Composition, Retention, Race, Remediation and the First Year: A Descriptive Study of the "At-Risk" Student Experience

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COMPOSITION, RETENTION, RACE, REMEDIATION AND THE FIRST YEAR: A DESCRIPTIVE

STUDY OF THE "AT-RISK" STUDENT EXPERIENCE ON A REGIONAL CAMPUS

A Dissertation
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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This study describes the experiences of first-year students at IUP-Punxsutawney, a regional campus designed to provide additional support to a population of at-risk students, approximately half of whom are minorities. The purpose of this study is to provide the reader with a better understanding of the context and to describe students’ experiences in this context by addressing two questions: What does it mean to be a first-year student at IUP-Punxsutawney? What is the first-year experience at IUP-Punxsutawney? The data collected for this research includes students’ maps of their experiences in the research setting, interview conversations and survey responses. In one sense, this is a study about retention that emphasizes the importance of social integration into the university. Both social and academic integration have been of primary concern of the retention research that is reviewed in this study. In another sense, this is a study about first-year composition and teaching writing. This research calls for teachers of writing to consider how students’ backgrounds and how their experiences, past and present, may clash in particular ways with the university and with what we aim to teach in the classroom setting—particularly in a context where social integration into the university is complicated by issues of race and remediation. This study also makes clear the connection between retention and composition, drawing on and extending Mary Louise Pratt’s contact zone pedagogy.