

Assessment of Student Perceptions in Introductory Honors Writing Courses

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Abstract and Background

- This study investigates student perceptions of their writing instruction in introductory-level Honors courses and their success at achieving writing expectations set by the program. Through this study, we hope to understand if all groups of students feel they are learning or if some groups feel they are left out of learning. Any gaps identified will be the subject of future intervention and research. This study builds on previous SOTL scholarship on Honors writing to identify best practices for encouraging student success.
- A major change to the writing curriculum occurred over the 2021-2022 academic year. After discussing Asao Inoue's *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies: Teaching and Assessing for a Socially Just Future* (2015) during the fall semester, the faculty revised the Honors Writing Guidelines. The new Writing Philosophy is crafted in a spirit of inclusive teaching, rather than the prescriptive rules of the old guidelines.

Use the QR code to access the Honors College Writing Philosophy



Student comment #8:

Start of the semester: Right now, I am expecting [writing assignments] to be very challenging just because I feel that they are going to be graded very harshly.

End of the semester: I know that from this course my writing has increased significantly. I feel more confident about writing and specifically analyzing and stating reasons why I think the things I do.

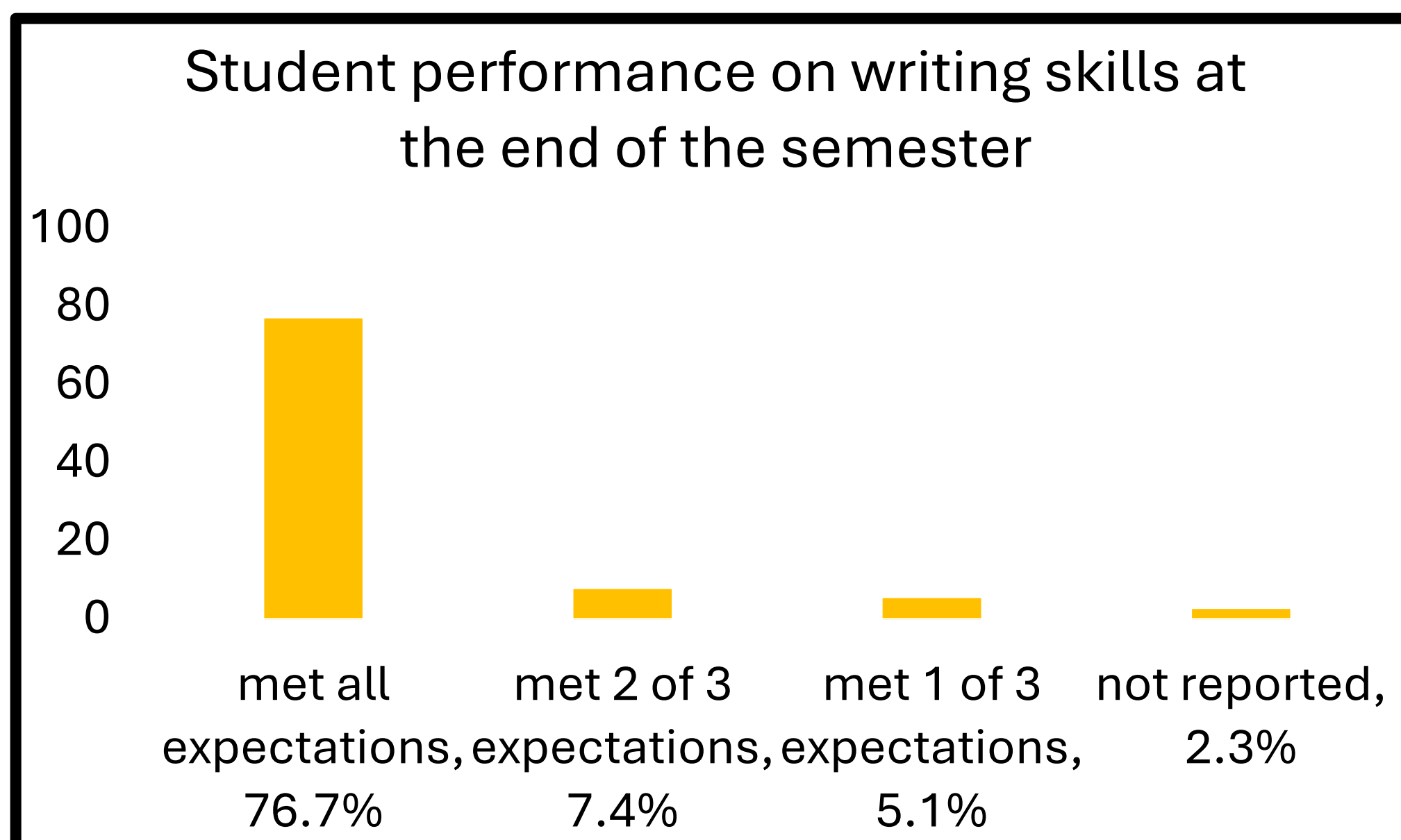
Student comment #56:

Start of the semester: I expect the writing to be more difficult than my high school papers. I expect a lot more analysis and perfect mechanics.

End of the semester: At the beginning I found them extremely challenging. As time progressed and as I got feedback, I was able to improve.

Study Participants

- Students completed a survey during fall 2023 at the beginning and the end of the semester in their introductory-level Honors seminar. 176 surveys were completed.
- These students were enrolled in fourteen individual seminars taught by seven faculty members. Two seminars were taught online; the other twelve seminars were taught in-person.
- At the end of the semester, instructors used an ongoing assessment rubric to evaluate students' writing skills in the categories of (1) communication conventions, (2) use of evidence, and (3) critical analysis.**
- 96% of students are between the ages of 17 and 22
- 23.3% self-identify as BIPOC
- 17% were raised by caregivers without four-year college degrees
- 40.9% were raised by at least one caregiver with a graduate degree
- 3.4% identify a language other than English as their primary language

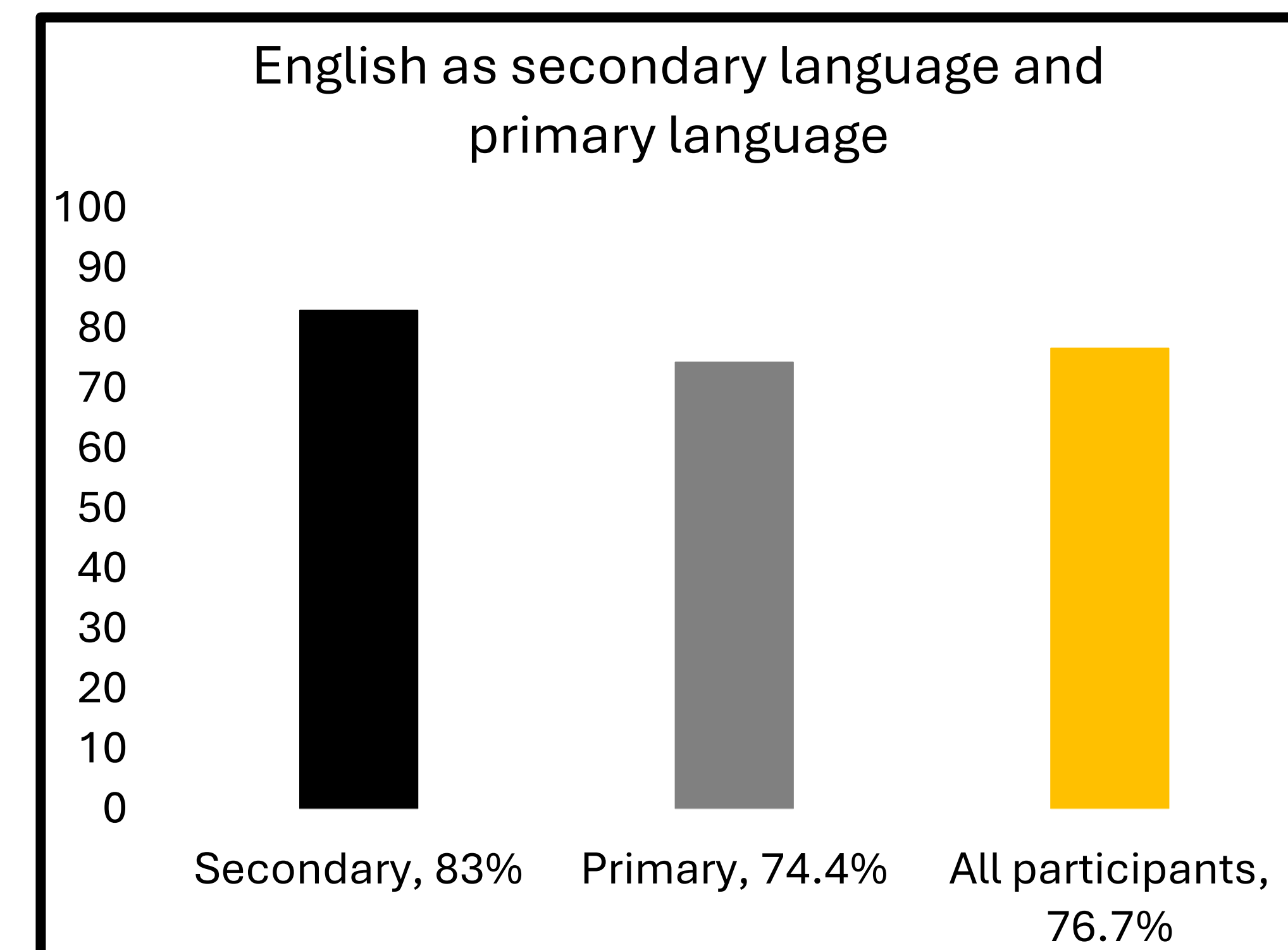
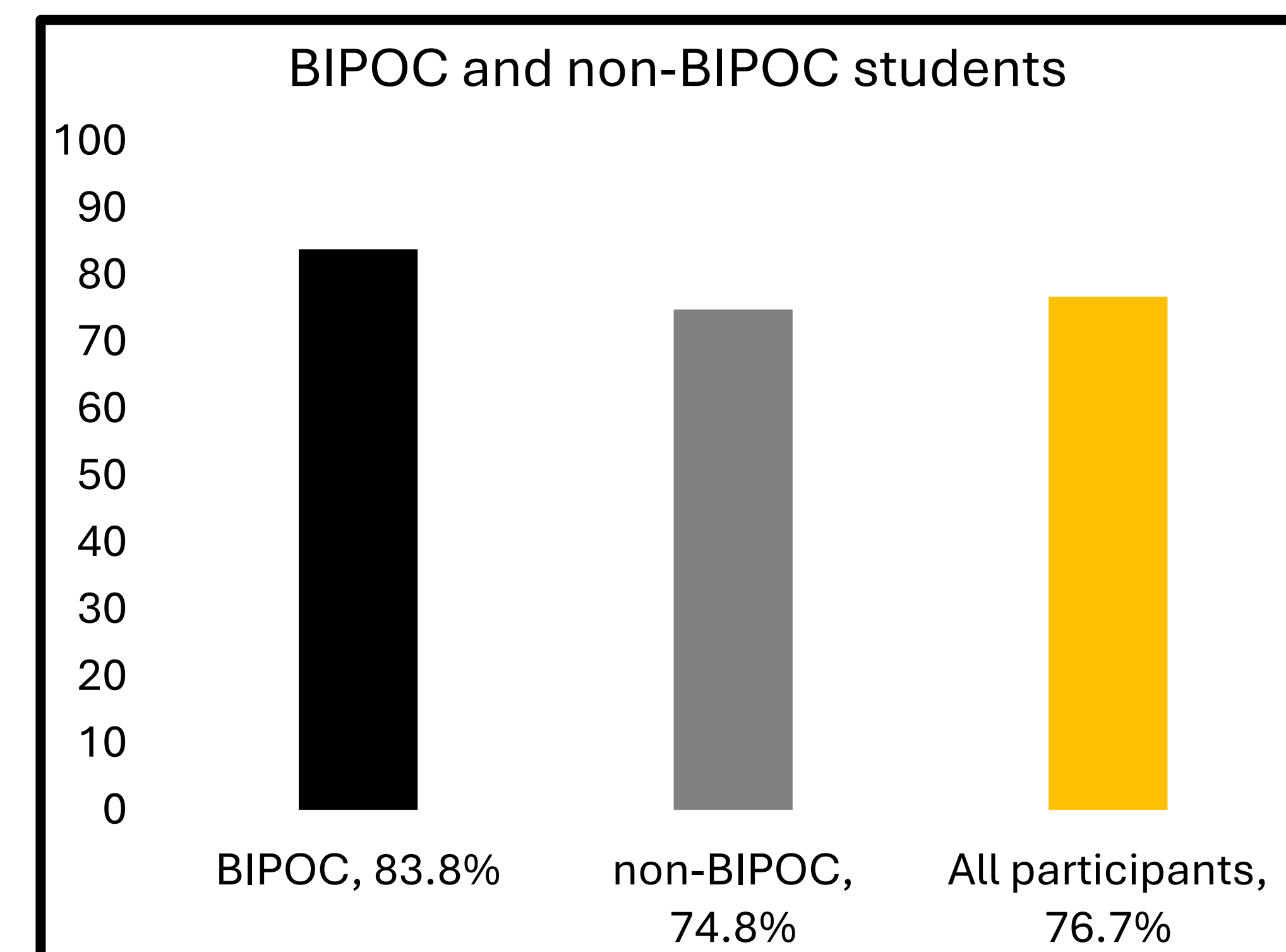
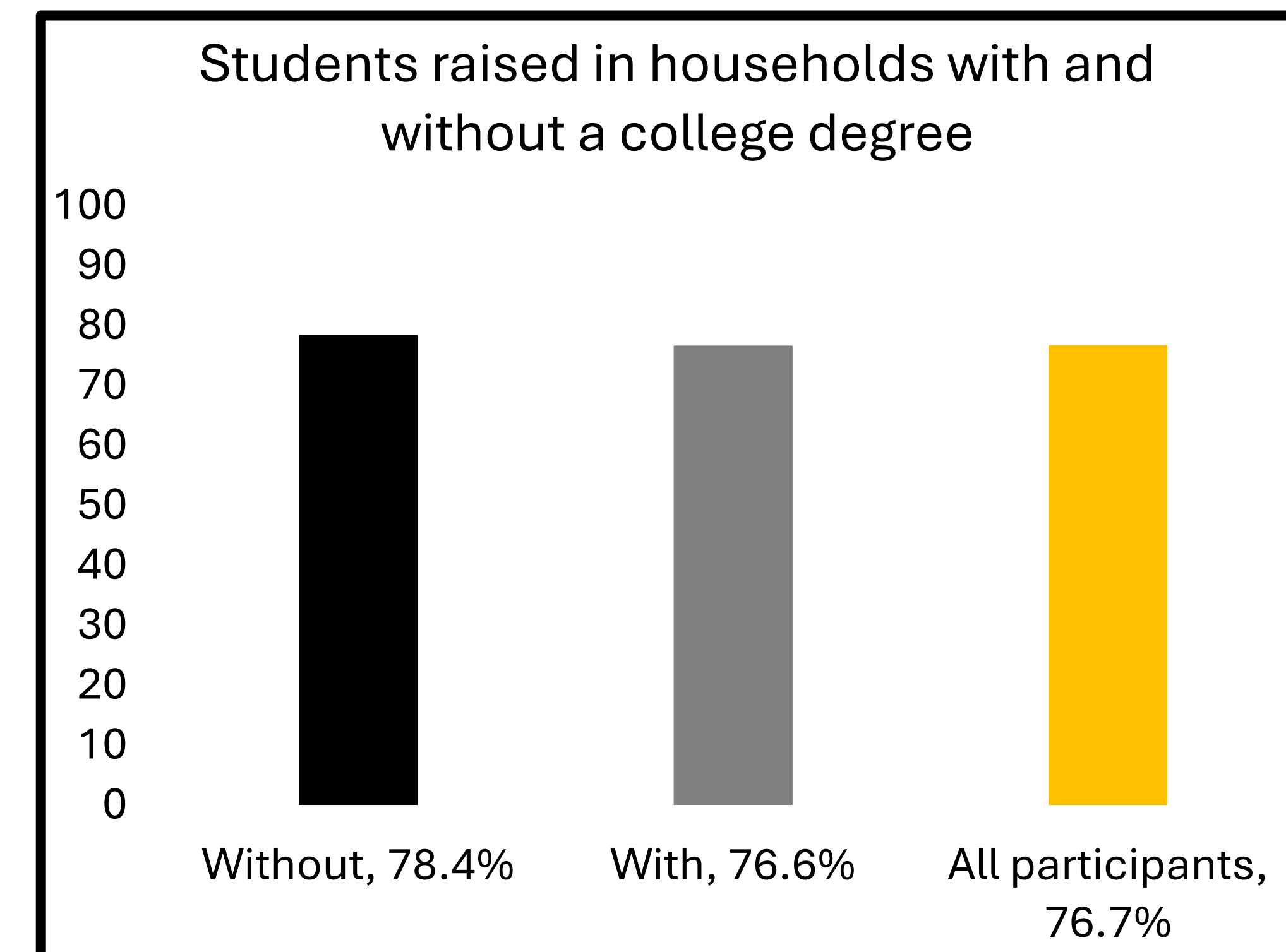


Student comment #5:

Start of the semester: [Writing assignments] may be more complicated than other classes that fulfill the same requirements due to the difference in formatting and subject materials.

End of the semester: These assignments took a very different form from the ones I have done in previous courses. However, I think they have helped me as a writer and a student as they have required me to become more flexible with my work.

All Writing Expectations Met



Conclusions and Future Plans

- The initial results indicate that our writing program does not have an achievement gap which disadvantages any of the subgroups studied.
- Further qualitative analysis of student comments will help us understand how students' perceptions may vary about their positive and negative experiences with writing instruction in our courses.

Student comment #107:

End of the semester: Going into the year, I had come from writing classes that didn't challenge me. Having writing assignments that provided challenge for me was refreshing. The feedback I have received has improved my skills greatly.

Student comment #129:

End of the semester: I feel most of my previous writing classes encouraged the easy route of writing about boring information that has a wide conversation surrounding it. This class encouraged me to find a topic I care about. It also encouraged me to try and synthesize my reading rather than quote it.

Selected Bibliography

Decker, Teagan, and Scott Hicks. "Embracing New Opportunities in and Beyond First-Year Honors Composition." *Honors in Practice* 18 (2022): 131-47.

Eckstein, Grant, Dana Ferris, and Katherina Sibbald. "What Do Students Think About Their Own Writing? Insights for Teaching New College Writers." *Writing and pedagogy* 12, no. 2-3 (2021): 307-39.

Inoue, Asao. *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies: Teaching and Assessing for a Socially Just Future*. Fort Collins, Colorado: The WAC Clearinghouse, 2015.

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