practice and where it may be beneficial to communicate rhetorical reading strategies and processes.

Methods and Methodology

My Positionality

Research is necessarily influenced by the positionality of the researcher and a few positions strongly influenced my work: namely, my position as a graduate student, writing center consultant, teaching assistant, US worker, public education advocate, and scholar.

1. I am a graduate student in rhetoric and composition at Miami University³. As part of my Research Methods course, I am engaged with and writing up this empirical research. Because of the short 4 month interval of the course and this project, some decisions made were in the interest of preserving time:
 - Follow-up interviews have not yet been conducted and are not included in this report
 - Four focus groups were conducted, but only one is reported here
 - Data is not intercoded between the focus group and survey
 These decisions were made as a means to prioritize the information most immediately impactful for the intended audience of college instructors for the purpose of adapting reading pedagogy to meet diverse needs of students.
2. I have served as a writing center consultant and teaching assistant for writing courses in years past. In my consulting, I’ve noticed some students from across disciplines saying that they “can’t write.” When probed, it seems that the students have a basic writing proficiency, but struggle with how to integrate their course reading into their writing. Because the reading is “invisible” (Scholes 2002), these students struggle to articulate what they need and instructors struggle to find the gap in understanding. As a teaching assistant for a critical reading course and a first year writing course, I took note of the misaligned perceptions and practices of students and instructors and how it impacted their development throughout the course. My choice to engage in this research emerged as a response to a material problem I noticed in the writing center and in the classroom.

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3. I am an employee in a public higher education institution in the United States. The US public education system advocates that all students gain a reading and writing proficiency sufficient to work and engage their civic duties such as voting, advocacy, and civic participation. I share this belief and hold that reading, and rhetorical reading at that, is necessary for developing informed and participative citizens. This meant that my disposition entering this research was hopeful for student engagement and positive perception of reading practices.

Methodological Approach

Student practices and perceptions of reading have been studied with attention to different aspects of their processes. Linda Flower approached student reading through a cognitive lens, attempting to understand the mechanisms in the brain that either supported or inhibited reading. Scholars like Dan Keller have engaged cultural/ethnographic research by studying the in-class and at-home reading habits of students and documenting his observations.

This study is grounded in an ecological understanding of reading situations and academic cultures. Jenny Edbauer's rhetorical ecologies acknowledge the interplay of texts, materials, objects, and feelings in our spaces. Situations bleed into broader networks of discourse and affective ecologies. Her methodology draws from new materialist and ecological approaches to circulation studies and textual analysis which are important to reading situations as many actors are at play: pencil, paper, technologies, feelings, instructors, student perceptions, cultural assumptions, and more. Understanding the students as part of this ecology, I thought it important and timely to go directly to a community of undergraduate readers and ask them how they describe their practices and perceptions of reading. In applying a narrative inquiry approach, I give primacy to my participants' voices and experiences. Further, by giving participants an opportunity to speak directly with instructors and help change reading pedagogy practices, I engage a participatory action methodology.

Methods⁴

This study had two primary methods of data collection: (1) student surveys and (2) focus groups. Participants included five undergraduate students at Miami University. The five students surveyed are the same five students involved in the focus group. Originally, my plan was to conduct only a focus group. Because of the complexity of the questions and metacognitive labor involved, I thought it best to add a survey before the focus group to:

- Acquaint participants to thinking about their reading practices and perceptions
- Encourage consideration and forethought in responses
- Prepare participants to share thoughtful responses with each other
- Privately share thoughts they weren't comfortable sharing with other participants

This survey-focus group methodological framework follows St. Clair-Thompson et al's "Exploring the Reading Practices of Undergraduate Students," with questions adjusted for situated insights into Miami University's reading community.

Survey Questions and Rationale

1. Email Address

⁴ See appendices for outreach emails, survey questions, focus group questions, and expectation sheets provided to participants

Collecting the email allows us to follow up with participants if they have questions or concerns. Additionally, we noted the possibility of post-focus group interviews and this would allow us to contact the participants.

2. Name

By including the name in the survey, we can match survey responses to participants in the focus group. Additionally, if post-focus group interviews are conducted, survey responses can be matched with interview responses.

3. Majors/Minors

Including majors and minors allows us to ground participant responses in the context of their interests and disciplinary work. Because of the small size of the study, we cannot assert claims about their fields or compare the reading loads, preferences, or practices between disciplines. Rather, this information helps contextualize their responses within a larger body of literature on the reading practices and perceptions of students in varied fields.

4. On average, how much reading do you do each week for your classes?

The time devoted to reading for classes in a week gives insight into participant habits and experiences as a means to contextualize their later answers.

5. You may add here anything else you'd like to say about your reading for classes.

Giving a space for participants to share information that does not directly relate to a question allows for nuanced responses about their practices and perceptions that may be left out in other areas. It was important for us to allow participants to describe their experience fully and not feel limited by the scope of the questions.

6. On average, how much reading do you do each week that is not for your classes?

The time devoted to personal reading in a week gives insight into participant habits and experiences as a means to contextualize their later answers.

7. Please briefly explain what this non-class related reading is for (for fun, for a specific job, etc)

Asking about the types of non-class related reading participants engage in allows us to gauge what they consider to be reading, their reasons for engaging in reading, and understand the individual literacy practices of sampled participants.

8. What kind of reading is most enjoyable for you? Can you give a specific example or two?

This question helps reveal the affective experiences of participants and characterize the participants' relationships with reading particular types of text.

9. What kind of reading do you find most challenging? Can you give a specific example or two?

Similarly, this question helps reveal the affective experiences of participants and characterize the participants' relationships with reading particular types of text.

10. Briefly, what do you wish college faculty knew about students' reading habits, abilities, and experiences?

This space allows participants to say anything related to the topic of the survey or focus group they think is important and has not been covered by a previous question. Participants can relay concerns related to faculty reading practices or expectations which may be used to influence change.

Focus Group Questions and Rationale

1. **My first question is really broad. How do you define reading? Which is to say: what counts as reading, especially in our digital age? How would you distinguish *reading* a text from other ways of engaging with a text that you don't think actually count as reading?**

- a. **Can you give some examples?**

This question helps contextualize what the participants consider reading and which reading experiences they might deem important to share with us. It also helps participants build a community knowledge of reading so they can more aptly answer other questions.

2. **Next: What do you think is the value of reading? What does reading do for you, and/or what do you assume reading does for others?**

- a. **Can you give some examples? These can involve reading for school, or reading outside of school.**

Perceived value of reading is important for understanding the role students think reading plays in their development. Asking for examples helps to identify particular areas where students feel reading most benefits them.

3. **How do you think reading does or does not impact your learning? Do you think reading helps you learn better, or not? How so?**

- a. **You might also think about how reading compares to other means of learning: listening to a lecture, watching videos, discussing ideas with others, doing experiments in a lab, etc. How do you think these modes of learning compare to reading in terms of their impact on you? Can you give some examples? These can involve reading you do in school, or outside of school.**

This question asks students to evaluate the modes of taking learning information and how reading compares. Reading has been a predominant mode of learning in academia and we wanted to understand whether students view this practice as effective or if there were other, more effective, methods they use to learn.

4. **How do you determine if and when it's important to engage in a reading task, because you think reading a text will impact your learning or success? How do you decide which kinds of reading rise to that level?**

Instructors have noted that students often don't read in their classes. This question attempts to understand why students decide to read or not to read. Instructors might be interested in adapting practices to encourage methods that encourage reading.

5. **Do you have any go-to reading *strategies*—*ways of approaching reading*—that help you engage with reading tasks that you think are important but may be challenging? These can involve reading in school or out of school.**

- a. **Are there any strategies you have heard about but haven't used yourself, but that appear to be effective for others, or that you wish you knew more about?**
 - b. **Are there kinds of reading you wish you were better at doing? Why, and what do you think these kinds of reading might enable?**

Undergraduate student reading strategies inform how students go about using a text for their particular purpose. In understanding these strategies, instructors may be able to intervene in student reading processes in productive ways by offering alternatives or building on current strategies.

6. **Now I'd like to hear more about what you think it means to read effectively or successfully as an undergraduate—regardless of whether you feel you achieve this**

consistently. How would you define “effective” or “successful” reading for a college student?

Identifying and defining successful reading gives us a framework for what undergraduates associate with success and what moves instructors might need to make to influence self-perception of reading.

7. What do you think these kinds of reading look like in practice? What do readers *do* when they do these kinds of reading?

This question invites participants to imagine the practices, moves, and motions of an aspirational undergraduate reader. It is important to understand how they view an ideal reading process.

8. Finally, I’d like to know about what you think of yourself as a reader, and why. How many of you consider yourself a “strong reader”? (Raise of hands)

This invites participants to consider and share their embodied experiences reading and how they situate themselves within broader reading communities. Reading self-perception has been studied and proven to influence compliance, satisfaction, and efficacy.

9. And how would you define a “strong reader”? What does a strong reader bring to their reading tasks? Whether or not you consider yourself a strong reader, can you give some specific examples—from your own experiences, or from what you’ve observed in others, or from what others have told you about reading?

Identifying the features that constitute a “strong reader” allows participants to identify aspirational practices and co-construct habits that might be seen as evidence for reading improvement.

10. Is there anything you wish faculty knew about your reading?

This question is meant to provide participants an opportunity to communicate anything related to their reading practices and perceptions that may not have been covered in other questions. Additionally, this gives participants the opportunity to communicate directly to faculty their experience in a less mediated manner than other questions. This question is important for making sure participant voices are heard vis a vis their personal concerns.

Participants and Reciprocity

This research was conducted at Miami University (OH) on Miami University students. Miami University is a 4-year university with students that are predominately white and upper-middle class. This demographic was likely reflected in the survey and focus group population. The results of the study should not be abstracted to represent the reading practices and perceptions of a particular discipline, area, or demographic. Rather, the findings give voice to the five students included in the study. By reflecting on their experiences and sharing their stories, participants contextualize their relationships with reading and prompt interested stakeholders to consider how it might influence their views and practices.

Participants were informed that their responses may be shared in publication, with outside stakeholders, and would be reported to faculty. Informed consent was obtained when participants signed up for the research and again confirmed before participating in the survey and the focus groups. By sharing participant responses with instructors, faculty, and beyond, the participant stories and this research has the potential to prompt response, most likely in faculty perceptions and practices as it relates to reading assignments for their undergraduate students. As participants were willing to share their experiences with reading in and out of class, so are the

researchers willing to elevate their stories to the parties needed to create and sustain change in the university and in the classroom. A forum hosted by “The Reading Project” for Miami University faculty at the end of the year has invited us to speak about the findings of this research. Here, we will make sure student voices reach these parties. Participants were informed of their invitation to participate in this forum prior to the focus groups and will be invited again prior to the forum, with the caveat that the forum is not a requirement of participation in this study.

The survey was provided before the focus group and denoted as optional for participants. This survey allowed participants time to consider their responses, get acquainted with thinking about their metacognitive reading strategies, and prepare themselves to discuss the topic with others. Additionally it allowed participants space to discuss the reading practices and expectations of their instructors in a forum that would allow them to anonymously share these concerns. In order to respect participant time, the focus group was scheduled for 80 minutes with the option to stay longer if they had more to share, or leave after our scheduled time. To try and recruit as diverse a participant pool as possible, \$20 gift cards were advertised in the recruitment and provided to participants upon completion of the focus group.

Results

The results of the survey and focus group are each coded separately below with tables describing the codes used and the themes abstracted. A codebook describing what is meant by each code is provided in the table.

This study endorses critical data studies and recognizes its necessity to inform justice-oriented data practices. The method involves a three-part heuristic: (1) Recognize data incompleteness, (2) Reveal the sociopolitical conditions underlying the data, and (3) Reject biased analytic practices (Gouge and Carlson, 2022). The results of the focus group represent the stories and experiences of the five students involved and shouldn’t be mistaken to represent the views of all undergraduate students, at Miami University or beyond. The purpose of this focus group and survey is to chart different perspectives in undergraduate reading perceptions and practices. The range of perspectives might help instructors to better understand the varied approaches students apply in their reading. Refer to the participants section for more information on those involved or the limitations section for study constraints.

Survey

The results of the survey⁵ represent the stories and experiences of the same five students involved in the focus group. The survey was conducted prior to the focus group and served as a space for students to exercise metacognitive knowledge of their reading processes and give information that contextualized their responses. Some highlights are shared below:

- 4 of 5 students completed the survey
- All surveyed students spend 1-3 hours/week reading for classes
- All surveyed students spend additional time doing non-class related reading
- All students identified their personal reading as more enjoyable
- Students identified scholarly texts, older texts, long-form essays, and textbooks as the most challenging readings

Table 1 provides the responses when surveyed students were asked what they want college instructors to know about reading:

⁵ See survey questions and materials in Appendices

Table 1*What do you want instructors to know about student reading?*

"It can be really difficult to read incredibly long assignments (i.e. 40 pages of essays) in two days when we have other classes, ignoring the fact some students (like myself) have trouble focusing on reading"
"Many students even within the Humanities will not read if not forced too due to the preference to spend time on other hobbies for the large majority of students. Pushing a grade or assignment with reading will make the students actually do the reading."
"I value when professors provide readings that both relate to the material, while still being engaging. Nobody likes busy work."
"Sometimes giving summaries of main points of the reading is more effective because I am not missing out on key themes by not being engaged in the reading and only doing the reading because I have to."

Focus Group

I coded participant responses according to the relevant question. In reading through the focus group transcript, I identified strategies, practices, and sentiments that participants shared. Similar comments were coalesced into a broader "coded theme" (Geisler and Swarts, 2019). In coding additional data, I'll start with the coded themes, and if comments reveal distinctions in the categories that justify their not being grouped together, I'll revise the coded themes. With each coded theme, I've included a description that operates as the codebook, and a representative student phrase for the coded theme.

Table 2*Focus Group Codes, Codebook, and Themes*

Question	Coded Theme	Description	Student Phrase
Q1. Defining Reading	Intentionality	Reading is defined by cognitive effort and will, distinguishing it from passive looking.	"I feel like the action of reading is sitting down with like intent and you want to understand, comprehend what you're looking at."
	Multimodal Reading	Students reject text-exclusivity; reading includes decoding images, audio, and video.	"I think reading is just any form of like making meaning from a text or from even like an image... I would count that [comic book] as reading."
	Active vs. Passive	Distinction is drawn between "scrolling" (social media) and "reading" (processing).	"Like if you're on social media and you see a picture to scroll past it, that's not. But if you like actually take time to look at it and think about it."
Q2. Value of Reading	Didactic / Moral	Reading is valued as a vehicle for specific lessons on character, politics, or	"If I'm reading like sci-fi, sometimes it'll teach me a lesson about character or a

		humanity.	lesson about politics."
	Relaxation	Reading acts as a break from academic "work," offering mental peace.	"It's a moment to just give your brain a rest... give your personal and like inner world a sense of fulfillment."
	Critical Faculties	Improves on the following values: Critical Thinking, Creativity, and Knowledge base.	"It either builds on your critical thinking, it builds on your creativity, or it builds on like the knowledge you have."
Q3. Impact on Learning	Diverse Perspectives	Reading allows for comparing multiple viewpoints, whereas lectures often present a single narrative.	"It's a lot easier to like synthesize ideas into one coherent thought... we get to see two different point of views on the same topic."
	Personal Interpretation	Text allows students to construct meaning; slides/lectures present pre-constructed meaning.	"I can't make any meaning of [a slide] because the meaning that the professor... has created is already up there."
	Discipline-Specific	Reading is viewed as essential for Humanities but not for Math/Chemistry.	"I don't need to read a 15 page essay on why the quadratic formula exists... But history... I feel like I can make meaning from that."
Q4. Whether to Engage	Redundancy	If the lecture duplicates the text, reading is unnecessary.	"It is brought up in class, but it's word for word exactly what the professor is talking about anyway. So there's no point in reading it beforehand."
	ROI (Return on Investment)	Effort is correlated to grade impact.	"If my grade goes up after reading, then I'm gonna read more. And if my grade is unimpacted... I'm gonna read less."
	Social Utility	Engagement increases if the text is social currency for discussion.	"I am more likely to do the reading... when I get to discuss it with other people."
	Applicability	Effort depends on perceived relevance.	"If I'm in a geology class, I'm like, 'Am I really ever gonna use this in the future?'... So I'm probably not gonna do the reading."

Q5. Strategies & Tools	Paper vs. Digital	Physical paper has different affordances from computer aided reading .	"Nothing compares to pen and paper... I like to write in it and annotate rather than writing separate notes."
	AI Scaffolding	Using AI to simplify language or summarize before reading to reduce cognitive load.	"I can be like, 'dumb this down for me'... and it'll tell me exactly like what I should be getting out of this."
	AI Skepticism	Rejection of AI on the grounds that it removes the "struggle" from learning.	"It's taking away my thinking that I'm paying to do... [AI] is the antithesis of reading."
	Speed Reading	Reading faster to prevent mind-wandering.	"I just force myself to read faster... because my problem is when I don't want to read, I go slower and stop paying attention."
Q6/7. Defining Effectiveness	Efficiency	Success is defined as maximum comprehension in minimum time.	"Effectively reading is getting the most amount of information... with the least amount of time required."
	Outcome-based	Success is binary based on the external reward (grade).	"You're successful as long as you get the grade itself."
	Perseverance	Identifying disinterest in a topic and persisting is viewed as a valid, successful outcome.	"I've read something and been like... this is not my cup of tea. And I think that's successful."
Q8/9. Reader Identity	"Gifted Kid Burnout"	Narrative of early love for reading destroyed by HS assignments.	"I loved reading and then they started giving me assigned readings... and then I started hating reading."
	Attention/Tech Tension	Digital devices are viewed as "brain rot" or addiction barriers.	"I wish I could just take my phone and throw it away... My phone definitely affects my attention span and it's definitely an addiction."
	Multimodal Competence	Students feel "strong" when reading media, but "weak" when reading text.	"I would consider myself... a pretty like capable reader... I read between the lines of that kind of media [TV/Podcasts]."
Q10. Feedback	Too Much	High page counts (40-80) are viewed as "busy work" and trigger non-compliance.	"Why am I reading eighty pages?... I would get so much more if I could sit down and

		think about one section... rather than reading it for no reason."
Instructional Scaffolding	Request for specific learning goals/questions before the reading.	"Tell me like exactly like what you want me to get out of this and then I'll go back and like do it."
Multimodal Variety	Critique of repetitive "Lecture-Read-Quiz" loops; desire for mixed media.	"Read kahoot, lecture, read kahoot... there's no like there's nothing stimulating about that... [I prefer] news videos to podcasts."

Discussion

Limitations

Demographic: This research was conducted at Miami University (OH) on Miami University students. Miami University is a 4-year university with students that are predominately white and upper-middle class. This demographic was likely reflected in the survey and focus group population.

Self-Selection: There was also likely some bias relating to self-selection of participants as most participants identified as "strong readers." The call for applicants specified that we were looking for any student, regardless of their perceived reading abilities. However, the topic of this focus group was likely more attractive to self-identified "strong readers," contributing to a self-selection bias in the participants.

Sample Size: I report on only one survey and one focus group consisting of five students. While this research helps to identify the breadth of local undergraduate reader practices and perceptions, the results should not be abstracted to apply to larger populations.

Implications

The reading perceptions and practices of undergraduate students differ largely. Reading does not exist as a monolith, nor can it with the different expectations and requirements of various contexts—across disciplines, professions, and genres. In order to best serve students, instructors might be interested in familiarizing themselves with the diverse perceptions of reading held by students and the strategies they use to engage their reading. These locally-situated reading focus groups are an effective means to gather diverse reader strategies, perceptions, and perspectives, and because of the locality of the responses, are well-positioned to serve in action research at the university.

Future Directions

The survey offered students an opportunity to build metacognitive knowledge of their own reading processes and helped us to contextualize their answers in the focus group. The focus group provided a breadth of answers detailing undergraduate reading processes. Three additional focus groups were conducted and those responses will be coded in the same way as the first. This will help reach data saturation, or the point at which most insights have emerged. The breadth of answers provided in the focus group aids in capturing as many perspectives as possible. In the

interest of deeply understanding practices and perceptions of undergraduate readers, we think it necessary to offer and engage follow-up interviews with the participants. These follow-up interviews will give participants a chance to share details they didn't want to share with the group, clarify any answers, and elaborate on their reading experiences so their particular stories are represented.

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