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From the Guest Editors - Corequisite Writing Courses: Equity and Access

Dawn Shepherd, Samantha Sturman, and Heidi Estrem

First Year Writing Reforms

Corequisite first year writing courses are a critical component of institutional-level equity work. Most often, efforts to address inequities in higher education are focused at the individual level through rethinking instructor bias, pedagogical approaches, or curricular materials. That classroom level work is, of course, important to do and to deepen. At the same time, institutional policies and approaches such as a) placement based on racist standardized test scores and b) course structures that require non-credit-bearing classes based on those test scores are ripe for proactive, equity-minded reform. Because of the deep impact revised course structures and placement processes can have on the success of students whom our institutions have historically underserved, first year writing reforms are urgent. Corequisite writing courses are a powerful equity lever, and for that reason, we are especially grateful for the opportunity to edit this special issue on corequisite writing courses at this moment and in this journal.

This moment: when COVID-19 continues to cause harm to our students, families, and colleagues, when we all are continuing to learn from the protests that began and are continuing after George Floyd’s death, when we are now, in this long, remote summer, beginning to tackle (collectively, imperfectly) the deep systemic racism in higher education, shamefully late.

This journal: Composition Studies’ roots are in the first year writing classroom. From its earliest days, its focus has been on the exchange of ideas among two- and four-year writing faculty and on learning from mistakes and innovations in the classroom and across programs (Dietrich, “History”). This legacy of dissatisfaction with labor hierarchies and the instructional status quo permeates this issue as well, and we are grateful for Kara Taczak and Matt Davis’ early and persistently positive support for this themed issue.

We imagine that some of you—maybe even most of you—reading this introduction now haven’t taught first year writing since graduate school and are not the writing program administrator at your institution. Please keep reading. The scholarship in this special issue is relevant for all of us: those who teach in and administer first year writing programs but, perhaps in particular, those who don’t. How, why, when, and for whom we offer first year writing courses affects nearly every college student at nearly every institution.
in this country. First year writing programs are a high-volume, high-touch enterprise; changes there are likely to affect hundreds of students at any one institution and hundreds of thousands of students nationwide. Whether we teach first year writing or not, our scholarship informs it and our sustained support of first year writing is critically important. It is not hyperbolic to claim that this is where we can do our collective, deepest work to mitigate the damage from racist standardized tests, inequitable K-12 education, and state and/or institutional policies that disproportionately affect our most vulnerable students.

Terms of Engagement for First Year Writing Reforms

Those of us who are writing program administrators dwell in a constellation of overlapping issues and pressures that include state educational policies, institutional expectations, labor inequities, and race- and class-based literacy misconceptions. For those less steeped in the conversation or more removed from the day-to-day administration of first year writing, defining three concepts (writing placement, corequisite, basic writing) central to the host of issues informing corequisite writing pedagogy and research will be of use. While our gloss here is far too brief, the scholarship informing all of these areas is rich and complex, and we invite you to (re)visit it.

We start with writing placement because, in most cases, students do not opt into composition courses. Writing placement and first year writing course sequences are inextricably linked and changing course structures (as with the move to corequisite writing courses) means changing how students are placed into those courses. At all except the most selective institutions, students are placed into their initial writing courses based on standardized test scores, a standardized “writing placement test,” or, less commonly, through another locally developed approach like versions of guided self-placement (e.g., see Emily Isaacs and Sean Molloy; Christie Toth). Several very basic questions have long troubled the three of us (and others in our field) about placement and its unique role in higher education in the United States:

- Why do we accept students into college but then actually not-quite-accept them through sorting some instead into required, non-degree eligible courses, creating what Holly Hassell and Joanne Baird Giordano identify as the “blurry borders” between the “essentialist definitions” of remedial and “college-ready” coursework (58)?
- Why do we do this sorting based on literacy (and math), but not based on students’ knowledge of history, science, sociology, or psychology (see Richard Haswell)?
• Even worse: why do we sort students based on standardized tests, which have been exhaustively catalogued as racist and classist (e.g., Asao Inoue; Ibram X. Kendi; Jessica Nastal; Mya Poe and Asao Inoue; Mya Poe, Jessica Nastal, and Norbert Eliot; John Rosales)?

We use *we* deliberately in the preceding questions, because although these policies are often set by the state or the institution, writing scholars are implicated when we do not consistently advocate for other approaches. According to Hassell and Baird Giordano, “not only is placement students’ first contact with college English, but it is also the critical moment that has the potential to profoundly shape a student’s experience in college—including whether they will be retained or lost to higher education altogether” (56). Staci Perryman-Clark reminds us that “assessment creates or denies opportunity structures,” and that writing assessment can be an area to use “power to effect institutional change in ways that can foster equity and fairness in the classroom” (206, 211). Elsewhere, we have identified writing placement as a right-sized equity issue for writing scholars to address (see Estrem et al.). But for too many of us and for too many of the colleagues we work with at our institutions, placement based on standardized test scores is viewed at best as a neutral and efficient mechanism, or at worst a kind of necessary evil.

**Basic writing** (also known as developmental writing, or “dev ed,” as Peter Adams describes it later in this issue) is a series of one to four writing (and sometimes additional reading) classes that a student could be required to take, based on placement, that are ostensibly “pre-college” courses. These courses may “count” in some way during the semester (for financial aid or scholarship purposes), but they almost never count toward a baccalaureate degree. We’ve heard our colleagues and friends label a course “credit-bearing” if a student receives credit toward financial aid or a full semester load. We disagree. We believe that if an institution is willing to admit a student, it should be willing to educate them through courses that count within a general education program. While this is not always possible—most of the corequisite courses described in this special issue are not credit-bearing by our definition—we should all work toward this goal.

**Basic writing**, as an area of study, is a part of our discipline with a student-focused, progressive tradition of supporting all learners (see Council on Basic Writing “About Us”; Victor Villanueva and Zarah Moeggenberg). Instructors in these classes often labor under problematic conditions (large class sizes, poor compensation, unstable employment) while taking on, as their explicit mission, working directly with those who have been disenfranchised at the institution by being barred from college-level work. Recently, though, those of us deeply engaged with and supportive of the social justice principles that we bring to
teaching basic writing have had to come to terms with the deeply problematic structures surrounding that work. While individual classroom pedagogies may be progressive and designed to serve students, the larger institutional framework of developmental education creates an unequal, unfair gap between college admittance and college-level coursework.

We can and should continue to support and learn from the personalized, thoughtful pedagogical work and scholarly research from basic writing as an area of study, and we must also commit to dismantling basic writing as a course structure while continuing to better support and retain all students. Basic writing programs silo and underserve students who would better benefit from direct access to credit-bearing, college-level coursework with support. Developing careful approaches that enable students to circumvent non-credit bearing basic writing courses has immediate and profound positive effects on the persistence and retention of Black, Latinx, and working-class students (see, e.g., Leslie Hensen and Katie Hern; Katie Hern; the Multiple Measures Assessment Project).

As a replacement for basic writing courses that seek to integrate students directly into college-level coursework, corequisite writing courses provide an especially powerful form of writing instruction. These course structures have expanded fairly rapidly recently; hence the impetus for this special issue. In simplest terms, a corequisite course is a course a student is required to take alongside another course. As the Course Design pieces in this issue demonstrate, corequisite writing instruction takes many forms. Over the past several decades, writing studies scholars have experimented with and reported on a number of creative alternatives to non-credit-bearing basic writing courses, seeking to mainstream students through co-curricular courses, studio or writing lab options, or stretch models that provide students with additional support (see Peter Adams; Greg Glau; Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson; Rachel Rigonlino and Penny Freel; Judith Rodby and Tom Fox). In many cases, writing scholars have been able to successfully advocate for all writing coursework to be credit-bearing (by our definition). In others, the corequisite course does not count toward the degree, but it does still enable students to begin directly in the credit-bearing option. The goal is to move students into college composition while also providing meaningful, challenging support for them while they are in the course—and not prior to it.

Part of what has complicated reforms to writing placement and the development of corequisite writing courses is the support of these initiatives by stakeholders outside the university and far-removed from our classes. For example, states like California, Florida, and Connecticut have passed legislation to either reduce or eliminate writing remediation, thus having a similar effect of placing all or nearly all college-admitted students starting in credit-bearing
courses with corequisite support when needed. In many ways, this is good news that echoes statements from our field: the 2015 TYCA White Paper on Developmental Education Reforms draws attention to the potential long-term effects of reform efforts that deny access to postsecondary education for some populations, namely “class- and race-based ‘tracking’ that perpetuates occupational and professional segregation” (228). While such state mandates are rooted in research that demonstrates the improved retention rates for students who begin in credit-bearing courses, they are also often framed in terms of efficiency and speed (see Complete College America, “Corequisite Support”).

Writing scholars are right to be wary of these external bodies’ involvement; we, too, are leery of what Linda Adler-Kassner has identified as the insidious effects of the “educational industrial complex” (320). While we should challenge and critique the instrumentalist language of organizations that focus nearly exclusively on credit accumulation and “clear” educational pathways, we can and should also leverage the external support for educational reforms that clearly benefit students. As Hensen and Hern note, “[S]tudents of color are being disproportionately excluded from college-level courses based on criteria that do not accurately reflect their ability to succeed, and this exclusion has very real and measurable consequences for their educational progress.” As we all seek to engage in the lifelong work of exposing and addressing systemic racism—on our campuses, in our practices, in our nation—writing faculty can advocate for changing writing course placement and course access as well as the institutional structures that support them.

This Issue: Equity, Access, and Institutional Change

When we wrote our call for manuscripts focused on corequisite writing courses nine months ago, three terms resonated for us: equity, access, and change. This special issue provides teacher-scholars a platform for exploring the intersections among access and equity in first year writing, particularly with an eye toward the corequisite model, state and national higher education policy, and the institutional nuances of issues like course credits, instructor load, scheduling, and professional development.

Cover Art

The cover for this issue was created by Brittany O’Meara, a printmaker, writer, and adjunct instructor in the First-Year Writing Program at Boise State University. Brittany says of this digital painting,

Traditional painting requires the use of various brushes in size and shape to apply paint to a canvas, which creates a tangible object that hangs in physical spaces. Because of the pandemic, we are all asked

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to learn new ways of experiencing the world and connecting with others, and this new way of existing opens up a conversation about art and access. [...] Creating art that is both painterly in form but digital in medium works to remove the barriers that are commonly associated with viewing art in both place and practice.

This piece, in its representation of the unique intersection of art and access, fits perfectly with the themes of equity and access we see in this special issue.

**At a Glance: Connections and Collaboration**

In this visual piece, Shelley Rodrigo and Samantha Sturman illustrate a course structure that is not otherwise represented in this issue: online corequisite instruction. Offering a corequisite course online in turn offers college access to a wider range of students. While the current situation requires many courses to be moved online, designing an online corequisite course comes with its own set of unique challenges and opportunities. Their visual collaboration examines two online corequisite courses (one synchronous and one asynchronous) taught by faculty trained both in corequisite instruction and best practices for online course design. It shows how these different course designs make use of tools within Learning Management Software (LMS) in purposeful and intentional ways to create corequisite courses that are fully integrated with the first year writing courses they support.

**The Articles**

This collection of articles offers a variety of perspectives that build nicely on each other, from national (Peter Adams), state (Diane Kelly-Riley), classroom and campus (Mark Blaauw-Hara, Carrie Strand Tebeau, Dominic Borowiak, and Jamie Blaauw-Hara), and finally historical (Eric Armstrong, Megan Baptista Geist, and Joshua Geist) levels. Adams, professor emeritus at The Community College of Baltimore County in Baltimore, Maryland, brings his national perspective as well as extensive pedagogical, administrative, and scholarly experience to bear in his piece. In it, he offers clear descriptions of the many variations of corequisite writing courses, necessary aspects of vital faculty support, and key issues to consider when transitioning to corequisite education. Second, Kelly-Riley’s piece provides a data-driven snapshot of corequisite implementation across different institution types (including community colleges, a small college, and universities with various research expectations) within one state educational context. Third, Blaauw-Hara et al., of North Central Michigan College, share the results of their study of the efficacy of a “writing about writing” approach within a corequisite course. Their findings speak to the power of challenging curricular materials for all
first year writing students. Finally, Armstrong et al. of The College of the Sequoias reveal how often meaningful educational reform is met by backlash, and often from educators themselves. They end with strategies to help us all remain vigilant to likely threats to corequisite writing education.

The Course Designs

The four Course Design pieces offer insights into how corequisite is conceptualized and corequisite writing instruction is shaped by its local context. They vary in credit hours, number of students, and instructor models. As importantly to us, while all offer examples of excellent courses, these scholars also write candidly and with vulnerability about the imperfect and nonlinear nature of curricular change. Angela Christie and Lynee Lewis Gaillet describe the development of a corequisite experience that pairs a “freshman learning experience” course with the initial first year writing course. Sara Heaser and Darci L. Thoune detail their efforts to design a careful corequisite course that is taught by a different instructor than the first year writing course. The robust corequisite course has had the unintended consequence of raising new questions about the first year writing course that it supports. Kim Jaxon, Laura Sparks, and Chris Fosen describe a dramatically different course configuration than most of us are used to: ninety students in a “jumbo” course who also attend small ten-person workshops as part of the overall course experience. Stacey Stanfield Anderson, Kathleen Klompien, and Kim Vose share their two-credit intensive corequisite course, the popularity of which has led them to add upper-division versions of it. Collectively, these windows into four very different institutional contexts illuminate the bright spots and dusty corners of our corequisite classrooms.

The Where We Are Section

This issue concludes with pieces by two special scholars in our field, both of whom have now retired. Tom Fox (often with his colleague Judith Rodby) unabashedly countered the damaging basic writing narrative of “bonehead English” at his institution, California State University Chico, for many years, and developed alternatives to non-credit-bearing coursework even in the face of direct hostility from colleagues. He has been a champion of all student writers throughout his career, and his book Standards and Access is still relevant today. We are delighted that he contributed this piece, which is rooted in the classroom and also addresses institutional change. And finally, our colleague Karen Uehling has been a tireless advocate for students in basic writing classes for nearly forty years. She helped found the Conference on Basic Writing, remaining an active participant in that organization for many decades. During that same time, she taught thousands of students in a variety of basic,
first year, undergraduate, and graduate writing courses. Her piece helpfully illuminates the changes she has been a part of as our field’s efforts to best support all students have continued to evolve. It is an honor to have both of their perspectives included here.

Taken together, these pieces raise dynamic, compelling, and unsettling questions about corequisite writing education. We are energized by these scholars’ work and look forward to the research projects that will be inspired by them.

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“The Multiple Measures Assessment Project.” *RP Group*, [rpgroup.org/All-Projects/ArticleView/articleId/266](rpgroup.org/All-Projects/ArticleView/articleId/266)
At a Glance

Imagining Online Corequisite Courses

Rochelle Rodrigo and Samantha Sturman

Imagining Online Corequisite Courses
Rochelle Rodrigo (University of Arizona)
Samantha Sturman (Boise State University)

...imagine talking to an excited colleague who is teaching a studio style co-requisite writing course. They’re excitedly promoting the benefit of the extra time provided by the extra credit hour. They’re describing the activities they have students do to more deeply engage with their writing.

Transport yourself to the classroom in which you imagine this all happening. What do you see? We’re betting it’s not your friendly neighborhood learning management system...

**This is an interactive visual. Please click on the image to enter.
You will be directed to an external site.**
Articles

Giving Hope to the American Dream: Implementing a Corequisite Model of Developmental Writing

Peter Adams

It has been twenty-seven years since a small group of faculty at the Community College of Baltimore County, faced with the discovery that two-thirds of students placed in our upper-level basic writing course never passed first year composition, began the development of the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP), one of the earliest corequisite programs in the country. This article traces that development of the ALP model and identifies the features of ALP that have now resulted in 74% of our basic writers passing first year composition. In addition, after exploring the growing phenomenon of top-down mandates concerning basic writing, it provides guidance for departments engaged in selecting the best corequisite model for their context.

“Dev Ed” and the American Dream

Developmental education (colloquially, “dev ed”) is the focal point for the American Dream. It is the most democratic segment of higher education. It is filled with students who are the first generation in their families to go to college; students who are not sure that they belong in college; students who lead very stressful lives; and, students full of hope that they will be able to improve their situation in life. It should play a crucial role in providing a pathway to success for these students, and yet, until recently, developmental education in English and math has been markedly unsuccessful at performing this important role. In school after school, state after state, studies have revealed that nearly two-thirds of students placed into traditional developmental education never succeed in passing even the credit-level course for which they are being prepared (Bailey et al.; Denley). In response to this sobering data, schools across the country, such as The Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) (MD), Suffolk County Community College (NY), and Butler Community College (KS), are making the move from traditional, prerequisite developmental composition courses to corequisite composition courses to improve the success rates for students placed in developmental courses.
At CCBC, the corequisite model we developed, called the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP), places student evaluated as “developmental” to, nevertheless, register for a first year composition section in which half the students are ALP students and the other half are students whose placement is first year composition. In addition, the dozen or so ALP students meet for an additional three hours each week with the same instructor. This corequisite course comprises four different activities:

- Activities designed to prepare students for what’s coming next in the first year composition course;
- Activities designed to re-enforce what was just covered in the first year composition course;
- Activities that integrate reading and writing;
- Activities to address students’ non-cognitive issues.

State Mandates

In recent years, there has been increasing pressure from state governments for schools to implement corequisite models. In eight states—California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia—policies have been enacted mandating the adoption of corequisite approaches. Faculty are understandably skeptical when legislators, most of whom have never taught, start telling professional educators how to do their jobs. When Connecticut’s PA 1240, which mandated corequisite approaches to developmental education, was enacted in 2012, my colleague, Susan Gabriela, and I worked with six colleges in the state to design and implement corequisite writing courses. The faculty from those six schools were not happy to be on the receiving end of the nation’s first legislative mandate. While I shared their unhappiness, I also asked them a question: “what is the correct faculty response when a top-down mandate is actually a good idea? When it will clearly benefit students? Must we still resist?”

In Connecticut, faculty did not resist, but we did do considerable collective grumbling as we developed programs based on the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP)—a corequisite model developed at CCBC—at their six colleges, programs they became increasingly proud of when their data showed they had doubled the rate at which developmental students passed first year composition. The programs these schools adopted allowed developmental students to register for sections of first year composition in which half the students were developmental and the other half were composition level. The developmental students also registered for a corequisite course taught by the same instructor. At our final meeting, I asked the coordinators from the six schools how they were
now thinking about PA 1240. The reply I remember best was this: “I still hate top-down mandates, but without PA 1240, we never would have done this.”

That reply perfectly captures my bifurcated view of such mandates. As a lifelong faculty member, I automatically oppose them and worry about the precedent they set. But as someone who has devoted his professional life to helping students achieve the success they dream of, I recognize that a mandate may be a necessary evil. At CCBC, we are quite proud of the fact that the success rate for our developmental students has increased from 38% for students in traditional, prerequisite sections to 75% for students in ALP sections (Cho et al. 7). It still took us ten years to scale up to 100%; in fact, it took eight years to reach the point where even 50% of students were taking ALP. If we had scaled ALP up to 100% after three years instead of ten, more than 3,500 students who did not pass ENG 101 would have. That is a sobering statistic enough to challenge my ingrained faculty resistance to mandates.

In addition, now that Texas (HB 2223) and California (AB 705) have climbed onto the mandate bandwagon, it seems like faculty resistance to this trend is unlikely to succeed. I would argue it is time for faculty to adopt a new strategy. If state mandates are unavoidable and if mandates requiring corequisite developmental education will result in thousands more students succeeding, I propose we stop resisting. Instead, when possible, faculty should get involved before the state issues a mandate in order to encourage two outcomes: 1) to shape the mandate in a way our professional expertise suggests will be most effective, for example, ensuring that the state mandate doesn’t require schools to purchase and deploy commercial products that consist primarily of grammar drills; and 2) to ensure the mandate is accompanied by resources to support its implementation.

**History of ALP**

In the summer of 1998, as the Coordinator of Developmental Writing, I was startled when the program was allocated its first computer, an Apple IIe. There was no way the eight hundred students in the program could “gather around the computer” to work on their essays, so I needed to find a different use for the machine. Having recently taken a course on databases, I decided to use the computer to set up a database for all students placed in developmental writing courses and to follow them for four years. I thought I would use this longitudinal study to demonstrate the effectiveness of our program. Four years later, in 1993, I was stunned to find that the study revealed that only 33% of students who took our traditional prerequisite developmental writing course ever passed first year composition, which meant that 67% of our developmental students, at least within four years, had not passed the course for which they were being “developed.”
Examining the data more closely, I realized that few students were actually failing courses; most were unsuccessful because they gave up—they dropped out. Seventeen percent of students who took our upper-level developmental writing course never failed anything; they passed the developmental course but then never even registered for first year composition. They gave up. Of the students who actually received a failing grade in the developmental course, most failed because they dropped out before the semester ended. Most of the two thirds of students who registered for our prerequisite developmental writing course never passed first year composition because they gave up before they got there.

To try to understand why this large number of students was giving up, we knew we had to ask students. We convened a series of eight focus groups at which we asked students this question: “If you had to drop out of this course at some point during the semester, which of the following would probably be the reason?” The students’ responses, delivered in between bites of pizza, are listed in the middle column below. Armed with this list, over the next three years, we surveyed about two hundred students in developmental courses, asking them how likely each of the items were to be the reason if they had to drop the course before the end of the semester—on a four-item scale of not likely, somewhat likely, likely, or very likely. Data from the fall of 2010 is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Students’ Reasons They Might Drop Out

<table>
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<th>Possible Reasons for Dropping the Course</th>
<th>Likely or Very Likely</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. financial problems</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. health problems</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. problems or changes at work</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. transportation problems</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. needs of my children</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. problems with spouse/boy-girl friend</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. problems with parents or other relative I live with</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. psychological problems</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. might have trouble balancing school and work</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. alcohol or drug problems</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. might move out of state or transfer</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. legal problems</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. pregnancy or birth of child</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. might get too far behind</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>course is not for credit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>course is boring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>problems with the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>might get discouraged—find the work too hard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>might decide college is not for me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fourteen of the nineteen reasons for dropping out (#1-14) were what are often referred to as “life issues,” problems caused by students’ stressful struggles to balance work, school, finances, and family. Items 18 and 19—“becoming discouraged” and “deciding college is not for me” (which is probably a face-saving way to say what I heard over and over from my students: a fear that they are not “college material”)—are “affective issues,” issues that do not involve their life in the outer world, but issues in their minds, in their psyches. In her important study based on five years of interviews with community college students and faculty, Rebecca Cox reports widespread fear among the more than 120 students she interviewed. “At the core of different expressions of fear,” Cox reports, “were the same feelings of dread and apprehension that success in college would prove to be an unrealizable dream” (26). Many of my students also reported that they felt stigmatized by being placed in a “remedial” class. Coming to that class was embarrassing. Telling their family or friends about it was humiliating. In addition, being placed in a developmental class and being excluded from college-level classes caused many of my students to report they felt little connection or attachment to the college.

I also observed, over many years, that students often felt confused or puzzled by college terminology and protocols. Often lacking family or friends with college experience, they had no one to turn to when they did not understand what “office hours” were for, what a “rubric” was, or, most critically, how and where to ask for help.

At CCBC, we developed the Accelerated Learning Program to address these three kinds of issues, which caused many of the students in our traditional, prerequisite program to be unsuccessful. Groups of faculty developed materials and strategies designed to address the life issues that so often derailed students. We asked students to write about financial issues like payday loans or how to apply for a Pell Grant. We asked students to investigate where to go on campus to find help with specific problems, and we worked with students on managing their time for effectively. To address affective issues, we asked students, working in groups, to deconstruct the term “college material.” We established activities to help students to respond effectively to setbacks, and we asked students to set both short-term and long-term goals. To address stu-
In the years since 2007, as a result of numerous studies (some of which involve very large numbers of students at multiple colleges) there has developed, in the developmental education community, a recognition that a corequisite approach to developmental education will greatly improve students’ chances of success. A study by the Community College Research Center (CCRC) found that 74% of students placed in ALP at CCBC passed the credit-level English course. Only 38% of students taking our traditional prerequisite developmental writing course passed the credit-level course (Cho et al., 7). Tristan Denley, in the Tennessee Board of Regents Technical Brief No.3, reports that “the pass
rate for those students who took a corequisite writing class doubled over the historic 30.9 percent within an academic year to 61.8 percent” (2).

Defining success as passing the first college-level course, Complete College America reports that Georgia’s corequisite approach raised the success rate for developmental students in English 101 from 16% to 71%; in West Virginia success rates went from 37% to 68%; in Indiana, from 37% to 55%; and in Colorado from 31% to 64% (Complete College America). As impressive as these numbers are, it is important to remember that they are more than just numbers; they represent the dreams of thousands of hopeful students.

The Need for Resources to Support the Transition to a Corequisite Model of Developmental Writing

The list of tasks faculty, some of whom teach five courses a semester, will need to accomplish to implement corequisite programs is discouragingly long. It is imperative that some faculty receive released time if implementation is to be effective.

At the top of the list of tasks is a rigorous program of faculty development:

- Faculty development for integrating reading and writing must be planned and delivered. English faculty will need help in developing the ability to address students’ reading needs and reading faculty will need help addressing students’ writing needs. In some schools, faculty development has depended primarily on workshops conducted by visiting experts. At other schools, it has consisted of a series of workshops conducted by the reading faculty for the writing faculty and by the writing faculty for the reading faculty. A few schools have been able to arrange for a reading faculty and a writing instructor to team teach for a semester, each learning from the other.

- Corequisite pedagogy relies heavily on active learning. Faculty development in this area will need to be created for those faculty not familiar with or comfortable with active learning. Again, outside experts can be brought in to lead workshops. At CCBC, we brought in Michelle Zollars from the Southern Center for Active Learning Excellence at Patrick Henry Community College (VA). Other schools have called on active learning experts on campus.

- Few faculty have any preparation to address non-cognitive issues, so additional faculty development will need to be implemented in this area. This might start with research into what challenges students report facing. Then a group of faculty can begin brainstorming approaches to addressing those challenges.
Most corequisite models require faculty to teach the first year composition course and the corequisite course paired with it. Few faculty have had to coordinate a pair of courses like these, and the task is even harder when a different instructor teaches the corequisite section. Many faculty will require assistance developing well-coordinated courses.

In addition, there are myriad logistical and administrative tasks requiring attention:

- A specific corequisite model will need to be agreed upon.
- New course proposals will have to be written, agreed to, and approved by a curriculum committee or faculty senate whose members may need convincing that corequisites are a good idea.
- At many schools, previously separate Reading and English Departments must be either merged or must work out an organizational arrangement that allows for the integration of reading and writing.
- Counselors and advisors will have to be informed of the new approach so they can explain it to students and help them register for the appropriate courses.
- Records and registration will need to be consulted so that a system can be developed that ensures the right students and the right balance of students register for each section of each course.
- Institutional Research will need to be consulted so that data is produced to help evaluate the program and modify any parts that don’t seem to be working.
- Coordination with the developmental math faculty will be necessary to help ensure that part-time students will not be required to register for six credits of English and six credits of math in their first semester.
- At schools where classrooms are in short supply, some way to avoid having a class of ten or twelve corequisite students occupying a classroom designed for thirty will need to be developed.

Too often, the state mandates I discussed earlier require implementation of a corequisite model by a certain date but provide few or no resources to support that implementation. For example, in California, Katie Hern reports, in *Getting There II: A Statewide Progress Report on Implementation of AB 705*, that “a key source of funding for this work—the state’s Basic Skills and Student Outcomes Transformation Program—ended, just as colleges were gearing up for AB 705, and no additional state funding has been earmarked to help colleges make the dramatic shifts the law requires” (24). Given current college budget shortfalls and little or no support from the state, individual institutions facing a mandated change, too often, look for a way to implement the mandate that is
least expensive and least disruptive. As a result, some schools are implementing corequisite models that are not robust enough to produce the dramatic improvements in success rates we all hope for. At the least robust end of the range of models being adopted is this: all students are placed in English 101, and those needing help are told to go to the Writing Center or to a computer lab. But, a little definitional housekeeping: in a corequisite model, students who need support in order to succeed in the credit-level writing course, must be allowed to register for that course and then receive that support *concurrently*. A model that has students taking a developmental course that meets six hours a week for eight weeks and then taking the credit-level course six hours a week for the second eight weeks is *not* a corequisite model. The support the students need is not delivered concurrently with the credit level course. This is a *prerequisite* model squeezed into one semester. Given these pressures, it may be useful to lay out a number of corequisite models already extant across the country.

**Four Corequisite Models**

The following list, gathered from my observations, may give faculty seeking to develop the most effective corequisite model for their context, for their college’s policies and preferences, and for their students, a sense of the range of options available. In the diagrams that follow, students who have been placed into credit-level courses are represented wearing purple sweaters and shirts. Students who have been placed into developmental courses are represented wearing green sweaters and shirts.

*Fast Track or Stretch Model*

Developmental students register for a six-hour (or fewer) course with one instructor. The class comprises developmental students only. The course blends the developmental material and the college-level material.

![Figure 1: The Fast Track Mode](image)
The Studio Model

Developmental students register for a three-credit college-level course where they are mixed with an equal or greater number of college-level students. In addition, they register for a one-hour studio course with students from a variety of other courses requiring writing. At each studio session students present drafts, they are working on and receive feedback from other students, much as art students do in an art studio.

Figure 2: The Studio Model

Tutoring Model

All students are enrolled in a credit level course. Developmental support is offered through the Writing Center or a computer lab. At its best, this model makes use of materials developed by the writing faculty and/or tutors trained so they are aware of the curriculum and requirements in the first year composition class. Many schools report a lack of student visits to the computer lab or Writing Center if such visits are not required.

Figure 3: The Tutoring Model
**Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) Model**

Ten developmental students join an equal or larger number of college-ready students in a 3-hour per week ALP section of the credit-level course. The students who are not yet college ready also register for an ALP developmental section for an additional 3 hours per week. At some schools, the support class meets for fewer than three hours per week. At other schools the support class is taught by a different instructor.

![Image of ALP Model](image)

**Figure 4: ALP Model**

**Seven Characteristics of Effective Corequisite Courses**

Based on the focus groups and student surveys I conducted from 2008 through 2012 and on conversations over the past eleven years with corequisite writing faculty I have worked with in colleges across the country, I have identified seven tasks that corequisite programs need to address in order to improve student success. These seven tasks are listed below and for each I have spelled out the features of corequisite models that address the task.

**Task 1:** The model must effectively address the non-cognitive issues that cause so many students to drop out.

Features:

- Faculty development like that described earlier is provided to prepare instructors to address these issues.
- Class size is small enough for faculty to really know their students. At CCBC, our class size for the corequisite course is ten. Many schools are having similar success with a class size of twelve, but schools with larger class sizes report difficulties.
• Classes meet for enough time to allow non-cognitive issues to be addressed. Traditional developmental writing courses require three hours a week to teach writing alone. Corequisite courses cover equivalent writing material but have added responsibility for addressing reading and non-cognitive issues. It appears that offering a corequisite course for fewer than three hours per week would produce reduced success rates.

Task 2: The model must confirm for students that they are college material and that they belong in college. Under traditional, prerequisite models, students, who too often arrive in college with doubts about whether they are “college material,” whether they belong in college, are told, too often based on a questionable instrument like Compass or Accuplacer, receive the message that we are also not sure they belong in college. They are barred from taking a college-level course and instead are required to prove they are “college material” by passing a developmental class that feels more like seventh grade than college. This experience only exacerbates any insecurities students arrive with.

Under a corequisite model, developmental students receive a very different message. They are placed into a college-level writing class and told that they will be supported by a corequisite class to make sure they can succeed.

Feature:

• Students are enrolled in the college-level writing course.

Task 3: The model must shorten the pipeline through which students must pass in order to pass the credit-level writing course.

Features:

• Students are able to complete their college-level writing course and their developmental work in one semester.
• Reading and writing are integrated into one course.

Task 4: The stigma students feel when identified as needing extra support must be mitigated.

Features:

• Corequisite students are in the college-level course along with students evaluated as college-ready.
• In the corequisite course, students are reading college-level texts and writing college-level essays.
**Task 5:** The model should strengthen students’ attachment to the college, their sense that they belong.

Features:

- Students are in a small cohort that spends considerable time together.
- In class, they are frequently working in groups enhancing the bonding that improves attachment.

**Task 6:** The model must encourage and support faculty in adopting more effective pedagogy.

Feature:

- Instructors are provided with rigorous faculty development opportunities to assist them with any aspect of corequisite teaching that they are not comfortable with. This may include, for example, integrating reading and writing, active learning/group work, addressing non-cognitive issues.

**Task 7:** The model must support students as they struggle with challenges in the credit-level writing course.

Features:

- Corequisite sections have small class size.
- Corequisite sections meet enough hours per week to address reading, writing, and non-cognitive issues.
- Corequisite sections are taught by the same instructor as the paired credit section.

Based on the seven tasks listed above, I have developed the following checklist which could be useful as English departments attempt to decide on which of the corequisite models is both feasible and robust. In the first column, I have indicated which of the above tasks is addressed by each feature. In the second column are listed the features I identified as necessary to accomplish each task, in the third column are suggestions for scoring models for each feature, and in the fourth column is a place to record the score.
Table 2: Checklist for Evaluating the Robustness of Corequisite Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task characteristics supported by each feature</th>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Scoring</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2, 3, 4</td>
<td>students are enrolled in the college-level writing course</td>
<td>yes = 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>no = 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>students are not required to do work that feels like a repeat of 7th grade work (backward curriculum design from the composition class)</td>
<td>0 to 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3, 6</td>
<td>integrated reading and writing, at least in the coreq class</td>
<td>both 101 and coreq = 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>coreq only = 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>none = 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>coreq students are in a 101 class with 101-level students</td>
<td>yes = 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>no = 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5, 6</td>
<td>active learning employed frequently, at least in the coreq class</td>
<td>frequently in both 101 &amp; coreq = 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>less frequently in both = 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>frequently in coreq only = 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>infrequently in coreq = 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>none = 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>coreq students in a cohort that spends extended time together</td>
<td>6 hours/week (101 + coreq) = 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 hours/week (101 + coreq) = 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 hours/week (101 + coreq) = 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>coreq students meet together only in 101 = 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task characteristics supported by each feature</td>
<td>Feature</td>
<td>Scoring</td>
<td>Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1, 5, 7</td>
<td>small class size for coreq class</td>
<td>&lt;13 = 4 14-15 = 3 &gt;15 = 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1, 6</td>
<td>faculty development provided to help instructors feel comfortable with the logistics and the pedagogy of a corequisite model</td>
<td>instructors well prepared = 4 instructors somewhat prepared = 3 instructors not prepared = 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>same instructor for both classes</td>
<td>yes = 4 no = 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>coreq section meets for enough time to address reading, writing, and non-cognitive issues</td>
<td>3 hours = 4 2 hours = 3 1 hour = 1 0 hours, students referred to tutoring = 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evaluating the robustness of various models under consideration may help faculty to reach consensus, and it may also help in negotiations with their administrations, which, in some cases, may be pushing the adoption of a less expensive or less disruptive model. It should be extremely helpful in these negotiations for English faculty to be able to demonstrate that the model they prefer is more robust and will produce stronger results.

Many schools today are in the process of adopting a corequisite model either because they are convinced doing so will help their students succeed or because of a top-down mandate or, sometimes, both. Usually, the faculty working on this major innovation are doing so while they are still expected to perform all or most of their regular responsibilities. As they attempt to read the scholarship, attend conferences, examine data, find time to meet, discuss, reach consensus, and then convince their colleagues of their decision, they are still teaching classes, grading papers, and serving on committees. It is a daunting task. It requires a serious commitment of time and energy. But our students deserve nothing less. Doubling the percentage of students who are successful
will have an important impact on our students’ lives and on our society as well. Our commitments to social justice and equity leave us no option.

**Works Cited**


Engaging Accountability: Faculty-led, Statewide Implementation of a Corequisite Model of First Year Writing across Two- and Four-Year Public Institutions

Diane Kelly-Riley

This article reports on a statewide implementation of a corequisite model of instruction for first year writing at two- and four-year public, postsecondary institutions in Idaho. This project explores how these institutions manage political and economic mandates for educational reform while preserving educational quality for students and teaching conditions for faculty. In presenting a model of agency and collaboration, this article reports preliminary results from the corequisite revised curricular configurations and the potential for this model to meet the instructional needs of varied student populations across the state.

In postsecondary writing, corequisite courses have evolved as a viable model to respond to instructional and curricular needs of developmental writers while also addressing external accountability mandates for increased retention, course and program completion. These approaches are informed by research and disciplinary best practices and are also attentive to political and economic constraints and realities. While early versions of corequisite instruction have been around since the early 1990s, this approach recently gained more traction as a way to meet educational reform mandates. However, writing studies often characterizes scholarship that engages accountability work negatively or with a great deal of suspicion. The villains in this story are often characterized as “efficiency-minded administrators” burnishing outcomes assessment to “diminish the value and purpose of writing program[s]” (Gallagher 25). In Composition in an Age of Austerity, Nancy Welch and Tony Scott assert that “in the age of corporatization and austerity, we now face the consequences of a field that has never established a scholarly habit of positioning composition scholarship in relation to the powerful political economic factors and trends that shape composition work” and they worry about “pedagogical ‘innovations’ that come under the gun of cost-cutting and . . . embrace neoliberalism’s privatizing and commodifying market pursuits as somehow compatible with the field’s public ethos and mission” (6).

Such perspectives forget the long history of corequisite courses in composition studies and the agency and collaboration required to sustain these
programs for so long. Writing studies scholars and practitioners have developed sound disciplinarily instructional models of corequisite instruction that attend to the needs of students, faculty, and institutions while preserving the ideals of the field. This article examines how Idaho writing studies faculty at two- and four-year public institutions managed political and economic mandates for educational reform in order to implement a statewide model of corequisite writing instruction called English 101 Plus while working to preserve best practices informed by scholarly and research innovations from composition. This model, English 101 Plus, replaced remedial writing with a required three-credit first year writing course (FYC) taken with a one or two credit concurrent corequisite section that provides instructional support for the FYC content. I served as Director of Composition at the University of Idaho beginning in 2013 and was involved with the implementation of this program statewide. I will explore the context that gave rise to these educational reform mandates, describe the collaboration between faculty at the two- and four-year Idaho public institutions, review the curricular configurations of the corequisite model of English 101 Plus, and report on preliminary results related to student learning from the statewide implementation.

In our state, Idaho writing program administrators and faculty adapted lessons from the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) development of the Outcomes Statement for First Year Composition and applied them to the design of corequisite models supporting first year writing. The Outcomes Statement was developed to articulate and compare what students learn across similar postsecondary programs at different institutional sites while retaining and attending to individual program features. The Outcomes Statement arose out of collective concern to articulate expectations for post-secondary first year writing programs to address both internal and external accountability concerns. The authors of the Outcomes Statement identified common goals to be attained rather than specifying certain levels of standardized performance (Yancey). As a result, the Outcomes Statement can work across a variety of institution types: at a community college like Eastern Idaho College in rural Idaho Falls as well as the elite, Ivy-league Yale University in urban New Haven. At both institutions, students enrolled in first year writing work toward the same goals, but have different expectations for performance based on their specific contexts and missions.

In 2012, the Idaho State Board of Education mandated the elimination or reduction of all remedial courses in public, postsecondary institutions. The Idaho writing programs adopted a flexible corequisite model called English 101 Plus. Like the Outcomes Statement, English 101 Plus has features of commonality across the public two- and four-year institutions, but retains sufficient flexibility to attend to specific local context considerations—student popula-
tion, instructional corps, philosophical program approaches, and so on—in a geographically dispersed state like Idaho. Cross institutional collaboration on English 101 Plus has resulted in enhanced programs, curricular structures, professional development networks, and increased agency for faculty and students who occupy these courses, exceeding what might have been possible from single-site implementation alone.

**Competing Political Contexts of Corequisite Writing Instruction**

Narratives about developmental writers, composition, and the broader political and economic context have multiple points of tension and competing perspectives. In “Creation Myths and Flash Points: Understanding Basic Writing through Conflicted Stories,” Linda Adler-Kassner and Susanmarie Harrington chart the evolution of some of these narratives noting “in each break point, conflict emerged because differing viewpoints constructed alternative narratives about basic writing and basic writers. These passionate narratives...locate basic writing in different settings. They differ in the agency assigned to writers and teachers, and thus describe the problems basic writing addresses” (15). As the accountability movement has evolved, the agency of its various players has also changed.

In her 2012 CWPA presidential address, Adler-Kassner began to map out partnerships of what she eventually called, in her 2017 presidential address to CCCC, the Educational Intelligence Complex (EIC). In these talks, Adler-Kassner warned about emerging narratives and players in the landscape of accountability and the quickly changing terrain of elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education. She described two distinct paths of public education: one that values education for the benefit of an educated citizenry and another that sees the role of education to prepare workers to help the nation compete in the global economy. In the EIC, according to Adler-Kassner, educational reform resulted in unprecedented partnerships between testing companies, legislative entities, and non-profit agencies driving educational reform. Composition teachers were being left out of the conversation.

Adler-Kassner’s framework and the view outlined by Welch and Scott detail a worrisome portrait for composition and writing studies, one that leaves composition instructors and their students seemingly with little agency. There is no doubt that there are strong forces that push and shape our field. Composition scholars have long documented the effects of the changing educational and accountability contexts and the particular demands placed on first year writing programs. These pressures include shifting the college writing curriculum into high school settings and streamlining first year writing curricula to get students through, often referred to as “guided pathways.” In *College Credit for Writing in High School: The ‘Taking Care Of’ Business*, Kristine Hansen and
Christine Farris observe the social, political, and economic factors driving early college credit programs and note how these arguments have been framed in economic terms. This “value” is twofold: value to individual students who lose out financially by not going on to college and in terms of the losses in the US economy in the global marketplace for ill-prepared workers.

The transition sites of workforce or college readiness have been the point of contention within our political and educational systems. Students exiting a twelve year primary and/or secondary educational system who appear not ready for work or advanced study give people heartburn; a great deal of controversy happens here. Chris Gallagher advocates for a return to “the notion that colleges and universities are places where people gather to learn together. As compositionists who teach one of the core arts of engagement, and whose very profession and discipline hang in the balance, we should not only be participating in these developments, but leading them” (32). Indeed, the development of corequisite instruction for first year writing programs is one of the places where this transition work has and continues to happen in ways attentive to competing demands of stakeholders.

In the evolution of corequisite education, non-profit entities with strong legislative support have driven much of the current work advocating this model of instruction, but these types of courses have a longer history. Writing centers developed early models of corequisite instruction in the 1990s in response to early accountability mandates. Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson in Teaching/Writing in Thirdspaces: The Studio Approach and Lisa Johnson-Shull and I in “Writes of Passage: Conceptualizing the Relationship of Writing Center and Writing Assessment Practices” imagined curricular configurations that retained the best practices and ideals of composition instruction while navigating external mandates for more streamlined instruction. Grego and Thompson’s Writing Studio and Washington State University’s small group tutorial programs created course structures adjacent to—but separate from—regular, FYC that provided supportive course structures—often led by advanced undergraduate or graduate students—that preserved student agency. These models utilized theories of collaborative learning articulated by Kenneth Bruffee and practices of peer tutors articulated by Harvey Kail and John Trimbur.

Peter Adams, Sarah Gearhart, Robert Miller, and Anne Roberts developed the Accelerated Learning Project (ALP) at Baltimore County Community College in the early 2000s. They provided needed research on the efficacy of this model of corequisite support and ALP is perhaps the most widely acknowledged model to meet students’ instructional needs while working within institutional missions, mandates, and economic realities. The ALP evolution provided a more structured approach than that of Grego and Thompson’s studio and Washington State University’s small group tutorials. The ALP corequisite
model articulated a more directive curriculum, still adjacent to the regular curriculum, but more intentionally supportive of course content and often led by instructional faculty rather than peer tutors.

Although compositionists have been suspicious about the intentions of non-profit entities driving educational support, there are groups whose work is rooted in evidence-based practices focused on addressing inequities in education. Idaho and its public universities adopted Complete College America (CCA) and are now part of the 48 state and regional consortium members of its “Alliance.” CCA advocates for specific measures to address problems in postsecondary completion, focusing on gateway courses and semester course loads (Complete College America). Their work has been informed by research conducted by the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Teachers College at Columbia University, a primary contributor researching the efficacy of remedial education in postsecondary settings. In general, CCRC has asserted that remedial education does not serve students well, particularly across demographic classifications, and that new models are needed (see Judith Scott-Clayton). In addition, CCA has been a significant supporter of corequisite models to transform postsecondary education by mainstreaming students into credit-bearing coursework that counts toward graduation. According to CCA, the overemphasis on remedial education has had a negative effect, particularly on students of color and students from lower socio-economic groups.

In response to political and economic pressures, many states have mandated various educational reform efforts, including overhauling writing placement and first year writing curricula; there are several models of faculty collaboration positioned in response to such reform efforts. In “Legislating First-Year Writing Placement: Implications for Pennsylvania and Across the Country,” Katrina L. Miller, Emily Wender, and Bryna Siegel Finer detail statewide writing placement changes in Florida, Wisconsin, Idaho, and Pennsylvania. They note the need to “balance efforts to create coherence and thus political power and the local flexibility to respond to the demographic and institutional shifts in our own context.” Faculty at Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) saw accountability mandates as an opportunity to revise their first year writing curriculum to be more responsive to their student population, engage emerging composition scholarship about student learning, and be supportive of their large percentage of contingent faculty. Chris Blankenship, Anne Canavan, Justin Jory, Kati Lewis, Marlena Stanford, and Brittany Stephenson articulate the ways that “recent developments in the scholarship of threshold concepts in writing studies can provide a durable and flexible conceptual framework… responsive to neoliberal completion, job-readiness mandates within guided pathways and similar initiatives.” They demonstrate that composition faculty
have expertise and positionality to identify creative and productive solutions in this accountability context.

In Idaho, the current writing placement system grew out of a collaborative, faculty-led effort to revise writing placement procedures within the state. In “Relentless Engagement with State Educational Policy Reform: Collaborating to Change the Writing Placement Conversation,” Heidi Estrem, Dawn Shepherd, and Lloyd Duman detail how they negotiated with legislative entities to use research and scholarship about student learning and placement to improve the statewide writing placement process. Estrem, Shepherd, and Samantha Sturman describe this new placement process—called The Write Class—in “Reclaiming Writing Assessment.” The Write Class utilizes multiple measures, including state mandated standardized test scores, for writing placement and directed self-placement questions that inquire about students’ reading and writing habits and their personal circumstances.

Other writing studies scholars advocate for wider perspectives and assert that compositionists need to examine writing programs based on demographic categories, thereby enhancing our understanding of different students and how writing programs work for them. Genevieve deMueller Garcia and Iris Ruiz as well as Mya Poe and John Aloysious Cogan Jr. document the importance of examining writing programs and the students served through diverse lenses. deMueller Garcia and Ruiz argue that programmatic approaches need to overtly explore considerations and representations of constructs like race throughout a writing program. Poe and Cogan Jr. assert that consideration of programmatic or assessment consequences need to be examined at the level of individual students and their particular demographic profiles. In “Toward a Vision of Accelerated Curriculum & Pedagogy,” Katie Hern and Myra Snell argue that consideration of the consequences of curricular innovations should also include voices and representation of two-year colleges. Much of the scholarship about first year writing programs has focused on four-year schools and not on other institutional sites.

Presently, higher education is becoming more concerned about fairness and equity, and this means scholars and practitioners of composition must examine the curricular structures that help or hinder our students’ progress. Norbert Elliot, Alex Rudniy, and I describe an empirical framework for examining the representation of a writing construct and its relation to demographic variables and student performance. We conclude “students may concurrently occupy demographic spaces that place them in positions of both advantage and disadvantage” (112). We are obligated to investigate more deeply students’ particular experiences within our curricula, especially those demographic variables that matter in our local contexts. Through these investigations, we can continue to develop and advocate for pedagogical processes that allow our
students to be successful within the first year writing context. It is important to develop sophisticated understandings about how our curricula affect students by the demographic characteristics they predominantly bring to our courses. Ultimately, that positions us to be able to advocate for our faculty, programs, and students.

**Faculty-led Corequisite Responses to Accountability Mandates in Idaho**

The Idaho state legislature has situated postsecondary issues squarely within themes of economic prosperity. Like other US states, postsecondary attendance and attainment remains elusive. Immediately following the economic collapse of 2008, arguments about these reforms were attributed to the weaknesses in the state economy. In 2012, “the State Board … set an ambitious goal that 60% of Idahoans ages 25-34 will have a degree or certificate by 2020. Responsiveness to business needs is driving a renewed effort to develop home grown talent toward the goal of a more diverse economy” (Complete College Idaho). They also mandated the elimination of all remedial courses from both two- and four-year public institutions in English and Math. Until the fallout of the pandemic of 2020, the economy had largely recovered and the arguments for postsecondary attendance were framed in terms of the need to educate skilled workers to fill thousands of unfilled jobs in the burgeoning high tech and STEM industries in the southern part of the state. Now, as the national economy is at the mercy of the coronavirus, the narratives will surely change.

As a state, Idaho has a low percentage of citizens who have post-secondary degrees and first generation college students from rural areas and/or lower income households make up a large percentage of Idahoans who pursue higher education. Idaho has perennially ranked low in terms of public education spending. The percentage of Idaho students who continue their education beyond high school presents a significant challenge for higher education institutions in the state of Idaho. The “go-on” rate has continued to drop in recent years, from 52% in 2014 to 46% in 2015 (Corbin). In the 2019 edition of “The Facts: Facts about Idaho’s Public Education System,” the go-on percentage increased to 48% of the high school graduating class immediately enrolling in college the fall graduation. According to the National Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis, Idaho is in the bottom ten states for people going on and finishing a four-year degree. The Idaho State Board of Education has focused its efforts on helping people make the transition between high school and college.

However, in Idaho remoteness and isolation are facts of life. The geographical terrain is so rugged that there is no north-south interstate, only a two-lane
highway connecting the more populated “Treasure Valley” in the southern part of the state to the northern panhandle.

Figure 1 – Map of postsecondary institutions in Idaho

More than a decade ago, faculty in the southern part of the state began formulating ways to address the political context of first year writing. In 2007, all two- and four-year public institutions articulated common writing placement benchmarks based on standardized test scores as later detailed in Heidi Estrem’s “Placement in First-Year Writing Courses at Idaho Colleges and Universities.” This work established an English Placement Test Task Force to advise the state on the best placement options, and that project has evolved over time (see Estrem et al.). This collaborative project also established a scholarly network capable of deploying emerging, best-practice curricular and assessment
practices in first year writing placement and programming to respond to the state board’s mandate to eliminate all remedial courses in 2012. As a result, a strong and active network of programs and their faculty at two- and four-year institutions have provided first year writing courses around the state with a great deal of coherence and support.

Development of English 101 Plus

The curricular revision for English 101 Plus was led by Heidi Estrem and Karen Uehling from Boise State University (BSU) and C. Meagan Newberry at the College of Western Idaho (CWI) (“English 101P Program: BSU and CWI”). They began brainstorming ways to accommodate the state board’s mandate to eliminate or reduce remedial courses from writing and they utilized older scholarship about corequisite models as well as the successes of the ALP model and its implementation around the nation. Estrem and her colleagues first piloted a version of English 101 Plus at Boise State. In the fall of 2013, Uehling and Newberry led a cross-institutional collaboration between BSU and CWI to implement these new models and to continue professional development and knowledge sharing. The curricular revisions needed to integrate best practices in composition studies about student learning, and they needed to address issues of contingency among first year writing faculty, especially because BSU and CWI have high proportions of adjunct faculty. (At that time, CWI was an emerging community college. Previously, the institution had been affiliated with Boise State but was seeking its own accreditation and institutional status. In its new form, faculty appointments at CWI were only non-tenure track.)

The Idaho English 101 Plus program is directly linked to this revised placement process. In the two- and four-year postsecondary institutions in Idaho, a two course sequence comprises FYC: English 101, Writing and Rhetoric I, and English 102, Writing and Rhetoric II. Across the state, English 101 carries college credit, and English 102 completes the general education requirement for written communication. English 101 Plus—the corequisite model—requires students to complete a one or two credit course concurrently with their English 101 section. For the Plus section, students are placed into a smaller class of eight to ten students who receive supplemental instruction focused on specific issues and problems that students may encounter. The Plus sections also provide a range of support including additional writing process practice, reading practice, situated grammar instruction, and/or attention to psycho-social issues students might face.

Following their successful pilot, Estrem, Uehling, and Newberry led a weeklong workshop in 2014 with first year writing program leaders from all of the other six two- and four-year institutions in Idaho. The meeting explored the
feasibility of adapting the English 101 Plus model to the diverse instructional contexts across the state. This was crucial because BSU and CWI are located in a similar urban, geographic setting; the other postsecondary institutions across Idaho have significantly different geographic and demographic contexts.

At the summer 2014 workshop, the English 101 Plus model proved to be flexible enough to accommodate the locations, instructional contexts, the demographic of instructors, and the demographic of students across the state. (The meeting resolutions and reports are available in First-Year Writing Across Idaho, “Resolutions and Reports”). Table 1 summarizes the institutions across the state and the ways in which they have configured their English 101 Plus programs in light of their student populations and their instructional corps.

Table 1 – Institutional profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Undergraduate enrollment</th>
<th>Carnegie Classification</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Profile of FYC</th>
<th>Engl 101 Plus Configuration</th>
<th>Engl 101 Plus Faculty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boise State University</td>
<td>N=22,033</td>
<td>4-year public Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity</td>
<td>City: Midsize</td>
<td>Adjunct faculty</td>
<td>1 credit registered with 101 section</td>
<td>Instructor of 101 section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Eastern Idaho</td>
<td>N=1,288</td>
<td>2-year public Associate’s Colleges: High Career &amp; Technical-High Traditional</td>
<td>City: Small</td>
<td>Adjunct faculty</td>
<td>1 credit/small group in developmental learning center</td>
<td>Tutor from the Reading/Writing Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Southern Idaho</td>
<td>N=6,906</td>
<td>2-year public Associate’s Colleges: Mixed Transfer/Career &amp; Technical-High Nontraditional</td>
<td>Town: Remote</td>
<td>Tenure line and adjunct faculty</td>
<td>2 credits taught as a companion course</td>
<td>Instructor of 101 section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Western Idaho</td>
<td>N=10,277</td>
<td>2-year public Associate’s Colleges: High Transfer-High Nontraditional</td>
<td>Rural: Fringe</td>
<td>Adjunct faculty</td>
<td>2 credits taught as a companion course</td>
<td>Instructor of 101 section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho State University</td>
<td>N=10,401</td>
<td>4-year public Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity</td>
<td>City: Small</td>
<td>Graduate students and adjunct faculty</td>
<td>1 credit connected to 101 course</td>
<td>Instructor of 101 section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis-Clark State College</td>
<td>N=3,684</td>
<td>4-year public Baccalaureate Colleges: Diverse Fields</td>
<td>City: Small</td>
<td>Tenure line faculty</td>
<td>1 credit connected to 101 course</td>
<td>Instructor of 101 section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Idaho College</td>
<td>N=5,270</td>
<td>2-year public Associate’s Colleges: High Transfer-Mixed Traditional/Nontraditional</td>
<td>City: Small</td>
<td>Tenure line faculty</td>
<td>1 credit embedded with 101 course</td>
<td>Instructor of 101 section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Idaho</td>
<td>N=9,568</td>
<td>4-year public Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity</td>
<td>Town: Distant</td>
<td>Graduate students</td>
<td>1 credit separate from Engl 101 course</td>
<td>Advanced undergraduate or graduate student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Enrollment data from College Navigator for 2017–2018

Across each two- and four- year institution, specific conditions shape how the institution can deliver this corequisite curriculum. Within the four two-year colleges, there is a mix of faculty appointments and students served.

By the end of the weeklong meeting in July 2014, the group of first year writing program faculty and administrators had agreed to implement the corequisite model at the various sites. All of the institutions agreed upon common
outcomes, largely drawing upon the CWPA Outcomes Statement, but—to complement the constraints and needs of each location—the enactments of the curricula were distinct and different across the state. The participants of the 2014 summer institute created a “Portrait of College Readiness” for each first year writing course to communicate these diverse curricular differences (First-Year Writing Across Idaho). Some institutions leave the content of English 101 up to the discretion of the faculty member when these faculty have been trained in other areas in English studies. Boise State University and Idaho State University use a writing about writing approach for the first year writing curriculum, and the University of Idaho uses a curriculum grounded in rhetorical theory. Each institution is able to work within the constraints of their particular locations, meet the needs of their particular student populations, and work with the instructional faculty available to them.

**Statewide Implementation and Preliminary Performance of Students in the Corequisite Model**

Because the English 101 Plus curricular configurations are linked to revised placement issues, it is important to examine the effects of the placement on students into this curriculum. Placement procedures require examination through the lens of validity, a construct that was radically revised more than twenty years ago, examines the “use and interpretation of test scores in particular settings” (AERA, 1999, 9). Evolution in validity scholarship resulted in the recent elevation of fairness to equal with validity inquiries in educational measurement scholarship (AERA, 2014). This concern for fairness in assessment results comes out of a long held consideration of what Lee Cronbach calls the “rights and life chances of individuals” (6). As I have argued elsewhere, assessment results that place students into anything other than the “regular” curriculum require closer scrutiny: “Students who don’t meet standards for writing tests face consequences that require completing additional course work, spending additional time, spending additional money (perhaps), and dealing with the stigma of not passing the ‘test’” (Kelly-Riley). While the intention of the English 101 Plus model is to mainstream students formerly placed into remedial writing courses, they still must complete additional requirements.

**Local Implementations of English 101 Plus**

In spring 2015, I travelled to all eight institutions to interview faculty and program administrators about their specific contexts. North Idaho College (NIC) in the northern panhandle has a more traditional college-aged student population, many of whom transfer on to four year degrees, but there is also a significant number of older students retraining for different professions and
seeking employment in the larger cities of Spokane, Washington and Coeur d’Alene, Idaho. NIC has traditional tenure-line appointments with faculty expertise in broader fields of English Studies (literature, creative writing, film, and so on). The other community colleges are located in the southern part of the state; they serve an increasingly racially diverse group of students, many of whom are refugees relocating to Southern Idaho. Students at College of Southern Idaho (CSI) include refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia who have been recruited for local factory work by companies like Chobani. CSI has a mix of tenure-line and adjunct faculty. College of Western Idaho (CWI) also has a high percentage of refugees with a large group relocating from places in Eastern Europe like Bosnia. College of Eastern Idaho (CEI) was recently converted to a community college from its former vocational training focus. Previously, as Eastern Idaho Technical College, it was an educational institution that trained many for work at the Idaho National Laboratory, a local site of nuclear energy research, development, demonstration and deployment. Most faculty at CEI hold contingent appointments.

The two-year colleges implement English 101 Plus sections based on their particular instructional contexts. NIC have their tenure-line faculty work with students in a separate hour focusing on content of the English 101 course while also addressing other social issues that may interfere with a student’s class performance (childcare demands, addiction, illness, job demands and so on). CSI and CWI require students to take two credits of Plus section as a supplement to English 101. CSI’s mission includes Adult Basic Education, so the configuration of their courses emphasized reading, writing, grammar, and other developmental issues. CWI emphasized similar areas in their two credit Plus sections, and saw these Plus course assignments as a way to give their adjunct faculty more stability and to decrease their overall course load requirements. That is, the faculty taught the Plus sections associated with their English 101 courses and consequently could count the Plus section toward their course loads, but could have a lower student enrollment with which to work. CEI requires one credit, and their course structure took more of an apprentice model that was brought from the vocational training that was in place before CEI changed to a community college.

The four-year colleges—University of Idaho, the land-grant institution located in the panhandle of the state, and Idaho State University, located in the eastern corner of the state—both have their first year writing curricula taught by graduate students in English and both are geographically isolated in rural communities. Because the graduate students have full teaching loads, the Plus sections are taught separately from the English 101 course with a separate instructor of record. Graduate students can take on the Plus sections as an overload. Boise State University, located in the capital city of Boise, has
a large pool of lecturers and instructors who teach first year writing. These faculty often have training in composition and rhetoric. To mitigate the contingency of appointments, BSU has the same faculty member teach the English 101 course and the Plus section. This arrangement gives faculty bona fide appointments while lowering the number of students with whom they must work. Lewis-Clark State College (LCSC) is a baccalaureate only, four-year college and has tenure-line faculty and adjuncts teach first year writing. These faculty also have expertise within the broader fields of English studies, and they facilitate a connected Plus section. LCSC also has a close connection between Plus students and their Writing Center.

Though the collaboration to implement the corequisite model between the faculty and writing program administrators was productive and enjoyable, the effects of the revised curriculum on student performance is most important. I received a grant from the State of Idaho’s Student Longitudinal Data System to take a look at the effect of the corequisite model on student performance. Many states have established data systems to track student performance, and Richard Haskell details the Idaho data collection system as one

Created for the purpose of collecting and analyzing Idaho’s public education data at the individual, course, institution, and system levels, aggregates data records from the breadth of the Idaho public education systems. The combined data collection systems are part of a nation-wide effort to record granular public education detail over time in order to document the entirety of students’ education experience. This information is intended to be available for analysis and public policy consideration for the purpose of producing improvements in student learning at elementary, secondary, post-secondary, and higher education levels, and to optimize labor market outcomes, individually and generally.

Given that our state purported to have a mechanism to collect this type of data, I wanted to conduct a rigorous analysis of this English 101 Plus curriculum and its effect on students by campus, race, sex, age, economic background, retention status, grade, major, standardized test scores, high school GPA, and college GPA. All of these seemed legitimate variables for collection by the State Longitudinal Data System. However, this was not the case. It took a year and a half to get the data from the office charged with stewarding it, and The State Longitudinal Data System only yielded broad data: passing rates for courses, sex, and race. The state office was concerned that the data might be misused for competition among institutions so they masked the institutional affiliation, which made it difficult to analyze the implementa-
tion differences at two- and four-year schools. This was a good lesson in the actual functionality of these longitudinal systems: though data may be collected, it may be neither accessible nor usable for the purposes it was intended to support.

As a consequence, my analysis about the effect of the statewide corequisite model is broad and only compares the remedial model and the corequisite model. The result is a preliminary view of initial implementation. The data presented here are through 2015, at which point all four two-year colleges and three of the four-year institutions had fully adopted the English 101 Plus model. I excluded dual enrollment students from this analysis. Following standard educational measurement practice, I looked at the profile of students in first year writing across Idaho.

Figure 2. Idaho First Year Writing Enrollment by Race, 2014-15

Figure 2 details the 2014-2015 profile of first year writing by race. Idaho’s population is predominantly white, but the general student population—particularly in the Southern part of the state—is increasingly diverse. (The distribution of male and female students enrolled in first year writing across Idaho in 2014-15 was split evenly.)

Figure 3 shows the percentages of ages of students in first year writing. The data show a large majority of students aged 18-25, but also include 16% of students who were older (with six percent of them older than 36 years old).
The demographic data statewide helps inform the approaches taken within the curriculum. When this data is combined with performance results, it speaks to the effectiveness of the curriculum for students. Figure 4 illustrates the passing rates by students in each course type. In 2010-11, students fared well across all types of first year writing courses, but as English 101 Plus was implemented different trends became apparent.

Figure 3. Idaho First Year Writing Enrollment by Age, 2014-15

Figure 4. Comparison of Statewide Passing Rates in First Year Writing Courses, 2010-2015
Boise State University was the first institution to pilot English 101 Plus in 2012-13, and students passed English 101 Plus at a higher percentage than the regular English 101 course. This preliminary positive result supported the distribution of this model to other locations. Students formerly placed into remedial courses were faring better in the streamlined curriculum with the corequisite instruction, thus supporting Judith Scott-Clayton’s observation that students are actually misplaced into remedial coursework at higher rates. If these students are placed into a curriculum with suitable instructional support, they can be successful (33).

We wondered how students would fare as the English 101 Plus model was implemented across the diverse contexts of the state of Idaho. As more institutions implemented the model in 2013 and 2014, that trend remained: students formerly required to enroll in remedial courses before enrolling in first year writing passed at higher rates than other students who were also in the regular curriculum without support. While the overall passing rates dipped, the difference between student performance in English 101 Plus remained better than student performance in English 101. Enrollments in remedial courses declined across the state, and students who remained in the few that continued to be offered did not fare as well in them. This student performance data combined with the lived experiences of students and teachers at the various institutions formalized English 101 Plus as of the educational structure for postsecondary writing in Idaho.

**Conclusion**

The English 101 Plus program in Idaho builds upon a thirty-year history of corequisite instruction as a means to support postsecondary students and to navigate the complexities of internal and external accountability mandates. The Idaho collaboration demonstrates the possibility of retaining agency and individuality of institutions, program administrators, and classroom faculty while still working from common frameworks with shared goals rooted in disciplinary expertise and practice. The result is a more connected group of faculty and administrators who work collectively toward improving the instructional experience for students in a state where postsecondary study is not a high priority for most citizens.

This faculty-led collaboration has positioned first year writing programs in the state to engage the political and economic factors that shape composition work on multiple levels: curricular content, faculty appointment configurations, and on-going professional development. While these political and economic forces are strong, the network of writing program administrators across the state is also strong. It is important that writing programs look to “unlikely” areas where previous success have occurred: two-year colleges, writing centers,
developmental writing programs, and even outside of our disciplinary boundaries. This scholarship is often on the periphery of mainstream composition scholarship; we need to do a better job of seeking it out and learning from its lessons.

Finally, a collaborative effort like English 101 Plus demonstrates the power of faculty to come together to work toward a curriculum that is fairer and attentive to the needs of the students in public educational systems. Instructional faculty benefit from more stabilized appointments and connection with students. The statewide corequisite model has resulted in a richer collaboration of faculty across the state. Institutions in the northern part of the state meet occasionally to share ideas and talk about best practices in their local implementation. In the southern part of the state, faculty gather to collaborate to discuss best practices and share ideas about how to best meet the students of their student populations. In spite of the significant geographic challenges, this enhanced network of first year writing faculty across the state is one of the great accomplishments of the English 101 Plus model. Remedial writing programs have structures that create obstacles for students from underrepresented populations. Taking stock of how students perform in these structures is key to revising and refining them so they work best for all.

Acknowledgments

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Is a Writing-about-Writing Approach Appropriate for Community College Developmental Writers in a Corequisite Class?

Mark Blaauw-Hara, Carrie Strand Tebeau, Dominic Borowiak, and Jami Blaauw-Hara

Current trends in developmental writing have focused on corequisite support courses that developmental writers take in conjunction with college-level courses. Much recent scholarship has focused on the design of the corequisite course, but a corequisite model also raises the stakes of the curricular design of the college-level course, since it now features developmental writers. In this article, we describe a qualitative research project designed to explore whether a writing-about-writing college-level curriculum is appropriate for community-college developmental writers in an ALP corequisite model.

The rich scholarship on developmental writing pedagogy in higher education means that departments seeking to improve lackluster pass rates or poor student performance have many possible options. However, for community college writing programs, determining the best interventions can be difficult, as these are, arguably, among the most marginalized writers in higher education. Current trends in developmental writing have focused on corequisite “support” courses that developmental writers take in conjunction with college-level courses. A growing body of research suggests that corequisite courses can do a better job at helping students quickly improve their writing skills and pass college-level writing requirements than a sequence of stand-alone developmental writing courses (Belfield et al.; Daugherty et al.; Logue). These corequisite courses can take many forms, including the one we use at our school, which is modeled on the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) pioneered by Peter Adams and others at the Community College of Baltimore County (Adams et al.).

At North Central Michigan College, ALP sections of English 111—the first course in our college-level writing sequence—can have up to twelve college-level students and ten developmental writers. The curriculum presented in the English 111 course is the same across all sections; for the ALP sections, the developmental writers also take a non-credit-bearing corequisite (English 095) that occurs immediately after the college-level section. That corequisite course, taught by the same instructor, is designed to support the developmental
students’ success in the college-level course. North Central uses a multiple-measures placement rubric that applies a combination of high-school GPA and SAT/ACT test scores to place students. The students placed in the corequisite must have below a 3.0 high-school GPA and low enough test scores to indicate that the corequisite class is the best fit.

An unanticipated consequence of our implementation of the ALP model was that it complicated discussions of the English 111 curriculum with some writing-program faculty voicing concerns that if the curriculum became too difficult, developmental writers would not be successful even with the extra support of the ALP sections. These concerns became especially salient in recent years, after our program adopted Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs’s Writing about Writing as its default textbook (At North Central, all new instructors use the default textbook; experienced instructors have some discretion in choosing a textbook, although the writing program has recommended elements and course outcomes that should be included in every section of writing).

Ever since Doug Downs and Elizabeth Wardle’s 2007 article, “Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions,” suggested a WAW curriculum for first year composition, there has been both interest and concern regarding the approach. For example, Libby Miles et al. critiqued the WAW approach as reductive, putting too much emphasis on one course to provide an introduction to writing studies, a field that is “a more multifaceted area of study,” as well as voicing concerns that a WAW curriculum grooms first year students to become “academic scholars” (508). In response to such critiques, Downs and Wardle refined their rationale for WAW in 2013 as simply an acknowledgment that “we are a field and we know things and should teach them. Just like every other field. That’s it.”

However, several scholars have also noted the difficulty of the readings in WAW curriculum (Bird; McCracken and Ortiz), which includes writing scholarship originally published in College Composition and Communication, Rhetoric Society Quarterly, College English, and other professional journals. Though she argues for the success of WAW, Jonikka Charlton notes that few faculty “could believe that first-year students would be engaged by such work” (3). In 2013, Wardle and Downs challenged the idea that WAW readings would be boring to students by noting that “while there are some difficulties with teaching this way, we have never found boredom to be one of them.” Yet among our own departmental colleagues, some have voiced concerns that the reading is too challenging and too removed from students’ own concerns, especially those of developmental writers.

While many North Central faculty have found the WAW curriculum to be accessible to developmental writers in our own co-curricular classes, we thought these concerns deserved to be addressed in more than an anecdotal
way. In this article, we describe a qualitative research study in which we interviewed ten students from four co-curricular sections in the fall of 2019. As we describe in our methodology, we asked them about how they learned to navigate the challenging readings, how they developed as writers, and how they understood writing as a result of the course. We also asked them about the role of the co-curricular course in their writing development. In the sections that follow, we present four major themes that arose from these interviews, and we discuss implications for writing programs that may decide to adopt a WAW curriculum for co-curricular classes. As these sections demonstrate, our study suggests that a WAW curriculum can be both accessible to developmental writers and lead to a greatly improved understanding of writers and writing.

Literature Review

Like Moriah McCracken and Valerie Ortiz, we avoid a deficit model for viewing developmental writers. However, we admit that WAW approaches are rarely suggested as appropriate for developmental students. Nonetheless, in a meta-review of best practices for community college developmental programs, Sim Barhoum identifies a research consensus that “developmental writing students need to be academically treated like transfer-level students” (799). The WAW curriculum has been tested in standard first year composition (FYC) programs, but few have researched its use in developmental classrooms. Barbara Bird found that, after using a WAW curriculum, her basic writers “demonstrated improvement, short-term transfer, and expanded intellectual contributions...as compared with freshman writers” (87). Charlton finds that the strength of a WAW curriculum for developmental writers is “its rigorous, academic nature” (6). McCracken and Ortiz examined students from a historically Hispanic institution and found that they responded well to a WAW approach. However, all of these studies were at four-year universities or colleges. We were interested in how this might work in an accelerated developmental sequence at a two-year college.

As we noted in our introduction, our developmental approach mainstreams developmental students into FYC to reduce opportunities for students to drop out. As the National Council of Teachers of English notes, “one of the primary benefits of acceleration via mainstreaming is increased persistence” (236). Charlton argues that developmental students see success with WAW because of immersion in the content, an enriched knowledge base, networks of support, and engagement (7-8). These are all elements that a corequisite course provides. Developmental students are exposed to an enriched knowledge base through their traditional FYC colleagues in class as well as their own immersive networks in the corequisite developmental section. Because the developmental section is smaller, there is greater engagement because the instructor is able to
spend more time with each student on the content and develop rich activities to aid comprehension.

The readings in *Writing about Writing* are difficult, and we know developmental students can benefit from support in developing strategies for reaching complex texts. Our college participated in Reading Apprenticeship training through WestEd, which follows Lev Vygotsky’s work on social mediation in learning; apprenticing readers learn from skilled readers through metacognitive conversations. In their guide to reading apprenticeship, Ruth Schoenbach, Cynthia Greenleaf, and Lynn Murphy note that socially mediated learning “applies not only to activities with observable components…[i]t applies equally, and significantly, to activities that are largely cognitive, taking place inside the mind and hidden from view” (22). While we do not use a strict reading apprenticeship model, we focus on helping readers understand challenging texts through modeling and metacognitive discussions in the corequisite developmental course.

In addition to understanding the readings, we try to help students build confidence that they can perform difficult work in a writing class. Self-efficacy theory, pioneered by Albert Bandura and applied to writing by Patricia McCarthy, Scott Meier, and Regina Rinderer, is a useful lens through which to consider the struggles of developmental writers. Self-efficacy deals with a person’s expectation of success and how it affects actual success (191). As McCarthy, Meier, and Rinderer recognize, self-efficacy affects “what behavior people will attempt in the first place and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles” (466). Developmental writers almost by definition tend to have had a difficult history with reading and writing, and many have a low level of confidence in their reading and writing abilities. Charles MacArthur, Zoi Philippakos, and Steve Graham, in their article on community-college developmental writers, note that “self-efficacy for writing has been shown consistently to correlate with academic performance, including writing achievement” (32). This research highlights the importance of helping students learn to read and write about complex material, thereby helping them develop a sense of self-efficacy and preparing them for college success.

In our college, we focus on the transfer of writing and reading skills from one context to another, using David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon’s distinction between high- and low-road transfer. Specifically, our aim is to cue students for high-road transfer, which “requires mindful abstraction of principles to apply them in new situations” (Elon 2). To facilitate this abstraction, the corequisite section includes many opportunities for reflection on reading comprehension and writing skill development. According to Ellen Carillo, “[n]o matter how one teaches for transfer, the one consistent recommendation for doing so involves incorporating metacognitive exercises into writing courses” (36). As
Reiff notes, a major finding of work by Kathleen Yancey, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak is that “when students are given the language and vocabulary to talk about and conceptualize writing, they are better able to abstract and apply this knowledge in other contexts” (Reiff 207). This comes not only from reflection but also from the WAW curriculum, which provides a threshold-concept framework for how writing works. According to Jessie Moore, “[t]hreshold concepts are not simply key ideas, but rather the core of the disciplinary world view. Therefore until students grasp threshold concepts, these concepts could be barriers to transfer.” Based on the scholarship of Jan Meyer and Ray Land, threshold concepts provide the heart of a discipline and should be transformative, irreversible, integrated, bounded, and troublesome (Cousin 4). Learning to read difficult texts and apply the larger theoretical constructs of the field to writing tasks is at the heart of our approach.

Methodology

North Central Michigan College is located in a rural area, which is mixed socioeconomically, with relatively wealthy pockets surrounded by more middle- and working-class families (Fast Facts & Resources). The college enrolls around 2,500 students a semester, and in the fall of 2019, it offered twelve sections of ALP. For that semester, Dom, Carrie, and Mark had four ALP sections between them from which the participants in this study were drawn.

North Central does not have an IRB, nor does the college partner with a university that does. However, the college has an Institutional Researcher, part of whose job is to work with faculty and staff to develop ethical and methodologically sound research projects, and we worked with him to settle on a sampling method and interview protocol. The Institutional Researcher generated a random sample of twelve students, ten of whom agreed to participate in interviews. For their participation, each received a $10 Amazon gift card. We did not collect demographic information on our sample group, mainly because we felt the group was too small to be able to form generalized conclusions. Our participant group was simply a random sample, consistent with “typical sampling,” which John Creswell notes is useful for understanding how a “typical” participant—in this case, a typical student in ALP—experiences the situation that is under study (208).

Participants were interviewed by faculty who were not their classroom teachers, and Jami, Dom, Carrie, and Mark each interviewed two to three students, all of whom were presented with an informed consent form at the beginning of the interview (Appendix A). We employed what Ann Blakeslee and Cathy Fleischer term informal interviews:
Interviews you plan, but [which] are still flexible, especially in regard to the questions you ask and how you structure and direct the interview. Usually you write out questions in advance for these interviews, but you do so knowing that you will work through the questions loosely or that you may even end up departing from them. (132)

Our interview questions appear in Appendix B.

We submitted the interview recordings to Rev.com, an online transcription service. After the interviews were transcribed, Jami, who had none of the participants as students, assigned pseudonyms to all of the participants, and then she and Dom “cleaned” the transcripts—fixing obvious errors where the transcription service had, for example, misspelled the title or author of a reading a participant had referenced. Next, Mark and Carrie independently read through all of the transcripts and wrote research memos, following Kathy Charmaz’s recommendations of capturing initial analysis, looking for possible patterns, and taking the first steps toward developing codes for the transcripts (80-85).

When Carrie and Mark shared their research memos, they noticed that they had observed strikingly similar patterns in the interviews. For example, Mark began his memo:

I’m noticing themes of personal growth and confidence. A big theme through 095 students is timidity before the class. Fear about writing. Several have relaxed about grammar as a result of instruction … They have built confidence. Several students said they improved on structuring their essays. They tend to have a better understanding of how writing works—how other writers write and learn, and how they do. They feel that the class will be valuable to them in the future.

Carrie began hers:

The running theme of the interviews is gaining confidence. Many students recollect that high school English felt like a prison of rules, and 095/111 helped them to realize that writing is everywhere, they belong within their own writing, rules should not be barriers to getting writing down on the paper, and they feel an ownership/invitation to dive deep that they did not feel before the class.

After discussing their research memos and observations, Mark and Carrie independently went through initial in vivo coding (Charmaz 55) and then worked together to develop a set of eight focused codes (Charmaz 57-60).

Dom and Jami then went back through the transcripts, evaluated whether they agreed with Carrie’s and Mark’s codes, and highlighted quotations that
they felt fit the focused codes. We then met as a group and further refined our codes, settling on four final themes:

- Improving Reading Comprehension
- Appreciating the Corequisite Class
- Developing Self-Efficacy
- Anticipating Writing Transfer

In the next section, each of these themes will be discussed in detail.

Findings

Improving Reading Comprehension

While our developmental writers did not dispute that the readings in a WAW curriculum can be difficult, they challenged the notion that they are too difficult. Consistently, students identified strategies they utilized in order to navigate these challenging texts. Many times, these strategies were part of the direct instruction of the course or gleaned through modeling of the instructor. For instance, Hannah mentioned:

I took it paragraph by paragraph and wrote it down and then created ... well it’s just like a big paragraph summary, just kind of like six words a piece for each paragraph ... is what [my instructor] had us do. And that kind of helped, too. Because it wasn’t about over-thinking; it was just like, “Oh, this is the point of that paragraph, move on.” We did it with the Brandt piece together, and then I just kind of branched off, and on the bigger ones I would do that on my own, too.

Hannah felt that this strategy allowed her more efficient recall, since she had created an archive of her interpretations of the main paragraphs/sections of the texts that she could easily reference when she needed to. With a slight nudge from her instructor—and an introduction to a reading strategy that she had not been aware of in the past—Hannah found her way through texts that she acknowledged were difficult.

Similarly, Joseph highlighted the role of his instructor in giving him the tools necessary to be successful, one of which was the suggestion to skim the text for primary purpose and meaning. Joseph said his instructor encouraged students to “maybe [skim] in the lightest sense possible, just [go] through it and [get] the general ideas out of it and just [ensure] that we understood it in that sort of way.” Emily, too, built an understanding through an initial skim of the text: “I would always skim the beginning and then find...the main points of whatever that reading was about, read that, and then skim whatever
backup they had for that information and just make sure that I highlighted on the main points of it.” Both Joseph and Emily were then able to bring this global understanding of the texts with them to class where they could further unpack and explore the concepts.

Skimming wasn’t the only technique students cited that helped them with initial understanding, though. Suzannah found great success with annotation: “It’s talking to the text where you would underline it and then like write any questions you have…. And then you’d go back and reread it and it makes it more clear.” Kurt took a suggestion from his father, a former high school English teacher: “So sometimes I’d have to get out a notebook and take notes on it and then even go back and reread it. My dad ... said, ’Just pull out a notebook and start writing notes. Sometimes it’ll help, sometimes it won’t.’” Brian relied heavily on what he termed foreshadowing: “If I didn’t understand it, I’d use ... foreshadowing, and I’d really just pay attention to the outside and get a whole picture of it.” Lacy used an in-class assignment to gain deeper understanding: “Having to journal everything, the summary and then the actual, the why’s and stuff, that really helped bring more perspective and more views to the piece.” While the approaches were different from student to student, the consensus our participants presented was that they had clear strategies that helped them do the reading.

Equally important to the specific strategies students developed to understand the texts was the grit and resilience they displayed in doing so. Nate, for example, worked as an overnight security guard, which gave him the time to tackle a reading, even if it meant consistent repetition: “I’ve got like eight hours from midnight to eight o’clock in the morning just sitting there. So you got nothing better to do but read. There’s really no better way. There’s no real strategy behind it. I’ll read it until I understand it or at least feel that I do.” Nate wasn’t alone in citing perseverance as a key strategy for completing the readings. Lillia said, “I think just reading it slowly, and there was a few where there was a really long section, so I just had to go back and reread it to try to understand what it was really trying to say.” Megan was no different: “So I just kept going. I read each section to make sure that I understood it and then I would go to the next one, read it, understand it. If I didn’t understand it, then I would go through, read it again, and it would take me awhile, but I eventually got there.”

In sum, our participants all articulated clear intentions to understand these difficult texts, and they all had developed effective reading strategies, most of which were modeled and/or explicitly taught by the classroom instructors.
**Appreciating the Corequisite Class**

Our developmental writers relied on the co-curricular class to continue exploring and exchanging ideas. The value of discussion and peer-to-peer or student-to-instructor interaction during this class was a common theme among the students during our interviews. According to Lacy, her instructor “pulled out what he thought was important [from the readings] also and let us reread that little section or whatever, and actually asked us our opinions on what we were reading from that … So we got all sorts of different views, and it was very well structured. I don’t know, I took a little bit from everybody.” Emily echoed this: “And then the in depth conversations we had, it wasn’t just [the professor] talking, it was other people putting [in] their ideas and then [the professor] directing it to the way for everyone to understand it, I think that was, like, really beneficial for me.”

While these discussions occurred in the college-level composition course, the students emphasized the importance of having extra time in the corequisite course to go into greater depth, both as a smaller group and one-on-one with the professor. Lillia: “I think the discussions in 111 played into 095, where my teacher just really made sure that we understood the material and we went back to understand it a bit more, and just briefly discussing it in 111.” Several students indicated that the additional time to discuss readings in the co-curricular class was paramount to their success. Many of the strategies that students identified for understanding the texts (as mentioned in the previous section) had their genesis in the co-curricular class, and students appreciated that opportunity and felt more comfortable with the curriculum as a result.

Furthermore, students appreciated the stronger relationships made possible through the smaller class size in the co-curricular class. Without the potential intimidation of working inside of a classroom with twenty-plus students, some developmental writers were able to take a more active role in their learning and forge productive relationships with their instructor and peers. Joseph noted that during ENG 095, “a lot of our discussions also just turned into one-on-one, just talking to each other and having open communication. Because I think my professor was really good with that. Just that one-on-one, answering questions, and just helping us out as students, and giving us all the tools that we needed to progress further in the class.” As for peer-to-peer connections, they allowed for the discussions mentioned above to expand more seamlessly, even outside the walls of the classroom at times. Consider Megan’s experience: “My friend, Lauren, that sits next to me, my new friend that I made, she’s a good writer. She loves to read, she loves to write. So she really helped me understand what was really going on and the main parts of the article … I have her number, so I would text her and be like, ‘What the heck was this about? I don’t know.’”

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Ultimately, experiences like these allowed developmental writers—who were responsible for twice as much time in the writing classroom every week than their college-level counterparts—to value their time in ENG 095. Kurt indicated that his time in ALP transformed his entire frame of reference regarding writing. He stated, “I felt like I was able to push the past aside and just look at the future, which was a big help. It kind of cleared up the negative stuff from the past and I was able to make the present positive.”

**Developing Self-Efficacy**

A significant recurring theme throughout the interviews is that students reported a developing sense of self-efficacy. Not only did students develop specific strategies for reading and understanding difficult material, but this practice also led them to feel a burgeoning confidence in their abilities. Students reported surprise at the extent to which their confidence grew, and this confidence allowed them to write more efficiently, with clearer writing plans, and better outcomes. They reported a sense of ownership over their writing as a result of ideas from the WAW curriculum that seems foundational to their ability to grow their perspectives and ultimately produce more developed and nuanced work reflecting a greater degree of critical thinking.

As Brian observed, “I think I’ve grown way more than what I thought I was going to. I mean, not just my spelling, but I was terrible at punctuation, and just about everything. [For] everything, it really helped.” It’s clear that Brian held assumptions about what he might learn from a developmental writing class; he originally placed his standards for growth on mechanical issues but was surprised to find he grew in multitudinous ways over the course of the semester.

Hannah echoed this sense of growth in confidence: “I think the whole confidence thing [prepared me to write in the future as a result of the course]. Because before I would… dread and if there’s a(n)… assignment or something that I had to write up, I’d sit there and overthink. And I think with having the confidence and not being afraid to say what I want to say anymore, that opened up a whole new world for future writing for me.”

“For everything” and “whole new world” suggest not just a useful experience within the WAW curriculum, but a holistic and transformative one that manages to move students out of places where their writing had been previously stuck. As Lacy explained, “I have become more confident in what I’m saying. I’ve always [written] just from my own perspective, but coming from the background I come from, I don’t put too much weight in my views. And throughout this course I’ve been able to be more confident, in not only stating my views, but going into depth on it.” Lacy’s previous sense that her background was the mediator of access to expression prevented her from feeling confident enough to write, but exposure to WAW ideas helped her to see that she was...
not only allowed to write, but that she should do so with confidence. Readings common in our courses, such as Deborah Brandt’s “Sponsors of Literacy” and Malcolm X’s “Learning to Read,” illustrate that background impacts but does not necessarily constrain writing; these texts suggest that students find ways to take agency over their own education. This message seems particularly valuable to developmental students who are likely to have emerged from difficult or access-limited backgrounds.

Kurt noted that “moving forward, I’d definitely say that in the past I felt like I was walking on eggshells … I feel more prepared that I can actually sit down and work on a piece without going over the edge or working around boundaries.” Like Lacy, he felt a growing sense that he should feel confident in what he has to say and should not try to constrain himself according to his perception of a professor’s judgment. In fact, Kurt said his plan for approaching future classes is “don’t be shy. Go in and tackle the class.”

Suzannah agreed that the course helped her shift from being tentative to confident: “I feel like I’ve always been creative with my writing, but … I’ve always been … scared to kind of put it into my papers. But now, with the help and skills I feel more confident.” Many students asserted that gaining this sense of agency over their writing made the experience of writing more pleasurable. As Lillia said, “[The co-curricular classes have] helped me come out of my shell a little bit … now, I find myself when I write comfortable, and … I like to write now. I used to not like to write.” Megan exulted, “I got here and now I’m writing three to four page papers … and it’s not a punishment anymore. I like it.” And Brian noted that “my standard of English is a lot higher, and [that is] why I’m doing a lot better.” Greater confidence seems linked to greater interest in writing, which in turn engenders success.

Many students described the ways their writing strategies were more successful as a result of feeling confident. Lacy said, “My critical thinking has changed … [I] actually express my views in more of a knowledgeable way, not just ‘hey, this is what I think,’ but this is why I think it.” She has learned over the course of the class to deepen her thought process and explore ideas in a more developed way. Similarly, Brian noted, “Now when I come to it, my writing is better, but I [also] think more like, okay, this is where I went wrong, this is what I could fix. I still have more to learn.” His understanding reflects a crucial threshold concept: knowing that writing is a perpetual growth process is a key to continuously improving writing quality. Along these lines, Emily noted, “Before I just didn’t care and I would give plain basic answers and now I go in depth and explain things.” Overwhelmingly, our participants seemed committed to thinking more critically as they wrote, and their experiences in the class gave them the confidence to access deeper layers of understanding and an interest in finding ways to do so.
Anticipating Writing Transfer

In addition to gaining self-efficacy, students also reported that they could easily see how ideas from the WAW curriculum could help them with future writing tasks. Students saw utility in the class for future academic situations and their future careers; it’s clear they generally understood the concepts as transferable.

Brian said, “When I was in high school, I was like, ‘Oh, we’re not really going to do anything with English later on … But as I think about it more, I want to be a conservation officer or whatever, and we’re going to be writing all the time. So I think retaining the ability to write and what I have learned is really going to help me in the future.” Emily agreed that her writing class will be useful for her career: “I feel like when I do my résumé or when I talk to people, or have to write anything down for any job that I have, if I’m more descriptive and more into answering the question they’re going to like me better.” Emily elaborated that thinking about discourse communities helped her to see how writing might factor into her future career as a nurse: “In the medical field you have to communicate with verbal and written responses. Us learning about that helped me better understand how there’s different relationships between everybody. I already knew that, but it highlighted a lot more than what I would have basically known.” Lillia also saw ways she might apply ideas from the course to her future employment: “We learned about genres in writing and the rules, like why you have to apply those rules. Like emails and résumés and everything, and just applying those skills will help [you] move forward.” Brian, Emily, and Lillia seem to have learned that writing is a rhetorical activity, and the audience forms a crucial part of the message. Thinking outside of themselves and the messages they need to convey as writers, they now see the advantage in factoring in audience and the rhetorical situation, so they must be ready to adapt their writing accordingly. They also seem to agree that more careful, thoughtful writing will yield better results.

Nate explained that his English class had immediate transfer applications, because he was also taking a psychology class that semester. He said, “In my [psychology] class, I was able to implement a lot of what I’ve learned in the English class into the research paper we had to do and it was definitely a lot better.” Nate noted that he likes to add in personal narration, but he understood that different classes would require different approaches. He added his stylistic touch in his psychology paper to the extent that it was appropriate but did not try to make it sound like one of his English papers. He was able to make this distinction because the readings and discussions of discourse communities taught him to understand how audience and expectation change according to the situation.
Suzannah also noted that learning about discourse communities and their specific expectations helped her to understand the ways she could apply writing outside of the writing classroom. She said, “It’s the discourse, like the tools, the people, and what you’re trying to make with it and I think that’s probably one of the biggest things I got out of that class.” Suzannah saw that understanding writing as a social and rhetorical activity would help her to write even outside the writing classroom, because she could see the factors she will need to consider. Furthermore, she could recognize both the knowledge and its important future utility, suggesting that a WAW approach helps developmental students not only see ways to transfer their writing knowledge, but also that transfer is crucial to writing success.

Kurt also considered the future beyond the classroom: “It may seem a little intimidating at first with all the writings and readings, but it all plays a huge role into everything for the future.” Lacy made a similar point, saying, “With those building blocks…you become more confident as a writer, and then we want to do more and more. So I think that’s a big key to further success in writing…just being able to think more critically about things so I can develop my own point of view.”

Because these students were asked to see writing as a transferable, social, and rhetorical activity, they were able to understand that they will be expected to mold their writing to varying situations both academically and professionally. They also seem to know the tools they will need for doing so; a study of discourse communities seems particularly effective in conveying this understanding. They take it even one step further and sense that as they transfer and adapt their writing knowledge, it will lead to growth and greater understanding.

Implications

At the conclusion of the semester, the random sample of students we interviewed were successful. All passed the corequisite class, their average ENG 111 GPA was 3.24, and 70% enrolled in ENG 112 (our subsequent FYC course) the following semester. The numbers alone suggest that the curriculum was successful, but the consistent positive responses the students displayed in their interviews suggests that despite being developmental writers, they are fully capable of reading and considering difficult texts, and furthermore, they are capable of developing what Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak would term a robust and portable theory of writing. (In Writing Across Contexts, Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak define a student’s theory of writing as an understanding of writers and writing that serves as a “frame” around writing situations, helping the student ask productive questions about a writing task and apply effective writing strategies to complete the task (56-58). In addition to being informed by writing scholarship, robust theories of writing in-
tegrate the student’s practical experience and writing preferences; while being specific to the student, they are also broad enough to apply to many different writing situations, and thus are portable.)

Our students were able to pinpoint reading strategies that they developed over the course of the semester that helped them access the dense academic texts. What is interesting is that although we all taught reading strategies, none of us taught the exact same strategies in our courses, which suggests that there is no specific way the material must be approached in order to unlock it. For example, Lacey, Emily, and Lillia described in-depth class discussions about the readings that helped them build confidence and dig into the texts, while Megan relied more on peer-to-peer mentoring. Joseph cited one-on-one discussions with his professor as central.

This suggests that developmental students can, indeed, read highly challenging texts if they are encouraged and supported; comprehension was not linked to a specific pedagogical methodology beyond our support and expectation that they could manage it.

The co-curricular class also emerged as extremely important. Students mentioned connecting with peers, class discussion, one-on-one interactions with their instructors, and valuing the extra time to work on writing in a supported way as factors in their ability to succeed in the class. It’s possible that the connections the students developed amongst themselves as they shared six hours of class time a week in a small group aided in their ability and desire to dedicate themselves to the difficult work. Extra discussions and more time to process ideas were likely also key factors in comprehension and success. It seems a key element of our approach that was most helpful to students was spending ample time in the co-curricular class digging into the readings in more detail.

We also think that the WAW curriculum itself did what it was supposed to do: help students develop a much deeper understanding of writers and writing that was at once personal and portable to different writing contexts. Nearly all of the students brought up the notion of discourse communities as a foundational discovery; realizing that writing is bounded by situations and audiences helped them to see new ways they could access and shape their own work. For several students, such as Brian, Kurt, and Susannah, this idea helped to dispel the common developmental writer assumption that writing is either “right” or “wrong.” Many also mentioned literacy sponsors as a key topic in the class; thinking about their own literacy histories through the lens of Deborah Brandt’s research helped encourage them to take agency over their literacy futures. They also brought up texts on process; the metacognition involved in examining how writing works seemed to help them understand writing more deeply and find more confidence in their own processes. Further
research might help sift out exactly which roles the curriculum itself and the co-curricular class might play in students’ success.

What is particularly encouraging is that students seemed not just to understand the material but were prepared to apply it. This study suggests that the WAW curriculum, coupled with a co-curricular support class, encourages developmental students to practice increased metacognition, meta-analysis, and reflection and build confidence in themselves through these acts. In short, they can conceptualize writing as something more than a product, and they more effectively understand their role as autonomous agents in creating text. As a result, they can better understand what a writer is, what a writer does and—more important—what they need to do to be or become better writers. Furthermore, as they articulated their portable theories of writing, many students utilized language that seemed more natural or authentic, which suggests that these learners were able to understand and decode the complicated texts inherent in a WAW curriculum, as mentioned above, but then recodify the concepts in comfortable terms.

For several of these students, such as Kurt and Hannah, the curriculum also had an emancipatory effect. No longer were they restricted by the experiences they had in the past or the relatively negative attitudes they had regarding writing. The continued repetition of challenging tasks seemed to build into true self efficacy. As a result, many of these students actually liked writing more by the end of the semester and were confident that they could produce good writing. Not only does the WAW curriculum not scare them away, but it seems to encourage them to reconceptualize themselves as writers, with the confidence necessary to approach future tasks and enjoy the challenges inherent in crafting effective writing.

Conclusion

We understand why some writing faculty might be hesitant to use a WAW approach in a course with developmental writers, and indeed, we would be reluctant to recommend such an approach outside of a co-curricular model. However, we think this study strongly suggests that a WAW curriculum can be accessible and transformative for developmental writers, provided they have the support necessary to develop effective reading strategies. We also think our findings are notable because they focus on developmental writers at a community college—a group that tends to be more academically challenged than developmental writers at four-year schools (Bailey 1). While our findings confirm our program’s decision to adopt a WAW curriculum, we think this article may reach beyond advocating for a particular curriculum. We hope it will provide encouragement to writing faculty to assign challenging, advanced reading and writing activities to developmental students, regardless
of curriculum. As our findings demonstrate, such readings—and the discussions they spur in corequisite courses—can be transformative.

**Appendix A**

Consent Form

I give the researchers consent to record and transcribe my answers to today’s interview with the understanding that my answers will be kept anonymous and that my participation does not in any way affect my grade for English 111/095. I also understand I can end the interview at any time. I give permission for my answers, along with those of other students, to be used to improve the North Central Michigan College’s writing program curriculum. I also give permission for my answers, along with those of other students, to be used for publishable scholarship, provided my anonymity is maintained.

_________________________________
Name

_________________________________
Date

**Appendix B**

Interview Questions

Thank you for agreeing to be a part of this research project! Our primary goal is to understand how our curriculum is working here at NCMC so we can continue to improve it. We may also write up and publish our results to help other writing programs at different schools. We want your honest answers! We will be recording this interview and having it transcribed so we can look for patterns, but your answers will be kept anonymous, and your participation does not affect your class grade in any way. In return for your participation, you will receive a $10 Amazon gift card.

Do you have any questions about the process? If not, could you please sign this consent form allowing me to record our interview and use it for this research? Again, all your answers will be kept anonymous.

How would you describe your growth as a writer over the course of English 111/095?
• Do you see writing and writers any differently than you did at the start of the course?
• Have you made any major improvements in your own writing over the semester?
• Are there ways you have changed your writing process over the course of the semester? If so, why did you make those choices?
• Can you put your finger on any key readings or writing projects that influenced your understanding of writing or your own ability to write?
• If you look back to where you began this course, what surprises you most about the progress you’ve made or the learning you’ve done? How has that been impacted by the curriculum itself?

A major component of this course was the exploration of important ideas about writing; the textbook and some instructors use the phrase “threshold concepts” for these. In your own words, what are threshold concepts, or the overarching ideas about writing presented in 111?

• What are a couple threshold concepts you see as crucial to writing? Please feel free to use your own words or paraphrase ones from the book or the department—there’s no wrong way to answer this!
• Has your understanding of threshold concepts changed how you think of writing, or how you approach your own writing?

A major goal of this course is to help you write better in the future, whether that’s other classes or the work world. Do you feel better prepared to write in the future as a result of this course? If so, in what ways?

• Were there any specific activities, writing assignments, class discussions, or readings that you think worked especially well to help prepare you to write in the future?
• Was this class different in how it approached writing from English courses you’ve had in the past? If so, how?

We are curious how you used the book and what you thought of the readings. We don’t expect you to have memorized the readings, and this isn’t a test! We just want to know what you thought.

• Some of the readings were particularly challenging. Can you describe how you approached those readings? What strategies did you use to comprehend the material?
• Can you point to any readings that had a big impact on how you thought about writing, writers, or key writing concepts? Which ones? Why?
• Were there specific ways your professor or peers helped you understand and apply the readings?
• Do you think about any ideas from the book when you sit down to write an essay, either in this class or others?

How would you describe yourself as a writer now? How has that changed from the beginning of the semester? What role — if any — has the WAW curriculum played in this?

Thank you so much for your time! Your participation will help us improve our curriculum for future students, and maybe even other colleges’ curriculum as well.

Works Cited


Withstanding the Backlash: Conceptualizing and Preparing for Coercive Reactions to Placement Reform and Corequisite Support Models in California

Erik Armstrong, Megan Baptista Geist, and Joshua Geist

In the last few years, college and university systems nationwide have implemented sweeping reforms to placement and course sequences to rectify systemic inequities affecting incoming students. Many of these reforms acknowledge that standardized placement tests create false distinctions between “prepared” and “underprepared” students, and that most students deemed “underprepared” by placement tests are in fact successful in college-level courses. A growing and predictable backlash is arising as these reforms change the demographic makeup of college classrooms. Using local data to examine, characterize, and theorize the backlash against California’s recent legislative reform, AB 705, this article identifies corequisite support courses as a likely target for future backlash and offers suggestions for framing conversations around corequisite models and placement reform so as to generate meaningful, good-faith discussion while minimizing reactionary attempts to return to inequitable placement and curricular practices.

“The reason why I’m so strongly in favor of AB 705 [is] because it truly symbolizes and hallmarks not just equality but equity in higher education.”

—Alexander Walker-Griffin, former student representative on the California Board of Governors

Over the last several years, higher education institutions nationwide have engaged in campaigns to reform remedial education. In most cases, such efforts center on reworking placement and implementing corequisite support. These reforms are driven by an ever-expanding body of research demonstrating that corequisite remediation benefits completion in both math and English for students of color by several fold, greatly helping to reduce the equity gaps we know exist in traditional, multiple-course remedial sequences (Public Policy Institute of California). Alexander Walker-Griffin and other young students of color like him stand to benefit the most from reforms legislated by California Assembly Bill 705 (AB 705), and student advocacy organizations like Students Making a Change have embraced AB
705 as a transformative opportunity for Black and Brown students (Students Making a Change). However, this growing body of evidence has not stopped reform critics from decrying institutional and curricular change. Rather, the tectonic pressure of legislative changes like AB 705 has increased the shrill of those critics.

Signed into law in October of 2017, AB 705 legislated changes to English, mathematics, and ESL placement and course sequences for California’s community colleges. The reforms included the required use of multiple measures (high school GPA, high school coursework, etc.) in placement, the elimination of standardized skills tests as assessment mechanisms, the prohibition of placing students in remedial coursework without clear evidence that such coursework would increase success, and the more limited time frames to complete transfer-level courses—one year for English and mathematics and three years for ESL (California State). These changes were later narrowed in guidance from the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO) to primarily rely upon high school GPA and to prioritize access to transfer-level coursework (Hope and Stanskas).

These recent legislative efforts in California mirror changes happening nationwide. Tennessee, for example, piloted corequisite remediation in the 2014-2015 academic year, and the pilot results were so compelling that they instituted full implementation the following year (Tennessee Board of Regents 1). Specifically, Tennessee demonstrated a 31% increase in writing completion with the corequisite model versus their old prerequisite model, and they closed their achievement gap (Tennessee Board of Regents 4). Tennessee’s transformative results have been echoed by other states adopting similar reforms, like Georgia and Colorado. These states saw a 55% and 33% increase in completion, respectively, while also reducing the time frame from two years to one (Complete College America, “Bridge Builders”).

Around the same time, Idaho was also making statewide change in their placement and course sequences, as chronicled in Heidi Estrem, Dawn Shepherd, and Lloyd Duman’s “Relentless Engagement with State Educational Policy Reform: Collaborating to Change the Writing Placement Conversation.” Detailing over 15 years of reform work, Estrem et al. acknowledge that placement is “an especially powerful act” (90). They demonstrate the importance of treating placement as a statewide and collaborative initiative and the potential for reform to have positive results. Putting writing faculty, administrators, student affairs representatives, registration staff, and the State Board of Education in the same conversation allowed Idaho to develop a more comprehensive placement framework than one relying only on standardized test scores. The new placement framework leveraged multiple measures to determine a more accurate placement for students across the Idaho system of higher education.
at both two- and four-year institutions (Estrem et al. 96-98). For example, the Boise State University pilot placed more students into the first semester freshman composition course, and students were more successful, earning an increased .23 grade points and completing at an increased 6.7% (84.6% to 91.3%) (Estrem et al. 101).

Despite the positive results achieved in each of these cases, whenever there is significant reform in education, there will be critics. To an extent, that is healthy; we should always maintain a critical eye toward change and toward the status quo. Unfortunately, when reforms pursue equity by making systemic changes that upend established power structures, the criticism—especially by those who have benefitted from the previous structures and those who feel unheard in reform efforts—can fester into a backlash that seeks to reinstall the former hierarchy. As educational institutions proceed down the road of educational reform, we educators need to be aware of this backlash and its tactics to impede change efforts if we are to effectively ensure our institutions and systems are equitable for all our students.

**Characterizing “Backlash”**

In their essay “Toward a Theory of Backlash: Dynamic Resistance and the Central Role of Power,” Harvard political scientists Jane Mansbridge and Shauna Shames lay out a framework for identifying and understanding backlash. They define a backlash as “the resistance of those in power to attempts to change the status quo . . . a reaction by a group declining in a felt sense of power” (625). Within this general framework for understanding power lies a more specific subtype that plays an important role in backlash theory: the concept of “coercive power.” Mansbridge and Shames define coercive power as a particular type of social power identifiable when parties in a particular situation have competing interests, stating that it exists in two forms: “the threat of sanction and the use of force” (624). The authors take great pains to point out that “many, if not most, forms of force are not violent,” and include “social norms that work in the interests of some and the disadvantage of others” (625). Thus, as we consider the possibility of backlash in our current setting, it is critical that while coercive power can have a sinister look to it—Mansbridge and Shames point to “assassination, rape, beatings, lynchings, and other forms of violence”—it often takes more subtle, less obvious forms, including “ridicule, condemnation, ostracism, censure” etc. (626). Any time a powerful actor or group feels their own capacity to exert power diminish and responds with either threat or force in an attempt to regain that power, this can be understood as a backlash.

Mansbridge and Shames point out that a strong backlash seems to occur most often when opponents of change see reformers as moving too quickly,
going further than appropriate, or lacking interest in their concerns (628). They also suggest that while backlashes are always ultimately about responding to a change that threatens power, the amount of power in question need not be particularly high (Mansbridge and Shames 630). Finally, Mansbridge and Shames suggest that backlash is often combined with a strong and sincere sense that the change is simply morally or ethically wrong, which presents additional challenges. They claim that “it is not easy in practice to distinguish between wanting to right a perceived wrong and wanting to return to a situation where one had greater capacity to turn one’s preferences or interests into outcomes” (Mansbridge and Shames 632). Ultimately, though, a backlash is present when coercive power is used to attempt to regain power lost through change.

Moreover, in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Michelle Alexander argues that this resistant force—in our case those that support traditional remedial and placement structures—will work to find a way to reinstate its system of control, even if in a new and different way. She describes this effort as a pattern of backlash:

Following the collapse of each system of control, there has been a period of confusion—transition—in which those who are most committed to racial hierarchy search for new means to achieve their goals within the rules of the game as currently defined. It is during this period of uncertainty that the backlash intensifies and a new form of racialized social control begins to take hold. The adoption of the new system of control is never inevitable, but to date it has never been avoided. (Alexander 21-22)

While Alexander is referring to the ways in which society, culture, and the law have evolved to continue to segregate and subjugate people of color since slavery, the principle still applies here, for placement measures and assessments tests have been, in effect, a racial system of control used to segregate and subjugate students of color within the academy by deciding who gets access to what and when. We do not argue that instructors, counselors, administrators, and staff members have explicitly subscribed to “racialized social control” (Alexander 21-22); in fact, most would deny such claims, abhor such a system, and rightly point to their consistent efforts at teaching and supporting a diverse student body. Nevertheless, the system itself, as we argue below, needs only implicit support to continue to replicate inequity—and in fact, a vocal backlash from stakeholders at each of those levels is already tempting to do so.

In order to distinguish between legitimate, good-faith critique and attempts to wield coercive power to reassert the *status quo ante*, we will first
explore the history of reform in California before engaging with exemplars of each kind of backlash.

A Brief, Recent History of Reform in California

AB 705 is not the first time that the California Community Colleges (CCC) have endeavored to reform writing placement and course sequences, particularly for students of color. In the late 1980s students at Fullerton College, supported by the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), claimed that placement tests were inequitable and prevented minoritized students from accessing a college education. In fact, David Reyes from the *Los Angeles Times* reported in 1988 that “At issue is whether the college is using the exams to exclude students from college-level courses that are transferable to four-year institutions and restrict them instead to remedial classes, attorneys for the plaintiffs said. They added that they believe the policies under attack at the Fullerton campus also are in effect at other California community colleges, each of which does its own testing.” This lawsuit was settled out of court, and in 1991 CCC “agreed to halt over-reliance on assessment tests in placing students and pay more attention to interviews, high school transcripts and other achievement records” (“Latinos Settle Dispute”). The settlement yielded changes to Title 5 regulations regarding placement and prerequisites that were intended to ensure more equitable access for all students.

Unfortunately, the reforms of the last thirty years did not produce the long-term change intended. In fact, over these intervening years placement policy regressed and remedial education remained a hurdle for students seeking higher education, at least in California community colleges. Ironically, the 1988 lawsuit summary could easily have been transplanted into a 2017 argument for AB 705. Despite lawsuits and regulatory changes, this regression is a testament to the enduring power of systems to reassert control and ideologies about students and their preparation, as Alexander noted.

This shift is evident in our local writing placement procedures at College of the Sequoias (COS). In February 1993—likely in response to updated Title 5 regulations that followed the 1991 settlement—placements were decided by multiple measures: reading test scores, grammar test scores, high school GPA, and the grade of the last English course taken. These four measures were compiled into a composite score that determined writing and reading placement (Keen 2-3). According to the document, this was supposed to be in effect until March 2006, but regression began earlier than that: effective March 2002, COS reverted to predominantly test-based scores, and in February 2003 raised the cut scores, limiting access even further for college-level course work.
A little more than 10 years after the MALDEF lawsuit, COS was back to the same problem: relying primarily on assessment tests.

While this is our own local data, we suspect this trend was echoed by other community colleges across the state. In fact, it is this regressive trend that ultimately led to the reforms legislated by AB 705 (though measured at the end via significantly lower throughput rates for students placed into remedial sequences, particularly students of color) (Hern and Snell; Henson and Hern).

AB 705 was the culmination of a thorough, exhaustive process examining the mechanisms by which community colleges in California placed students into transfer-level classes. A major conclusion of that process was that, in sum, “standardized assessment skills tests are not well-suited to accurately assess California's community college students” (Oakley). Nevertheless, the majority of critiques of AB 705 from individual educators take as an irrefutable premise that placement tests accurately identify so-called “underprepared” students. Thus, before we engage with those individual critiques, we should examine the history and data that drove the CCCCO to firmly reject skills tests as a mechanism for student placement and what initial data show about the impact of those reforms.

In 2013, the Chancellor’s Office commissioned the Common Assessment Initiative (CAI). As outlined above, the Chancellor’s Office was well aware that existing placement mechanisms were both inequitable and unreliable. The CAI included two major efforts: CCCAssess, which attempted to develop a skills-based assessment test that would accurately, fairly, and equitably place students, and the Multiple Measures Assessment Project (MMAP), which sought to develop metrics for incorporating multiple measures into placement in conjunction with the CAI’s proposed test. By 2017, the Chancellor’s Office decided to terminate the CCCAssess project as an impossibility, noting (among other reasons) that the project had been unable to meet external validation requirements, and observing that standardized assessment skills tests tend to yield “inappropriately low placement recommendations” (Oakley). The MMAP, on the other hand, analyzed a population of 245,020 students across a thirteen-year period (1992–2015), covering the full breadth of the CCC system (Bahr et al. 187). The MMAP’s findings concluded that “cumulative high school GPA is the most consistently useful predictor of performance across levels of math and English coursework” (Bahr et al. 201), and outlined a set of placement guidelines which projected success rates above 75% for the top recommended GPA band in both Math and English (Hope and Stanskas 6-7).

It is in the wake of these thirty years of reform that AB 705 was implemented. The clear implication of this history is that the idea that students are “underprepared” arises from an overreliance on standardized assessment tests that are unreliable, inaccurate, and predisposed to underplacing students. The
reality revealed by the MMAP data, however, is that the vast majority of incoming college students are already prepared to succeed in college-level courses. Nevertheless, the disproven belief that placement tests identify “underprepared” students remains a central premise of backlash efforts.

**Backlash Against AB 705**

While the MMAP data was a projection, we already have initial data confirming these numbers (Public Policy Institute of California; Henson). As California community colleges conclude our first full year of AB 705 implementation, the impact of the changes in placement procedures—at COS, at least—are difficult to characterize as anything other than a complete success. In fact, since Fall 2015, we have seen an approximately 10% increase in success rates in college-level English (from 58% to 68%), and our first semester of post-AB 705 data sees those numbers holding steady at 67% for courses without corequisite support. Meanwhile, those changes have meant that nearly 800 more students were allowed to take, and pass, college-level English in Fall 2019 compared to Fall 2018 (College of the Sequoias). Moreover, these changes had a tremendous impact on equity. The overall direct placement rate into first-year composition effectively doubled (from 41% to 81%) after AB 705 implementation, but the equity gaps among student populations shrunk significantly. The gap between rates of placement into first year composition between white and Hispanic students decreased from 20% to 10% from Fall 2018 to Fall 2019, while the gap between white and African-American students closed from 21% to only 1% in the same period (“Placement”). The research is clear that standardized skills-based cognitive placement tests are inaccurate, invalid, and inequitable; that those students who have heretofore been deemed “underprepared” are in large majority ready to succeed in college-level classes; and that initial data show that such students granted access to college-level classes do succeed at approximately the same rate as under the old, more restrictive mechanisms of placement.

These facts are crucial background to examining the backlash to reform, and so they are worth re-emphasizing before we move forward. Even though reform was long in the making and has demonstrated powerful results, systems are reluctant to relinquish the power of placing students, particularly students of color, in remedial writing sequences. Thus, we have already begun to see backlash develop. This backlash adheres to the patterns Mansbridge and Shames observe in how agents of backlash employ coercive power. Backlash at the level of institutions has relied on rhetoric critiquing reformers for moving too quickly, while individual voices of backlash have attempted to take a stand of moral certainty, asserting that reforms deny essential realities—each form of criticism following its own formulaic logic.
Institutional Critiques of Hasty Action

Once AB 705 became law, backlash very rapidly took root in the form of institutional critiques of hasty action by lawmakers and the CCCCO. By the fall of 2018, the statewide academic senate had written and was circulating a motion titled “Improving Participatory Governance with the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges.” While the motion does not specifically mention AB 705, placement reform, or remediation as sites of conflict, it clearly describes the relationship between the statewide senate and the Chancellor as adversarial, unproductive, and dismissive of the role the Senate is meant to play in the development and implementation of policy changes (Academic Senate for California Community Colleges).

When this motion did not pass, a more aggressive and forceful version appeared for our local senate’s consideration. This version considerably amplified the claim that our chancellor had acted inappropriately and unilaterally, although the specifics of these accusations were again vague (Spencer). What is clear in both resolutions, and in conversations with our colleagues around campus, is that faculty felt that the changes were happening too fast, and that they were inadequately involved and represented in the process.

The entire purpose of these documents, it seems, was to express, publicly and loudly, some faculty’s displeasure—not with the reforms themselves, but with the Chancellor, the process, and the perceived reduction of faculty roles. In other words, these motions served as a mechanism by which a group—one that had previously held authority over placement, course sequences, and curriculum design—used their coercive power to censure the person and office they perceived as having led the charge on reform. Fortunately, these motions did not succeed, and ultimately, as preparations for the legally-mandated changes began to be made, they faded into the background.

Individual Critiques of Abdication

While critiques of these reforms come from many voices, the core syllogism driving this resistance is based on three pillars of coercive power: first, the status quo ante assumption that students traditionally placed into remedial classes are “underprepared” for college-level work; second, that allowing such students access to college-level work will result in a catastrophic lowering of course-level success rates; and third, that any success among those ostensibly “underprepared” students constitutes a lowering of standards and an abdication of our duty toward academic integrity. While this syllogism can be found in many spaces, we will examine three articles employing it as a coercive mechanism to reassert the preexisting racist hegemony of placement tests and remedial classes.
This logic is most clearly laid out in Merced Community College philosophy professor Keith Law’s February 2018 opinion piece for the Merced Sun-Star, “How California’s Democratic Leaders are Destroying our Community Colleges.” Law argues that rather than representing true and useful reform, the changes mandated by AB 705 would, unavoidably, result in there being “little difference between a community college degree and one from a for-profit diploma mill.” In one paragraph, Law asserts the primacy and accuracy of standardized placement testing; from that premise, he augurs the potential consequences of allowing such “underprepared” students access to college-level work:

Now, students can bypass remedial courses based on high school transcripts. The problem is they didn’t test well because they graduated from high school being nearly illiterate. They register for college courses though they can’t read a textbook or write a proper paragraph. This means they either fail, or teachers will dumb down classes so they can pass. (Law, “How”)

In sum: students who didn’t do well on placement tests are “underprepared;” if those students are given access to college-level work, they will fail; if they do not fail, it is only because standards have been lowered.

In a December 2019 article for the California Part-Time Faculty Association, Law describes the elimination of placement tests as “one recent example of the lowering of expectations in higher education” (Law, “Soft Bigotry”). Here, Law demonstrates the first, essential premise of reform critics taking this tack: that students who would historically have been placed in remedial classes are, in their language, “underprepared” to succeed in college-level courses. As we have seen, substantial research disproves that assumption, but it is nevertheless core to the argument against reforms like AB 705.

Law is hardly the only voice arguing from this premise. In October 2017, Yuba Community College English professor John Almy penned an essay titled “The Fast Lane to Nowhere” for Inside Higher Ed. Almy characterizes reforms like AB 705 as the work of “federal and state policy makers, college and university administrators, and some well-intentioned instructors,” all of whom are “ignoring low placement scores” in pursuit of their agenda (Almy). “The root of so many of our problems,” Almy argues, is that “we have already promoted so many students at all levels who don’t know the material that we are drowning in a sea of bogus diplomas and degrees.” Almy goes on to cite as evidence for this problem low success rates on the National Association of Educational Progress’s reading test, as well as “nationwide college entrance exams.” Almy laments, “How do we justify passing such ill-prepared students?”
It is only through skills-based placement tests, Almy implies, that students may “demonstrate that they have attained a solid educational foundation.” In fact, at no point does he provide any metric for “underpreparedness” that does not rely on a standardized skills-based cognitive assessment.

Here, Almy models the “soft repression” of ridicule: he declares that the instructors working to further the reforms are “well-intentioned,” a back-handed compliment reserved for those passionate but misinformed people whose intention is coupled with failure (Feree, as cited in Mansfield and Shames 629). In so saying, Almy minimizes and ridicules those faculty who have worked towards change, even before those changes have really and truly taken hold. Moreover, the hegemonic intent of this rhetoric becomes clear in Almy’s subsequent characterization of “underprepared” students: “right now we are squandering hundreds of millions of taxpayers’ dollars on people who do not have the wherewithal to do the work.” He characterizes those students who were underplaced by tests—a group which, recall, included hugely disproportionate numbers of economically disadvantaged students and students of color—as “draining our valuable resources” when they should rather “leave and find something better suited for them” (Almy).

It is difficult to read the rhetoric of “underprepared” students as anything other than an attempt to reassert the preexisting social and racial hierarchy by glorifying the mechanism—standardized skills tests—which reinforced it. Knowing, as we do, that placement tests are terrible at predicting success in college coursework (Estrem et al. 111), but extremely efficient at dividing and privileging incoming students along racial lines (Complete College America, “Remedial Enrollment”), any adherence to the divisions created by those tests is, wittingly or otherwise, an act of white supremacy.

The second component of the anti-reform syllogism is that if these “underprepared” students are allowed access to college-level work, they will simply fail. Proceeding from the false premise that placement tests were accurately distinguishing between “prepared” and “underprepared” students, Law asserts that students will “fail in droves” if colleges do not “dumb classes down” (“Soft Bigotry”). These students, he claims, “can’t solve basic math problems, read a textbook, or write a proper paragraph,” because “they graduated from our high schools without having college entrance competency in math or English” (Law, “Soft Bigotry”). Thus, Law argues, the only way these students might succeed is by a widespread lowering of standards. This is the third component of the syllogism of reform critique.

Law concludes his op-ed for the Sun-Star by arguing that ultimately, terms like student success, equity, and access are buzzwords deployed by Democrats in order to dumb down and destroy the California community college system, and that if allowed to continue, these changes will render degrees from our
colleges useless and meaningless to transfer institutions and employers alike (Law, “How”). Here we see yet another component of backlash in action: the threat. While in this article Law upholds politicians as the responsible party for these changes, he claims that ultimately, it will be teachers who will have to make the choice between lowering their standards or failing “underprepared” students. If the double-speaking Democrats persist in their foolishness, he concludes, faculty will have no other options but to water down degrees or punish “underprepared” students (Law, “How”).

In contrast with Almy’s more explicitly hegemonic characterization of “underprepared” students, Law wields another form of academic backlash: co-opting positionality. Where censure, ridicule, and threat do not prevail, he seeks to persuade the unconvinced that resisting reforms is in the best interest of students. For Law, instead of reforms granting students access, they “rob” them of hard work. Instead of reforms having high expectations for students, they lower standards and expectations. Instead of reforms being liberating and equitable, they are the actual “bigotry” we should resist (Law, “Soft Bigotry”). Law suggests that his is the progressive, equity-minded position. Unlike Almy, Law acknowledges that “completion rates as measured by college transfers, diplomas, and certificates have been historically low for black and Latino students,” but argues that this is the result of a failure of the public education system, which has granted students diplomas based on lowered standards rather than holding them back—although he provides no evidence that this is true beyond his own classroom experience (Law, “Soft Bigotry”). Law connects this observation with a phrase coined in 1999 by George W. Bush: “the soft bigotry of low expectations” (qtd. in “Soft Bigotry”). Law claims that rather than turn the tide of inequity, placement and remediation reforms have already and will continue to make these issues worse, as “masses of relatively illiterate people . . . possess college diplomas that give a false impression”—not only denying our students’ ability to succeed in college, but also laying groundwork for white supremacists to reject the credentials of graduates of color (“Soft Bigotry”). Throughout this article, Law contrasts the reformers against the example of Jaime Escalante, the subject of 1988’s *Stand and Deliver*, who was able to help his Latinx students succeed in math simply through “hard work” (“Soft Bigotry”). This new system, he argues, “[makes] life easier for teachers and students alike,” but ultimately robs them of the opportunity to work hard and learn (“Soft Bigotry”).

Law alludes to *Stand and Deliver* as a paean to the hard-working educator who believes in his students’ capacity, and we certainly celebrate Escalante’s faith and diligence. In this context, though, *Stand and Deliver* showcases the danger of this rhetorical essentialism. We see it prominently in the film’s portrayal of the Educational Testing Service, which sees Escalante’s students’
success on the AP Calculus exam and responds predictably: if these students are succeeding, they must be cheating. This is precisely the rhetorical move employed by reform skeptics when they assert that increased success (particularly by students of color) can only mean failing standards. This lack of faith in the ability of students of color to succeed is portrayed as villainous in *Stand and Deliver*, but it is also the centerpiece of any declamation of lapsing standards in our current context.

Having examined the placement and completion data, however, we can see that these arguments do not engage in good faith with the evidence behind the reforms. In this way, they reveal themselves as an attempt at coercive persuasion, attacking those that seek reform and the reforms themselves as the real villain (Mansbridge and Shames 631). This tripartite syllogism is not new, by any means, but in our current context, it is likely to gain additional rhetorical force as a means of backlash specifically against corequisite support courses.

*The Next Front: Corequisite Support*

Given the shape our remediation reforms in California have taken, we can predict the next site at which backlash will likely take root: the corequisite support model. Furthermore, our initial, preliminary data collection efforts at COS have already seen some conversations coalescing around what may be perceived as a “failure” in the corequisite model to support those students who would previously have been categorized as “underprepared.” We present our own data here not as representative or generalizable, but as an example of how backlash might take shape, and why it might focus on corequisite support.

The three coercive mechanisms we have already examined—our students are not ready, our course-level success rates will go down, and the only way they will go up is if we decrease standards—are already commonplaces of reform skeptics, but we suspect that these mechanisms will find unique purchase in the conversation around corequisite support models and will anchor the backlash in that debate.

First, critics will find it easy to categorize students in corequisite support courses as “underprepared.” As we have seen, the idea that test-reliant placement mechanisms accurately distinguish between “prepared” and “underprepared” students is deeply flawed, and more often than not, “underprepared” is used as a dogwhistle to essentialize the reasons that some groups of students—often and especially students of color—do not have the same levels of success as others, thus effectively importing the Southern Strategy into composition studies. While the perspective of those lamenting the loss of standards relies on the purity and perfection of testing as a means of divining “preparedness,” the fact that there are still placement mechanisms at play under AB 705 makes it easy for reactionaries to target students placed into corequisite support as
“underprepared.” The same rhetoric that once said “These students can’t even pass a basic placement test” will likely reframe itself to use the new metrics of AB 705: “These students couldn’t even pass high school algebra,” “These students barely had a C average in high school,” “I don’t even know if these students have ever taken an English class,” ad nauseum et infinitum. Insofar as there are different levels of placement, critics of reform might say that AB 705 works for “college ready” students, but that “underprepared” students are another thing entirely—never noticing or mentioning that, at least at COS, the number of “college ready” students increased by nearly a thousand students who would have been considered “underprepared” just a year before (College of the Sequoias).

Second, critics’ emphasis on course-level success rates will make it very easy to target corequisite support courses, which will almost certainly have lower success rates than courses without support. As mentioned above, our success rates for courses without support at COS remained very consistent, from 68% in Fall 2018 to 67% in Fall 2019. In conversation with colleagues, though, we have already heard some anxiety about the 46% course-level success rate for classes with corequisite support (College of the Sequoias). 46% feels, and is, very low. As a result, it is again relatively easy pickings for critics: “obviously, these students just aren’t ready.” Of course, use of course-level success as a metric here overlooks two issues fundamental to these systemic changes. For one, the tremendously broad and thorough MMAP studies that led to AB 705 predicted lower course-level success rates. In English, the two GPA ranges that might result in placement into corequisite support had projected success rates of 57.7% for students with high school GPAs between 2.0 and 2.59 and 42.6% for students with high school GPAs below 2.0 (Hope and Stanskas 6). Our 46% success rate is in line with those projections. For another, and more crucially, comparing course-level success rates between courses with and without corequisite support is deeply misleading. At COS, 46% of the students who were given our lowest placement possibility completed college-level English within one semester (College of the Sequoias). By comparison, under the previous system, our course-level success rates for English 360, our lowest pre-transfer course, were on average only 55%—after which students would still need to complete another pre-transfer course, and then complete college-level English (“College of the Sequoias Program Review Dashboard: ENGL”). As a result, only about 28% of students who received our lowest possible placement completed college-level English within six years (“Sequoias ENGL 360 Fall 2012-Spring 2018 Cohort Data”). With that in view, a 46% single-term course-level success rate for college-level English with corequisite support is an undeniable success.
Third and finally, corequisite support courses will be a target of backlash because they can easily be manipulated into the rhetoric of “compassionate passes,” to borrow a term from Almy. Backlash rhetoric proceeds from the premise that increased success means lapsing standards, which means that corequisite support courses will likely become the site at which a certain tautological essentialism plays itself out. Because of the essentialist assumption that some students are not prepared to succeed at college-level work, any success in a class designated for “underprepared” students must be characterized as the result of lowered expectations. The alternative would be to accept, as the research suggests, that traditional models of preparedness are deeply flawed, based on false assumptions, and derived from invalid instruments, and that we should instead be looking at other metrics to predict success. And, more painfully, it would mean that reform critics face the demoralizing reality that these students were never “underprepared,” but that the systems we have constructed have held them back.

To say it more simply, corequisite support courses will be the site of the strongest backlash because the students in those classes can most easily be forced to conform to pre-existing models of “underpreparedness,” allowing reactionaries to celebrate those students’ failures as proof that the reforms are wrong, and to lament those students’ successes as evidence of dereliction in academic gatekeeping.

**Toward a Counterreactionary Rhetoric of Success**

Thus, we should expect the backlash to attempt to centralize student “underpreparedness,” course-level success rates, and lapsing standards, especially in conversations surrounding corequisite support. We must resist the impulse to frame the debate in these terms, as these very frameworks established the systemic injustice that these reforms attempt to overturn. Talking about course-level success rates is a familiar crutch, but it allows us to overlook the long course sequences and terrible student outcomes that have kept so many students from success. As Tom Fox reminds us in *Defending Access*, “the academy is no island of tolerance; it shares our culture’s fear of change and difference. We need forceful, thoughtful, vigilant, and prepared responses to these challenges” (113). It is in the spirit of this challenge that we turn now from identifying and predicting backlash to responding to it.

To combat this reaction, we suggest the following:

1. In any conversation about success data and corequisite courses, we should insist on contextualizing the new data. It is counterintuitive, but nevertheless true, that a lower success rate in a college-level course with corequisite support is still likely better than higher
success rates across multiple courses in sequence. Ask colleagues to think about “success” in terms of throughput, and point to the number of students who were able to succeed in college-level English with support in one semester as compared to the number of students who were able to succeed in college-level English after spending a year (or more!) in remedial courses.

2. We should also welcome good-faith criticism and engagement where it exists. Although the data that drives the new placement and support models is thorough, robust, and supported by decades of scholarly work in the field of composition, it is likely that as implementation continues in California and elsewhere, we will continue to find more effective ways to teach our students. However, as we discuss new possibilities, we must resist the impulse to allow our colleagues’ anxiety to drag us back toward the systems we now know to have been inequitable and ineffective. We must ask of any good-faith criticism: is this likely to be an improvement on our current system, and how do we know? We must insist on evidence beyond “common sense” and “personal experience.” The recent data shows definitively that we have consistently overestimated our abilities to accurately assess student capacity and identify student needs, and in so doing, unwittingly upheld systems that oppressed students—particularly students of color. If we are going to address inequity in our systems, we are going to need more than gut feelings.

3. Whenever we engage in conversations about reading and writing, we should endeavor to do so with a solid foundation on what has been supported by academic research. In Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies, editors Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle point out that there is a lot that literacy and composition studies have learned, but most of that information is not shared well throughout the field and across institutions (xii). Because of this lack of shared understanding, outdated and unfounded perceptions of reading and writing instruction prevail, including perceptions about student “preparedness” and their reading and writing capabilities. If we are to effectively maintain system-wide change, we should—wherever possible—work to inform our institutions and organizations about current and effective literacy practices, especially anti-racist pedagogies.

4. We should engage in consistent professional learning that helps us improve our teaching through race- and system-conscious approaches. These learning opportunities should take many forms to
allow diverse engagement from faculty, staff, and administration. Furthermore, these learning opportunities need to be explicitly cultivated and encouraged by our institutions, and all participants should be compensated for their additional commitment. If we are to develop and maintain equitable systems, our institutions need to be actively engaged in learning. Professional development is often called out in mission statements, policy documents, and categorical funding goals, but all too often the practices around professional learning are ad hoc, influenced by negative stereotypes about faculty or staff engagement, and vaguely seen as a poor investment. Instead, professional learning should be intentional, concrete, fully funded, and integrated into our institutional plans. It took a lot of professional learning and effort to effectively make the changes legislated by AB 705, and it will take more to maintain and improve these changes without succumbing to backlash.

5. Finally, we should be prepared to publicly combat backlash, especially the backlash we anticipate against corequisite support. We must “[b]e present. Relentlessly” (Estrem et al. 109). As narratives of success become available to us, and as new data shows increased access to the academic world beyond college-level English for populations long excluded by the status quo, we must tell those stories—not only to those colleagues in whom we already find support, but to those who resist, to those outside of our departments, and to the public more generally. It will be tempting, indeed, to ignore the backlash and get on with the work of teaching, but in so doing, we risk ceding important ground to a vocal minority clamoring to regain power.

As Michelle Alexander notes, it is not inevitable that another system of inequitable control will reassert itself. If we are mindful of reform backlash, particularly that which may arise around the corequisite model, we stand a strong chance of building on these reforms toward a more equitable future for our students—one that is resistant to regressive and racially unequal systems of power.

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Course Design

Swimming in the Deep End: Data-Driven Retention and Success with Corequisites English 1101 (Success Academy Section) and GSU 1010

Angela Christie and Lynée Lewis Gaillet

Course Descriptions

At Georgia State University (GSU), like at most other institutions, corequisite courses must be taken simultaneously—the information in one is necessary to the full understanding of the other. However, the corequisite pairing we describe here has a unique history; we paired a GSU 1010 course, part of the larger Freshman Learning experience, with English 1101 in an ad hoc manner.

The GSU 1010 course provides students with essential information about the academic demands of the university, its rules, procedures, resources, and academic, social, and personal survival skills that contribute to academic success. The GSU 1010 curriculum encourages students to establish supportive relationships with peers and faculty and to become an integral part of the academic community. In addition to offering the necessary information and skills to navigate the university, GSU 1010 also exposes students to the academic field of their choice through an examination of the general area of study and related principles. The course’s learning outcomes align with the following themes: Academic Life, Community Life, Personal Life.

English 1101 is designed to increase the student’s ability to construct written prose of various kinds. The course focuses on methods of organization, analysis, research skills, and the production of short expository essays. Readings consider issues of contemporary social and cultural concern. A passing grade is a C. By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Engage in writing as a process, including various invention heuristics (brainstorming, for example), gathering evidence, considering audience, drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading.
2. Engage in the collaborative, social aspects of written composition, and use these as tools for learning.
3. Use language to explore and analyze contemporary multicultural, global, and international questions.
4. Demonstrate how to use composition aids, such as handbooks, dictionaries, online aids, and tutors.
5. Gather, summarize, synthesize and explain information from various sources.

6. Use grammatical, stylistic, and mechanical formats and conventions appropriate for a variety of audiences, but in particular the formal academic audience that makes up the discourse community with which you will also become more familiar in this course.

7. Critique others’ work in written, visual and oral formats.

8. Produce coherent, organized, readable compositions for a variety of rhetorical situations.

9. Self-reflect on what contributed to the composition process and evaluate one’s own work.

As originally conceived, GSU 1010 serves as an orientation course, designed to help students succeed in all the courses they take during their first semester of college work. This course serves as a college primer, presenting students with typical “what you need to know to succeed in college” information. We argue, however, that GSU 1010 is an important corequisite for English 1101, particularly for students entering GSU through the summer Success Academy (SA) program. When GSU 1010 is part of the SA curriculum, the focus of composition instruction is adjusted to include mentoring and research support tailored for students deemed underprepared for college success. We argue that the success of SA courses depends in large part upon the 1010 course’s emphasis on mindset growth, academic grooming, confidence building, and community development. The English department seeks ways to ensure that English 1101 curriculum can reflectively help develop topics covered in the orientation course. Conversely, learning support offered in the 1010 courses enhances the quality of instruction in composition classes. When English faculty began adjusting 1101 courses for SA students, we leveraged the one-hour 1010 course content to augment and correlate curriculum. For instance, students participate in mindset growth mentoring sessions in 1010; we saw this requirement as an opportunity for extended instruction in 1101 and added writing assignments, in-class activities, and course readings related to mindset growth. By claiming GSU 1010 as a corequisite for 1101 SA sections, the English department increased the efficacy of both courses.

Institutional Context

Recognized in 2020 by US News and World Report as #2 in Most Innovative Schools and #3 in Best Undergraduate Teaching (tie), Georgia State University, located in metro Atlanta, has radically overhauled advisement criteria, curriculum, and support services to better meet the needs of our urban students. We are ranked 25th in the country for social mobility and follow-
ing the 2015 merger with Georgia Perimeter College, GSU now serves 53 thousand students at the downtown R1 university campus and perimeter college campuses. To streamline consolidation and the transfer process from the community college campuses to the four-year undergraduate program downtown, we combined the GSU and Perimeter catalogs and mission statements. Despite initial growing pains, the university’s comprehensive plans to retain students and ensure progress towards degree have been widely heralded and imitated (see *New York Times* articles such as “Economic Diversity and Student Outcomes at Georgia State University” and “Data-Driven Innovation in College’s Reinvention”). In Fall 2019, GSU set institutional enrollment records, admitting the most qualified and diverse freshman class to date. Students currently represent 49 states and more than 160 nations and territories. At the downtown campus, 4,600 freshmen entered the university with an average high school grade point average of 3.53. An additional 3,300 freshmen enrolled at the GSU perimeter college campuses. These combined totals yield the largest class of students in GSU history. They now have access to student success programs which means “these 8,000 freshmen will enter Georgia State with the best opportunity in school history to be successful,” according to Timothy M. Renick, Senior Vice President for student success at GSU; “[t]hey will join a university at which students are graduating at record rates, in record time, and enjoying unprecedented success in careers after graduation.” Of note, since consolidation with Georgia Perimeter College, graduation rates at Perimeter campuses have nearly tripled (“Georgia State Sets a Record”).

First-Year Programs (managed by the office of Student Engagement) is largely responsible for the recent growth. This initiative cast a wider recruitment net by focusing on student training in financial literacy, providing retention grants, and creating early alert systems (particularly useful for first-generation students). The university now relies upon predictive analytic advising, College to Career course designs, adaptive learning software, the creation of freshman learning communities and meta-major programming, leadership training, and the formation of a Success Academy (SA) to help students meet their goals. SA students, who enroll in courses the summer before their first year of college, benefit from university cohort housing, in-residence mentoring, and tailored social events. Most importantly for this study, SA requires the pairing of core courses and GSU 1010, an “introduction to the academy” seminar. In the English department, these corequisite writing courses dovetail in ways that increase access and retention of students, many of whom are first-generation college attendees and all of whom are determined to be “at risk” for dropping out during the first year of college. Of note, the GSU downtown campus abolished learning-support classes and basic writing instruction in 1997.
While course pairing and Freshman Learning Community cohorts are not unique to GSU, the use of predictive analytics allows us to shape curricula and services to design a bridge program that addresses the specific needs of SA students. Curricular adjustments include scaffolded assignments, shorter paper assignments, and generous revision opportunities. Despite these changes in pedagogy, the curriculum in SA classes is credit bearing and maintains the same high expectations as traditional 1101 courses. The recent addition of a university Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) grounded in College to Career curriculum ensures that summer SA students are prepared for the academic courses and activities they will encounter in the fall semester.

In 2014, the SA program invited just under 100 students to pilot the program. Since then, the SA cohort has grown to over 500 invited summer students who are carefully selected through analysis of freshman index scores. Most colleges use index scores (or a similar admission system) to determine a student’s ability to perform college-level work, acknowledging that traditional admission standards favor students from robustly funded educational programs (Fussell). The SA program extends admission to students who fall below GSU’s index score requirements. GSU calculates admissibility through consideration of two factors: a student’s GPA in college prep high school courses and official SAT and/or ACT scores. The average ranges for admissible first year students are: HS Core GPA 3.2-3.7; SAT (Verbal and Math only) 950-1160; ACT (Composite) 20-25. Participants in the summer program take just seven credit hours—math, English, and a freshman orientation course—instead of the fifteen hours most students take during their first college semester. Students who complete the summer program with a 2.0 or better then matriculate into that year’s freshman class. In 2018, the SA program was extended to two-year Perimeter College campuses and is now integral to how students (who are identified as those needing additional resources and a more scaffolded approach to course work) experience their first college semester at both the four-year and two-year campuses.

At the program’s inception in 2014, the English 1101 course remained identical in every way to credit-bearing courses offered in the fall semester. We quickly learned, however, that the SA students who benefit from administrative support services would also benefit from a revised 1101 experience. English 1101 instructors convened a committee to review ways to adjust pedagogy to meet both student needs and course goals, as well as combine the course with existing GSU 1010 instruction. The revised composition course paralleled the content and goals of the traditional 1101 course (available in the supplementary materials), with teacher-led changes in delivery and pedagogical methods. Additionally, English faculty had little experience in the space of “administrative/orientation” teaching. In order to pair these two classes, English 1101 needed
to learn to cooperate with the orientation course leaders. Eventually, English Writing Center tutors were assigned to teach the 1010 course, which helped us gain additional insight into how best to tailor the composition course to correlate with 1010 content.

The campus-wide First-Year Book program provides another initiative connecting the corequisite courses. This program aims to promote academic discourse and critical thinking, provide an introduction to the expectations of higher education, integrate an academic and social experience into the campus community, raise awareness and tolerance of cultural likenesses and differences, and create a sense of community. The annual book selection, chosen by a committee composed of interdisciplinary teachers and SA administrators, is distributed without charge to all incoming first year students, who are asked to participate in events related to the book and attend convocation featuring the author as the plenary speaker. English 1101 courses integrate the selection into class curriculum, and the writing program administration (WPA) team creates accompanying in-class, collaborative, and research/exploration assignments. The First-Year Book is integrated into the GSU 1010 course as well. While the discussions in GSU 1010 focus on the global and broad themes of the book, the English course drills down to more nuanced issues, asking students to craft compositions that not only reflect upon the selection's themes, but also analyze how those ideas resonate with local circumstances and GSU community exigencies. Past selections include *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* by Bryan Stevenson; the *March* trilogy by John Lewis; Wes Moore’s *The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates*; and Warren St. John’s *Outcasts United*.

Once the revised English 1101 course reflected the goals of the First-Year Program, the students’ productivity and final grades improved. Additionally, students rated their satisfaction with courses higher. After linking the two courses, students became more engaged, and the faculty looked forward to teaching (and began requesting to teach) the course. Pairing SA university support services and teacher-adapted curriculum (in conjunction with larger GSU initiatives created for all students) set the stage for student success and retention.

**Theoretical Rationale**

Alice Myatt explains that most scholarship on writing program collaboration focuses on university and high school pairings or community and writing program initiatives. She instead calls for complex collaboration partnerships, challenging representations from “higher education, administration, organizational studies, and business management, WPAs and WCAs” to seek ways “to add to or expand the research and scholarship connected to complex collaborative ventures that cross (or even transcend) boundaries” (3). In spite of
initial turf wars and faculty resistance to big data, the SA and English department venture at GSU answers this call.

While faculty who work in the humanities have long valued the importance of data, facts, evidence, and research (see A Changing Major, ADE report), their appreciation of data differs from higher administration's affinity for facts and figures. Coverage of innovative university initiatives like recent ones at GSU frequently include phrases like “big data,” “data-driven outcomes,” and “student success built on data analytics.” Recruitment and retention programs, while extremely successful, are often created in the administrative world, void of input from the very faculty who are charged with implementation. Despite resistance to big data language, many faculty members are fundamentally committed to teaching in programs designed to improve retention, close equity gaps, decrease time to graduation, or improve the success outcomes for students with lower achievement indicators. Unfortunately, the vision of student success is often bifurcated from the start: faculty believe students achieve success by time spent in the classroom, and university administrators know success can be engineered outside of that traditional space—and they have the data to prove it. GSU has made crucial internal changes to encourage faculty to get to the business of effecting change. The university found that when faculty are asked to play an active role in strategic visioning, teachers are more likely to buy into innovative programming and, therefore, student success measurably increases (St. Amor).

In “Demands for Partnership and Collaboration in Higher Education: A Model,” Amey et al. provide a series of questions designed to promote key elements of educational collaborations. Addressing these questions is necessary to evaluate the efficacy of collaborations:

• What was the impetus to initiate the partnership? the reasons for joining? the antecedents (Gray; Russell and Flynn)? state, federal, or institutional policies?
• What is the context of the partnership? What are the economic, political, and sociocultural circumstances? What is the motivation for each partner to participate?
• How is the partnership understood by others, and what is the role of leadership in framing the partnership for constituents? How do the institutions involved and their members make sense of partnership (Watson)? Who is communicating with members about the partnership (Fullan)?
• What are the outcomes, benefits, and costs of the partnership? What kinds of assessment and benchmarking data about the partnership
are gathered? Are goals and objectives revised appropriately? Do the data feed back into the partnership process (Kotter and Cohen)?

• What is required to sustain the partnership? If it is decided to continue the partnership, how will this be accomplished (Amey and Brown)? What resources are needed? How will they be garnered? If the partnership is to be dissolved or dramatically changed, who will manage this process and communicate it to others? (9)

This self-inquiry is critical to sustaining mutually beneficial partnerships, particularly in student success initiatives like the ones fostered at GSU. SA relies upon cooperation at multiple university, college, and department levels; yet, each entity needs to maintain their individual identities and purposes, receive credit for their participation in the larger project, and feel empowered as a stakeholder (see Currie and Eodice; Harrington et al.).

The decision to adopt English 1101 as a possible extension of the university-level programmatic aims for SA required a shift in thinking about the role of faculty and departments. When English set to work with the SA program, the collaboration necessitated ceding some ground in the composition classroom and allowing the goals of the SA program to have equal weight with course outcomes. This corequisite pairing allowed GSU to reimagine the first year writing space, expand our reach into the mentoring and student success areas of education, and maintain the same level of writing instruction rigor across all first year writing classes. Achieving student success and raising the national reputation of GSU as a leader in student retention required gathering experts with differing areas of expertise from across the terrain of the university. The resulting complex collaborations (as defined by The Research Group on Complex Collaborations) occurred because the various stakeholders worked “across organizational, epistemological, and interest boundaries in order to create an emergent outcome” (“About Us”). The process of collaboration was not difficult to establish; however, the act of fostering genuine belief in the benefits of student learning that has its foundation established by an administrative program required a shift in the writing program’s theoretical point of view. The current complex collaborations between SA administrators and teachers in the various core disciplines relies upon trust and respect, working together to achieve larger goals that aren’t attainable by one entity.

University staff and support service team members (working on 12-month contracts and therefore available to summer SA students) are integral to complex collaborations; they ensure opportunity and equity for all incoming students. First-Year Programs created a unique combination of academic and administrative services associated with the GSU 1010 orientation course, including: weekly workshops, one-on-one advising appointments, academic coaching,
and targeted skills-based tutoring sessions. While some support features exist for students entering in the fall, SA students receive an increased level of attention. The corequisite pairing adds an additional academic layer to tracking and monitoring student progress, and most summers, 100% of the 1101 courses taught in the summer are designated SA sections.

The corequisite pairing inherently fosters cross-campus collaborations in other ways as well. For example, the Writing Center and Writing Program move beyond siloed positions and instead partner for the benefit of both programs. The inclusion of the Writing Center pedagogy with the mentoring programs offered by the SA resulted in mentoring sessions grounded in the theories and best practices established by the tutors and faculty who run the program. SA mentoring and study sessions reflect the learning goals set forth at the direction of our department’s Writing Center. Through this collaboration, English was able to inject the administrative student success program with writing center and composition theory. Directors of these programs adjust staffing over the summer to make sure the Writing Center tutors and departmental advisors are prepared for SA students during critical times. In addition to meeting the needs of students, faculty in both programs receive summer funding. In “Crafting Collaboricity: Harmonizing the Force Fields of Writing Program and Writing Center Work,” Michelle Miley and Doug Downs explain “through overlapping fields, and our shared goal of a campus writing community, our interactions affect not only each other’s programs but also the people within each of the fields of influence” (40). This cross-campus collaboration is amplified when we layer other vested and funded university initiatives aimed at student retention and success, such as the College-to-Career QEP, the Humanities Inclusivity Program (HIP), and Center for the Advancement of Students and Alumni (CASA) integrated endeavors.

The intentional cohorting of GSU 1010 and English 1101 became standard practice when the 2014 retention and graduation rates data illustrated the success of the program. By its second year, SA students had an 83.2% one-year retention rate, compared to 81.2% rate of non-SA students. The four-year graduation rate for SA students was 21.3%, just 8 points lower than for traditional students. The curriculum revision in 1101, the pairing with GSU 1010, and a suite of services offered at the programmatic level helped these SA students perform at, or just below, traditionally matriculated students by the end of the first year.

While the supplemental materials offer the standard SA syllabus for English 1101, teachers certainly may (and do) adapt the standard curriculum to merge with their individual teaching strengths and the needs of a particular cohort of students. Michael Harker, Associate Professor specializing in composition theory and literacy studies, regularly requests to teach the SA courses. Most
recently, he adapted the syllabus to include a focus on “Rhetoric, Literacy, and Family,” an 1101 course designed to meet students where they are upon entering GSU, and to introduce students to an R1 university learning environment. Pedagogically sound, this class design tweaks the standard English 1101 syllabus to reflect student demographics, teacher interest, and local program exigencies. Harker explains,

> When I teach undergraduate composition courses (SA or Honors) I rely heavily on ideals communicated in GSU’s strategic plan, emphasizing that GSU is an R1 school with certain expectations for decorum, attendance, integrity, and work ethic. It sounds tough, intimidating, maybe even cruel, but on the first day—and throughout the semester—I repeatedly remind them that if they find the readings difficult or the assignments time consuming, they’re in the right place. I allow them to revise multiple times and work with them individually when it comes to certain issues, but ...I think both the larger institutional climate and the back-channel PR instructors do for institutions is so important. If students sense that you don’t trust, admire, or respect the institution, they won’t either. All students need to see the instructor believe in more than the course they’re teaching. I think this ‘move’ is critical when it comes to SA courses. This isn’t possible at institutions that don’t message as effectively as GSU. (Harker)

We applaud and welcome adaptations to the standard syllabus because those faculty-created changes reflect a sincere enthusiasm for the course and how it functions within the larger university success initiative. In early critical reflections of student success programs from across the country, critics noted the lack of cohesion between the results hoped for by administrators and the progress students made in their coursework. As Vincent Tinto, Distinguished University Professor at Syracuse, points out success initiatives fail to improve student experience “in large measure because most innovations have sat at the margins of the classroom and have failed to reach into the classroom to substantially improve the classroom experience” (4). Courses adapted to local needs and specific student demographics put into practice the First-Year Programs’ tools and opportunities, ensuring academic success happens in the classroom. By creating a pedagogical approach to success initiatives through the vehicle of a course, and then pairing that course with academic spaces, students benefit from both the administrative efforts and the faculty expertise needed to move beyond the barriers that most commonly prohibit student success.
Critical Reflection

With the large and growing number of SA sections each summer, teacher training for this course is vital, particularly when the bulk of those instructors are graduate teaching assistants (see Wallis and Jankens; Estrem and Reid). Instructors must see their role as both academic coach and teacher, especially as students in the summer cohort often are not prepared for the rigors of independent college living. Gaining admission despite low Freshman Index scores, SA students know they have been invited to participate in this course because they are not competitive with students who enter college through regular admission processes. Even though the program has adopted more welcoming and encouraging student labels (“early college adopters” and “academy students”), summer SA students are well aware that their summer work determines their ability to matriculate in the fall. The students are also sometimes less enthusiastic about starting college in the summer, when their friends may enjoy a two-month vacation from school or earn money to defray college costs. Some students have cried openly when they performed poorly on an assignment, fearing they will fail and get kicked out of school before the freshman year officially begins. Making sure instructors are aware of this student perception is crucial. Low Freshman Index scores may also be symptomatic of larger learning or readiness issues. A student may not yet be emotionally ready for collegiate work nor attained the required personal and interpersonal sense of responsibility necessary for academic success. While the programmatic activities and the orientation course aims to address some of these issues, instructors of English 1101 often encounter these issues first, as Harker explains,

This class remains the most rewarding and memorable course I’ve taught since coming to GSU in 2010. I’m not sure why, but I think it has something to do with the fact that a lot of SA students arrive with a chip on their shoulders because they don’t want to be there (or think they shouldn’t be there.) It’s something special to see that burden/anxiety/resentment—it’s different for each student—slowly dissolve over the period of a semester and be replaced with the disposition/perspective I’m trying to impart: undergraduate scholar at an urban research university. (Harker)

Corequisite courses help to demystify the college experience for students and then assist them in campus participation; however, from a training and mentoring perspective, it is sometimes difficult to prepare instructors for the wide variants in student preparedness and behavior. Generally, students who participate in the SA program go on to complete their degrees at the same rate
as traditional student cohorts. However, to date, we have no comprehensive study of the effect on student learning when the suite of services and the tailored academic programming abruptly ends after one short summer term. We need to investigate if and how SA students struggle once they no longer receive individualized and constant attention.

Both English 1101 staff, teacher-mentors, and administrators now recognize that university initiatives provide unique opportunities for partnership. This intentional collaboration, described by Myatt as “imposed on units in the manner of top-down directives” has led over the last few years to interesting invitational partnerships, whereby “units seek out or accept opportunities to join or partner with others” (4). At the start of the SA program, our English Department was given little to no information about the new cohort of students, how the program might function, and what role we should take in helping to ensure the success of these students. In fact, we were told directly to make no adjustments to the English 1101 course, as it should not in any way appear as remedial. We quickly learned that curriculum adjustments and conscious pairing with GSU 1010 courses provided an expedient way to ensure students not only passed their classes, but also to prepare them to make the leap into the academic deep end. While GSU has a stellar reputation as an innovative university (demonstrated in the data), we still have difficulty “assessing and comparing each party’s contributions, gains, and competencies in the collaboration process” that led to this national phenomenon (Jap 87). However, we do know that the efforts made by instructors willing to reinterpret their roles as teacher-mentors and cooperate to create pedagogically sound corequisite courses ensured that students were ready to swim.

Note
The College to Career initiative is Georgia State University’s Quality Enhancement Plan, a requirement of SACSCOC accreditation process. www.collegetocareer.gsu.edu

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Designing a Corequisite First Year Writing Course with Student Retention in Mind

Sara A. Heaser and Darci L. Thoune

Course Description

ENG 100, a three-credit, graded course is designed for students who are enrolled in ENG 110, our three-credit, single semester first year writing (FYW) course. Students in ENG 100 and 110 take six credits of FYW instruction during their first semester at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse (UWL). ENG 100 focuses on developing academic literacy skills such as describing, discussing, and reflecting on student reading, writing, and research habits and practices. Students participate in workshops, small group work, and peer review to practice writing as a collaborative activity and a recursive practice. The learning outcomes of ENG 100 are for students to:

- Describe, discuss, and reflect on their reading, writing, and research habits and practices;
- Identify specific skills and techniques for developing recursive and flexible writing processes;
- Evaluate and incorporate feedback from peers and instructors;
- Practice writing as a collaborative activity;
- Develop strategies for the various stages of the writing process, including invention, drafting, and revision;
- Develop proficiency in using information literacy resources.

This course has an enrollment cap of 15 students per section and is taught by instructors with a background in basic writing. It also features embedded writing interns who help to co-facilitate the course with additional workshops, office hours, and one-on-one peer writing consultations. This is a credit bearing course (three credit hours) and contributes to the 120 credit hour minimum required for graduation.

Institutional and Programmatic Context

UWL is a four-year comprehensive institution that serves approximately 10,500 students (9,000+ undergrad); it is also a predominantly white institution (PWI). The average ACT score for incoming students is 24.7, and 25% of these students graduated in the top 10% of their high school class. Because of its high admission standards, UWL occupies a somewhat privileged position in the UW System. In 2018, UWL was ranked the number one comprehensive campus in the UW System and is ranked among the top four among...
regional universities in the Midwest. Second only to the flagship campus at Madison, UWL is consistently ranked highly by *US News and World Report’s* America’s Best Colleges list.

The First Year Writing Program (FYWP) at UWL enrolls roughly 2,000 students per year. With few exceptions, all students at UWL must take a FYW course. FYW at UWL has student learning outcomes (SLOs) that are aligned with the most recent WPA Outcomes for First Year Composition (Council of Writing Program Administrators). Although all FYW instructors work with these same outcomes, they have a fair amount of autonomy over course design and assignments. All instructors (tenure-track; non-tenure track with 1-2 year contracts, and non-tenure track with semester-to-semester contracts) in the English Department teach FYW, although non-tenure track (NTT) instructors teach the majority of the sections.

There are currently three FYW courses at UWL: ENG 100 (3 cr.): College Writing Workshop, the corequisite course; ENG 110 (3 cr.): College Writing, the standard gateway FYW course; and ENG 112 (3 cr.): College Writing AP, a course designed for students who earned a score of 3 or 4 on their AP Literature and Composition or AP Language and Composition exams. Students who earn a 5 on either of these exams are exempt from the FYW requirement.

**Creation of ENG 100**

The fall of 2018 was a turning point in the FYWP and marked a substantial revision to our basic writing courses. Prior to the creation of ENG 100, our program offered ENG 050, a non-credit bearing, pass/fail remedial course that students placed into based solely on their Wisconsin English Placement Test (WEPT) scores. This course was historically non-credit bearing because of its status as a “remedial course” and because of the monies from the state that are attached to courses labeled as such.

Starting in the fall of 2018, however, the program eliminated ENG 050, mainstreamed all students into ENG 110, and transitioned to using ENG 100, a credit bearing, corequisite support course for students who needed additional help to be successful in ENG 110. Although there are a variety of models for support, we felt a move from a non-credit bearing prerequisite course to a corequisite sequence ensured that our population of students could be equal with their peers in credit-bearing classes and in time to graduation despite being flagged as unprepared for college based on their test scores. Ultimately, it was a small programmatic change made with long-term student retention in mind.

However, our decision to eliminate ENG 050 was fraught because, from a nuts and bolts perspective, the course worked. The vast majority of students who took ENG 050 were ultimately successful in ENG 110, but we knew that ENG 050 stigmatized students who placed into the class and that students...
resented the course because it was pass/fail and non-credit-bearing. In the end, we wanted to retain the best of what ENG 050 offered, but to expand that work. Therefore, we designed ENG 100 with the following features:

- credit bearing (three credits)
- graded
- portfolio-based
- embedded peer writing tutors (carryover from ENG 050)
- an emphasis on low-stakes writing (carryover from ENG 050).

Concurrent to our decision to mainstream all UWL students into ENG 110 and to the creation of ENG 100 was the decision to overhaul our placement practices as well. For some students, the scores they earned on the Wisconsin English Placement Test (WEPT) were sufficient for us to confidently place them into ENG 100; for other students who were on the cusp, we required additional information. Inspired by the multiple-measures placement (MMP) system developed by Hassel and Giordano, we created a FYW placement system that would allow us to gather background information on student writing habits and experiences through a series of survey questions and a writing exercise. This information, in addition to ACT and WEPT scores, helped us to determine which students would benefit from a corequisite support course and which students would likely succeed in ENG 110 without additional support. And, while we were motivated to make the above changes in the name of accuracy, we were also motivated by a desire to place students fairly and ethically.

From the beginning, our desire to create ENG 100 coincided with our desire to improve our placement practices for students that do not neatly fit into ENG 110 without support. In teaching ENG 050 over the years, we noticed that it was not for a lack of understanding or writing skills that students were in ENG 050; it was more related to a lack of awareness or exposure to academic literacies. The reasons for this were abstract and difficult to pin down. Therefore, our goal was to design a robust placement system that would provide us with as much information as possible about students who might benefit from taking ENG 100 with ENG 110.

Additionally, we wanted to create a program that allowed students enrolled in ENG 100 to have a FYW experience that mirrored, as closely as possible, the experiences of students who did not need to take the corequisite course. With this parity of experiences in mind, we worked with our Office of Records and Registration to ensure that students in ENG 100 were purposefully enrolled in a variety of different sections of ENG 110 or could self-select which section of ENG 110 in which they would like to enroll. As a result, students may not have the same instructor for both ENG 110 and ENG 100, and they may or may not share an ENG 110 section with other students enrolled in ENG.
108. However, because ENG 110 sections may be taught very differently, one of the main challenges facing ENG 100 instructors is designing a course that can adapt and respond to the needs of students in these sometimes very different sections. The pressure on ENG 100 is that it needs to be applicable to a wide variety of writing situations while not replicating the work taking place in ENG 110.

Ultimately, the exigency for ENG 100 has always been clear—we have students entering the university who need additional support in order to be successful in FYW. Because we were (luckily!) not facing an exigency associated with austere budget cuts or state-mandated changes to remedial education, we were able to create a campus-wide conversation that instead started with student success in mind. We know that the typical population of students who place into ENG 050/ENG 100 are the students we struggle to retain—students of color, first-generation students, multilingual learners, and students who for various reasons are less proficient in academic literacies. Therefore, this programmatic revision was also an opportunity for us to align our practices with our principles and to respond to calls from the field for WPAs and writing programs to consider how assessment practices and placement practices resist and/or reinscribe a one-size-fits-all model of higher education (Adler-Kassner; Inoue; Condon and Young; Inoue and Poe).

Despite our best efforts, however, the results of our new MMP and ENG 100 have been mixed. However, the process of developing this course has reinforced the interconnectedness of FYW with a variety of campus stakeholders including our Office of Multicultural Student Services, the Academic Support Institute, the Writing Center, and Student Support Services. The success of this class is largely contingent upon not only the cooperation of instructors within our FYWP, but also upon the support of these stakeholders in their coordination to ensure the success of these students at UWL. This cooperation was an opportunity for us to start and steer a conversation that considered best practices in localized, ethical placement.

Consultations with our Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Planning (OIRAP) and with the Office of Records and Registration provided us with data to support offering one or two sections of ENG 100 per semester. Because this student population is vulnerable in terms of retention from first to second year, these students needed writing support immediately (during their first semester) to ensure a good foundation of habits and practices before they take additional general education courses. We advocated for these students to be enrolled in ENG 100 and ENG 110 immediately in their first semester on campus. Before our adoption of ENG 100, students took ENG 050 anywhere from their first semester to their last; not surprisingly, a delay in taking ENG 050 (and then ENG 110 to satisfy the general education FYW
requirement) often put students behind their peers in credits toward graduation and in completion of general education coursework (because ENG 110 is a prerequisite for other general education courses). FYW serves as a foundational course for other writing-intensive general education courses, such as history, and early research in the development of ENG 100 indicated that students who do not take FYW early in their undergraduate career did not fare as well in other writing-intensive general education courses. Early struggles in general education predicted future issues in attrition and retention.

Although we are in the beginning stages of tracking these students’ persistence in the university, our OIRAP was able to compare a small cohort of students (97) who passed through the original ENG 050 and ENG 110 sequence and a cohort of 38 who passed through the new ENG 100 and ENG 110 sequence. Between the two cohorts, there was no statistically significant difference found in persistence to the second term. However, when looking at the retention to the second year, 88% of the new cohort were retained, whereas 78% of the old cohort were—an increase of ten percentage points. Overall, UWL’s retention rate to the second year is 86%, so it was encouraging to find that a cohort of students that typically includes an overrepresentation of underrepresented students aligned with the overall retention rate at UW L. Again, this is a noted observation of a small cohort, and many factors are at play in a student’s persistence, but we are encouraged by this early data and we will continue to track students in subsequent cohorts moving forward.

**Theoretical Rationale**

**Acknowledging and Fostering Academic Literacy**

As we were overhauling our basic writing courses in the fall of 2018, our campus was simultaneously participating in the Re-Imagining the First Year Experience Initiative and experimenting with designing and implementing a required First Year Seminar (FYS); this seminar sought to develop students’ academic literacy skills as they transitioned to the university. Concepts emphasized in FYS scholarship overlap nicely with initiatives of FYW courses and offer a unique opportunity for FYW instructors to consider how their courses contribute to retention (Crank, et al.). For example, the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*, co-produced by the National Council of Teachers of English, the Council of Writing Program Administrators, and the National Writing Project (2011), offers eight “habits of mind” essential for academic success that look far beyond FYW courses: persistence, responsibility, metacognition, engagement, flexibility, openness, creativity, and curiosity. We wished for ENG 100 to become an opportunity for students to identify, understand, and practice these skills while navigating new and unfamiliar aca-
demnic writing situations (in ENG 110) and communities at large (within the
first year). As noted earlier, our goal for ENG 100 students was simple: suc-
cess in ENG 110. But, because ENG 110 is a gateway course and as Garrett,
Bridgewater, and Feinstein’s scholarship shows that performance in “writing
courses strongly predicts both graduation and success in the major” (107),
ultimately, we were concerned about retention of ENG 100 students in the
long term. In response to this concern, we considered High Impact Practices
(Kuh) and kept course caps low (15) and utilized peer-embedded mentors.
Much of the coursework in ENG 100 also followed this vein. For example,
students frequently reflected on their writing choices and processes in low-
stakes and collaborative situations and also collaborated on writing projects.
A particularly revealing activity asked students to review the feedback they re-
ceived from their FYW instructor and peers on a piece of writing from ENG
110. They brought this writing and feedback to class with them and watched
Sommers’ short video production *Beyond the Red Ink*. In small groups, led
by the writing mentors, they discussed their interpretations of and reactions
to instructor and peer feedback. Next, they reflected on the feedback and
considered revision via informal writing. Students were then encouraged to
explore their own ideas for revision while questioning and hypothesizing why
they received the feedback they did. The assessment stakes were nearly nonex-
istent: If students simply completed the activity thoroughly and on time, they
earned a pass. The role of feedback—why it is important, what it looks like,
and how it happens—became more familiar to ENG 100 students, as did
their ENG 110 instructors, who many students viewed as intimidating. In
the small groups, students even collaboratively drafted questions to ask their
ENG 110 instructors about their feedback, modeling the reciprocal relation-
ship of feedback to the complex processes of writing. We witnessed how in-
roducing students to academic discourses and practices like feedback helped
them feel more capable and prepared for unfamiliar contexts.

**Labor-Based Grading Contracts**

Because our primary motivation for the course is student success, we
wondered: How could we design a course that gives enrolled students the
best possible framework for a positive and engaging transition into our writ-
ing program and the university? And, how might our assessment practices in
this course be more ethical and equitable for students that are more likely to
drop out? We wanted to be careful to create a learning environment that did
not implicitly reinforce Standard American English, but instead focused on
meeting students from marginalized populations where they were. It felt nat-
ural to turn to Asao Inoue’s *Labor-Based Grading Contracts: Building Equity
and Inclusion in the Compassionate Writing Classroom*. Labor-based contracts
(LBC), because of their emphasis on student labor as a valuable entity, allowed us to shift the course’s emphasis from writing performance to work and from product to process. To encourage this shift all student work submitted in ENG 100 earned a pass or no pass, and when a student earned a No Pass, they were able to reflect on their work, revise it as many times as they wished or needed, and resubmit it for a chance at a Pass.

Students were also able to choose how to demonstrate their learning in the course, be it drafting an informal journal entry, offering feedback to a classmate during workshop, or visiting the writing center. In turn, we hoped students considered ENG 100 a safe place to take risks, fail, innovate, and share their writing without fear of being corrected or chastised. Interestingly, because of its LBC system, ENG 100 directly and purposefully resisted high-stakes writing assessment practices students may have been concurrently experiencing in their ENG 110 class. We hoped ENG 100 would function as a liminal space alongside ENG 110, and it did. The classroom became a collaborative respite from the demands of university life, likely because of the low-stakes grading environment, emphasis on reflection for other courses, and insight into social cues and norms of university life from the writing mentors. But students noticed the tension between their ENG 100 and ENG 110 courses. The kinds of writing they were doing in these two paired courses and how these different kinds of writing were assessed were radically different. This tension fueled confusion among the ENG 100 students and, at times, frustration. It was difficult for this student population to decipher how writing and assessment at the university might look different depending on the discipline, course, instructor, or learning goals—even during their very first semester.

Reading in Composition

Although our FYW SLOs are drawn from the CWPA’s most recent framework, our courses that emphasize rhetorical awareness and genre dexterity tend to gloss over the “critical reading” component of these outcomes. Reading—the what, and how, and why of reading instruction—in our FYW courses remains nebulous. Across the department, we often heard that teaching students how to “read better” or “do research” got short shrift in the curriculum. While we were sure that ENG 100 students were focusing on rhetorical concepts in their ENG 110 courses, we were not sure if they were exposed to instruction devoted specifically to reading. Anecdotally, we noticed patterns of distracted and limited reading capabilities among our own students. Our MMP process asked students to read a dense text (Allison Carr’s “Failure is Not an Option” from Bad Ideas About Writing) and respond to it, integrating Carr’s voice with their own; students who placed into ENG 100 often demonstrated limited
or incorrect understanding of the piece or superficially integrated Carr’s voice into their response.

Heeding recent calls in the field of composition focused on the importance of reading instruction and practice within FYW courses and our own personal experiences, it was startlingly clear that reading—the activity of it—needed to take on a central role in the course. Just like ENG 100 emphasized reflecting on writing choices, we wanted students to have space and time to reflect on their reading in measured, practiced ways that encouraged them to engage in recursive thinking about their texts. Low-stakes, informal writing about reading is “designed not to measure the outcome of reading but to provide a means to think more fully about it” (Anson 25). This kind of writing about reading took on a central role in ENG 100 so students could establish a sense of agency over the texts they read.

To achieve this, we used Charles Bazerman’s framing for knowing a text using his “conversational model” as a framework: accurate understanding, reacting, evaluating, and synthesizing. To do this, students responded to their ENG 110 course readings rhetorically, with an audience in mind. They were encouraged not only to summarize a reading, but also to reframe it in an accessible genre for a particular audience. Students gathered these activities and created a reading portfolio that demonstrated their engagement with a difficult text from their ENG 110 course. This text could be anything from a scholarly source to be integrated into their writing to a creative narrative—as long as it was difficult, dense, and incorporated into their ENG 110 course and writing projects in some way. The portfolio was a collection of low-stakes writing responses to these readings from ENG 110, each one scaffolded to rest on the concepts explored previously.

Critical Reflection and Discussion

Because of the embedded mentors and small class size, it became very apparent that ENG 100 was a safe liminal space for many students. The instructor and mentors led students to campus-wide resources both related to writing (the writing center; Student Support Services) and not related to writing (Testing & Counseling Center); and helped ground things like advising, registration, changing majors, and other academic moves that come with university life. The course took on the identity of a first year seminar in this respect, which set the groundwork for a classroom dynamic that encouraged trustworthy, honest collaboration from student to student, mentor to student, and instructor to student. We consider our LBC grading system to be influential in establishing this classroom dynamic.

Overall however, the autonomy of our FYWP presented problems for designing and instructing ENG 100. Students wanted applicability and
practicality in ENG 100; they expected the course to be like a study hall with experts on hand for Q&A. Because of the diverse variety of ENG 110 courses represented in ENG 100, we drew from the one similarity we knew all sections of ENG 110 did share—the course SLOs. And, as these SLOs focused on rhetorical awareness and dexterity, we designed ENG 100 to offer additional instruction for these concepts. Not surprisingly, then, it was difficult for ENG 100 students to discern just how focusing on concepts that we know to be fundamental to the field may influence their day-to-day actions of writing. We continuously struggled to give these students accurate messaging about how focusing on, for example, audience, might help them revise a current writing project. In turn, students questioned ENG 100 and its goals and objectives and contributed to lack of motivation or engagement in coursework.

This dissonance was particularly strong when we asked students to engage their reading skills. Students considered the reading portfolio, and the activities that asked them to reframe a text for an audience as “just more busywork.” Much student writing about their readings echoed a genre familiar to them: a book report that offered a summary followed by an opinion or reflection on a reading’s key points. Students had trouble understanding how their purposeful engagement with texts could translate to their writing; much less could they select a text that played a central role in their ENG 110 course. We can feel the conundrum here: based on students’ lack of rhetorical awareness surrounding texts they were assigned in ENG 110, it is clear they could use additional instruction, but the reading portfolio itself was startlingly unfamiliar to them.

Creating and instructing a corequisite course can unintentionally reveal gaps and shortcomings in a FYWP at large, and designing this course helped us critically question assumptions we hold about our FYWP. Although we value autonomy and trust ourselves to embrace best practices in the field as we teach FYW, ENG 100 offered intimate glimpses into ENG 110 classrooms through the lens of a student. We questioned then: At what cost does instructor autonomy come? What might we be sacrificing by assuming that students in ENG 100 should have a nearly equivalent experience as those who are not in the course? We thought this to be the most ethical and transparent organizational set-up, but what would it look like if our corequisite course did not honor autonomy but instead embraced the creation of an isolated, specific cohort—for example, linking an entire ENG 110 and ENG 100 section together and co-teaching each? Students might lose the “authentic” ENG 110 experience, but what would they gain instead?

It seemed natural to ground ENG 100 within ENG 110 by designing assignments to take on the course’s SLOs. But, repeatedly, we struggled to connect with students about their ENG 110 coursework. We incorrectly assumed that we would be able to tether ENG 100 coursework to ENG 110 with little
scaffolding or explanation. In the future, instructors will be careful to ground ENG 100 coursework in what students actually know instead of assuming that because they are concurrently enrolled in ENG 110, they know its purposes, goals, and are aware of why and how they may need additional instruction. To reconsider the reading portfolio assignment, for example, students could first examine and consider *how* they approach the various texts in their day to day lives differently, and think about why it might be critical to know how to read different kinds of texts in different ways. Then, perhaps, ENG 110 coursework as “text” is more effectively tethered to known experience. This could alleviate some tension between the pull to address global concerns at the localized level simultaneously, and do so in a way that for students, feels immediately applicable.

As instructors of writing, we are familiar with the amount of flexibility our pedagogy requires. Even so, designing a corequisite program is a master class in navigating unpredictability because it lies in so many aspects of the course, from the FYWP at large to the prior knowledge of individual students. The syllabus and assignment descriptions in the supplementary materials reflect the aspects discussed in this piece, but the daily work was just that—day-to-day, discussed and decided on in class. Hence the absence of a planned course schedule in the supplemental materials. We do hope to return to and modify the syllabus as it is presented, based on some of the revelations shared here.

**Works Cited**


Epic Learning in a “Jumbo” Writing Course

Kim Jaxon, Laura Sparks, Chris Fosen

Course Description: English 130: Academic Writing

The first year writing “jumbo” is a large enrollment composition course with ninety students and nine embedded writing mentors. The “jumbo” structure “emerged from an ‘entanglement’ of the institutional environment and intentional innovation” (Jaxon). Currently taught with a human rights focus, but with other iterations including a focus on digital culture, the “jumbo” model offers a provocation to the field’s focus on class size, including preferences for smaller student-teacher ratios and the assumption that only the writing instructor can give valuable feedback. Three key structures support the jumbo design: a small workshop (ten students led by a mentor) that meets “outside but alongside” the jumbo class, writing mentors who participate in the large course, and an intentional design focused on community-building and various forms of participation that distribute labor and expertise among class members (Grego and Thompson 69). All of these structures emerged from a complex history on our campus of supporting students’ literacies alongside a commitment to honoring student labor. Importantly, remediation, as an identity or pedagogical practice, is absent from the design.

Institutional Context: Corequisite Courses in Response to “Basic” Writing

In 1991, English faculty at our institution abolished basic writing courses for students who scored low on a California State University (CSU) system-wide English Placement Test (EPT). Students scoring low on the EPT began attending a one-credit adjunct workshop in conjunction with our credit-bearing first year course (FYC). It was a radical move at the time, coming against the backdrop of increased attention to basic writing courses and other remedial programs as colleges and universities took steps to deal with what was seen as a growing problem (see Rodby and Fox; Stanley). For EPT students who had previously taken one or two “remedial” classes before having a chance to take composition for baccalaureate credit, abolishing remediation was a move that recognized their literate experience and labor as having real value.

This ten-person writing workshop operates on principles and practices similar to the Studio model developed by Grego and Thompson and is in many ways functionally analogous to it. Drawn from Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger’s theories of situated learning and participation within communities of practice, the workshop facilitates peer- and near-peer learning and is led by
trained undergraduate and graduate student mentors, who work to create a culture of inquiry among students about all aspects of literate practice.

Thirty years later, and through changes in placement mechanisms in the CSU system, students still meet in groups of ten and use the workshop space to work on readings and assignments, as well as peer-critique drafts from their different sections of first year writing. In the intervening time, this workshop space, first described in Rodby and again in Rodby and Fox, has been very successful: over the past 30 years, the average rate at which so-called remedial students pass the for-credit writing course (with a C- or better) hovers at around 90%, which is as high as—sometimes higher than—that of their nonremedial peers.

Creating Space for the “Jumbo” FYC Course

These principles—situated learning and communities of practice—were arguably the most important elements in developing a new model for composition classes on our campus, called (ominously enough) “the jumbo.” For the past ten years, our writing program has offered, with great success, a large-enrollment writing course that extends what has been learned from this rich history of supported and supportive writing mentors who lead the corequisite workshop. We know, for example, that it is possible to distribute writing expertise among writing mentors and students. In this jumbo model, just over one hundred people meet in a large classroom for two hours each week—ninety first year writing students, one instructor, and nine writing mentors who are recruited from our corequisite workshop program. First designed by Kim Jaxon, the “jumbo” was not occasioned by top-down institutional pressures like budgets or staffing shortages. It “does not take part in neoliberal projects of scaling for fiduciary efficiency” (Jaxon). Rather, the jumbo is an intentional and student-centered innovation that leverages the institutional environment and students’ and faculty’s expertise, with student participation and professional development for future teachers as core principles.

We launched the first jumbo sections of our FYC course in fall 2009. Since then, more than ten years later, eight instructors (five full-time faculty in composition and three lecturer faculty) have taught twenty-two sections of the large course. To put these numbers in perspective, our writing program typically offers twenty-five sections of FYC each semester, which includes 1-2 sections of the large class. To date, more than 2,000 students have participated in jumbo sections with a 95% pass rate in their first attempt.

Support for Writing Mentors

The “jumbo” structure requires institutional support, from classroom space with moveable furniture to a budget for hiring student writing mentors. Cru-
cial to the large-enrollment course’s success at our university is a mechanism for training and supporting writing mentors. The nine writing mentors come to every section of the large class and also lead the students for an additional two hours per week in small-group workshop activities and discussions. They interact with students and respond to their writing more often and more directly than the instructor does. The mentors themselves are often future teachers, and they work with the instructor each week designing writing activities and assignments, brainstorming potential student issues, discussing future readings and course goals, and norming and developing mutual plans for responding to student writing. In this way, the jumbo course also serves as a space for mentors’ professional growth and reflection as future teachers.

Writing mentors begin with an upper division course called Theories and Practices in Tutoring Writing. The course provides a foundation in situated theories of learning, theories of literacy, and research in the teaching of writing; it exposes mentors to the range of discussions and research surrounding first year writing courses and students. The course also includes a practicum component in which mentors intern with experienced writing mentors—graduates of the Tutoring Writing course—in the small group workshops. In the subsequent semester, after passing the course with a “B” or better, they may apply to become paid mentors in our program.

The course and the practicum allow mentors to compare what they are noticing through their internships with the theories they are reading in class. Often in our general education courses, mentors are recruited based on their successful participation in an instructor’s course. These successful students are asked to return to the class as more capable peers. But in these scenarios, it can be challenging for the returning students to understand the theories and practices that undergird the design of the class. Further, “success in the class” does not always translate to “success in mentoring”; it can be challenging to push back on structures of a course when those structures worked well for the student mentor. In fact, we have found that mentors who claim to struggle with writing often make the best mentors: they can more easily understand the challenges because the structures of a class simply did not work for them. Our Tutoring Writing course allows us to think through the theories and practices informing the design of our first year composition classes and to imagine together how we might rethink structures and activities when they do not appear to be supporting student writers. In other words, our writing mentors see both the staging of the class itself and what’s behind the curtain.

Theoretical Rationale

Our program has a long history of support for peer feedback, collaboration, and mentorship, both in FYC and our adjunct workshops—and in using fac-
ulty administrative roles to challenge and expand the traditional roles given to writing instructors. But even though students often give thoughtful feedback on each other’s drafts, that work is generally outranked by the instructor’s more definitive evaluations. We don’t blame students for prioritizing in this way; they know who ultimately gives the grades. But this overreliance on instructor feedback seems to be exacerbated by a system that doesn’t allow them to be more authentic “responders to writing.” We wondered if students would come to see themselves as more valued responders if writing expertise were more distributed throughout the group, based on the size of the course. With nearly one hundred students in each jumbo, we had to imagine new ways of distributing the tasks associated with feedback across people, spaces, and digital platforms so that students would be better positioned to rely on each other as they proceeded through the course.

We want to emphasize that the jumbo course is not simply a traditional FYC with more students: it is not a scaled version of the traditional course. The jumbo is designed for the affordances of the size, including attention to a network and to practices that allow students to be seen and heard in a large group. In the world, writing circulates across networks, platforms, readers, and critics: we are interested in the ways in which a large class can approximate complex systems of production and circulation and disrupt the primacy of the teacher-student dyad (Trimbur).

Our overarching goals for the jumbo FYC course include:

1. Provide professional development support for future teachers: A central component to the large course design is an emphasis on support for future teachers and graduate Teaching Associates so they experience a collaborative environment in the teaching of writing. Faculty and mentors collaborate in responding to student work. We meet weekly as a team to discuss responding to student writing, designing assignments, and creating activities that support student learning.

2. Create stronger connections between the FYC course and the adjunct workshop: By embedding the mentors in the large course, the writing mentors see “the whole” program. Typically, mentors in our program do not attend the first year class with the students who are enrolled in the workshop. In the jumbo, the mentors participate in the first year writing course first hand, and not simply by hearing about the course from FYC students. Mentors and students participate in the “regular” first year writing course together.

3. Develop assessment practices and research agenda in the FYC program: Another major component of the design is to develop
undergraduate and graduate opportunities for research in the program. Graduate students have already presented research at conferences such as the Conference on College Composition and Communication.

4. Make “remediation” invisible: Any student can enroll in the large course regardless of recommended course placement. Every member of the class is supported by the two hour, mentor facilitated workshop. The concept of “remediation” and pedagogical practices associated with it are absent from the structure of the course.

5. Take a proactive stance towards the rise in caps for FYC: In the jumbo model, the instructor is not as central to revision work and can rely on mentors and peers to share the workload. The course follows a “community of practice” (Wenger) model by creating small learning communities, embedding mentor support, and developing FYC students and mentors into capable peer responders to writing.

6. Improve the use of and support for digital writing: we aim to create a course that is a model for best practices in critical digital pedagogy.

**Epic Learning**

The jumbo model affords a focus on the relationships that can be formed when people work side by side on similar tasks and support each other’s growth. Pedagogical practices like students’ curation and publication of other students’ work, for example, increase opportunities for students to become caught up in, “entangled,” in each other’s work. As Jaxon notes, students pursue “inquiries of their own design, inquiries that matter to them and begin to matter to their classmates as well.” The sheer number of students involved is part of what makes this powerful.

Indeed, both the large class and the built-in workshop space share structures and activities that promote what Jane McGonigal calls “epic scale,” which helps us identify elements of **epic learning** in and through writing (49). It may be that no writing course can ever match the intensity of a campus wide tournament of Humans vs. Zombies or the grandeur of *World of Warcraft*. But in terms of this course, the language helps us think through how writing and writing pedagogy both make large class spaces feel intimate and encourage small groups to feel empowered. In *Reality is Broken*, McGonigal argues that the best online and face-to-face games, far from being transitory bits of meaningless fun, create deep learning experiences in which players voluntarily work together within a set of rules to establish goals and give each other practical feedback on their performance (also see Gee). In these scenarios, she argues, the satisfaction we receive from carving out meaningful moments of play, and perhaps being successful,
forms strong bonds between us and other people that enable future action. For McGonigal, “epic scale” refers to the moment when we as participants in a project realize that the actions and environments we join are “bigger than ourselves” (98). While many examples are drawn from online games like Portal and Halo, her argument extends to crowdsourcing and “real life” applications like Foursquare, or distributed computing platforms that create protein folding simulations to search for actual cures to Alzheimer’s or Huntington’s disease. Epic scales not only “encourage wholehearted participation” but also “provide mechanisms for the exchange of expertise” (Jaxon). McGonigal argues, “And the chance to do something you’re good at as part of a larger project helps students build real esteem among their peers—not empty self-esteem based on nothing other than wanting to feel good about yourself, but actual respect and high regard based on contributions you’ve made” (131). We witness this entanglement in our jumbo course: the students’ desire to be scholars, to find out things, and to share their findings with peers.

We’re struck by the conceptual similarities among Grego and Thompson’s Studio model, McGonigal’s work on games, and situated cognition in communities of practice (Lave and Wenger). Taken together, they lead us to view learning as irreducibly social: tied to real communities and contexts, goal-oriented, participatory, and potentially epic in scale. Knowledge is not (only) in the head of individuals; knowledge is shared and “distributed” across people, spaces, and resources (Cole; Hutchins; Lave and Wenger; Salomon). For this reason, we do not view our role as a professor as someone who delivers content, but instead, as someone who curates artifacts and constructs learning spaces so that students can make meaning themselves. In the jumbo, the instructor’s role is to curate texts, classroom structures, discussions, and activities so students can choose from a range of options, and hopefully, find their own purposes for learning, reading, writing, and research. Students are not mucking around in the dark—the instructor still holds a disciplinary expertise that informs text selections and potential ideas for class consideration—but students have opportunities to use those texts as a way to solve problems and consider what use they might make of the content and ideas presented to them.

As in McGonigal, our program imagines learning, at its best moments, as inevitably connected to play (Vygotsky 96-101). We do not mean “play” in a free spirited or trivial sense; we mean focused, forget-what-time-it-is, completely-engaged-in-an-idea kind of play (on this also see Csikszentmihalyi). Instructors sometimes create structures in educational contexts that ignore or purposefully remove the enjoyment that comes from learning. Often, learners have to imagine something they do outside of school—bake, play guitar, restore old cars, organize concerts—before they recognize that learning need not be (or most often is not) a chore. For this reason, we’ve adopted a Vygotskian
view of learning and play as authentic parts of being human, not something only done in school but both “life-sustaining and inevitable . . . reflecting our own deeply social nature as human beings capable of knowing” (Wenger 3). This philosophy—that learning is natural and students are quite good at it given the opportunity—informs both teaching practices and writing program design. In terms of the jumbo, we see the course as a large activity space where students write, read, talk, make, upload, download, and share; and, a studio space “where activities of production are undertaken individually but in a place where others are working and discussing their work simultaneously, where teachers provide, along with other students, guidance, suggestions, input” (Grego and Thompson 7). This sense of learning as (potentially) epic and writing as (a form of) play arguably has potential for teachers of writing interested in creating authentic writing spaces.

**Jumbo Workshops**

The workshop groups are a critical part of creating participation structures for learning. A typical workshop asks students to not simply continue the work of the jumbo space but add to it: to read together, write blog posts, gather both primary and secondary research, write drafts of major assignments, give feedback on drafts, create portfolios, and sometimes prepare to lead conversations in the larger class. In this way, the workshop reproduces and extends the activities of the larger section, with more opportunity to ask questions and focus on individual concerns. It is important to note that we see both the large class time and the smaller workshops as activity spaces; we are always doing the work of the course. But the workshops, and specifically the mentors, create a space that is “outside-but-alongside” our large class. The smaller group can complain, question, praise, and bond more easily than they might at in a sea of one-hundred students. As students note, the workshop space allows them to ask clarifying questions, get individual attention, and create friendships with peers. These friendships, and the role they play in supporting each other’s writing, spill over into the larger class; the larger class still not only feels intimate, it feels connected and meaningful.

As in the games McGonigal discusses, the design here is highly attuned not just to accomplishing particular writing goals but also to the creation of community. Students learn and perform best when they feel supported, when they feel they are seen and heard. Many of the online spaces we use to encourage participation also help create a rich classroom community. Through tweets, online posts, and through their contributions to our class content, we get to know our students. It is in their tweets and informal posts that we learn who is a champion wrestler, who is a drummer, who is an orphan. The data from student interviews support our findings: their attendance, their performance,
and their participation are robust because they have a valued identity and multiple avenues for sharing their work in our large class.

One more point about noticing, which is an iterative social practice in the jumbo that is consistently modeled and supported for mentors and students: we were concerned, at first, at the possibility of students feeling lost in the numbers. That has not proved to be a problem: routines in the classroom set up opportunities for noticing. We create structures — small teams, public blogs, consistent exchanges of student work, featured work — which model and support noticing. The experience of being noticed, either by the professor, the mentor or a peer, in a class of one-hundred is more powerful than being noticed in a class of twenty.

The idea of community carries over to the work students do with their peers. In the large class we have a variety of structures that contribute to a classroom environment where peers are seen as colleagues. On the first day, each student is assigned a permanent research team. The students in their team become their partners for the rest of the semester. During their first meeting, teams are asked to reflect on a time when they were part of a productive and a not-so-productive group. We talk about material conditions that support effective group work, so that together they create group norms, which are conditions under which someone can get “kicked out” of the group. Together teams decide how many times a colleague is allowed to show up for class unprepared or how often they want everyone to check our course website. Once groups create these norms, they often refer to them, at times pointing to an agreed upon statement with a fellow peer and reminding him or her of the group’s expectations. If a peer is asked to leave the group (which happens to one or two students every few semesters), they sometimes ask to join another group that fits their expectations about participation more closely. This opportunity to write rules for oneself and contribute them in service of a group provides pockets of ownership within a potentially overwhelming space. Through groups, digital platforms, and the sheer volume of feedback students give and receive, they come to trust their peers and mentor—not just their teacher—as important partners in their learning.

**Weekly Mentor Meetings**

Throughout the semester, the jumbo instructor meets weekly with mentors to discuss issues related to the teaching of writing. The mentors in the jumbo course collaborate with the instructor to plan class activities, read and give feedback on student writing, and design their weekly workshops. A typical meeting begins with a brief check-in where mentors share the successes and challenges of the previous week’s workshops. In this check-in, we often discuss the progress of particular students and brainstorm together ways of sup-
porting students who may be struggling. Then together we make a plan for the week’s activities and divide up responsibilities; it is not uncommon for a mentor to lead a component of the large class activities. For example, if a mentor is particularly proficient in using Google Scholar, we may plan a 5-10 minutes activity in the large class that is led by the mentor. Students can then spend time using this resource to search for research while we are all in the same room together.

These weekly meetings also allow time for the instructor to model and support mentors in giving feedback on student writing; in fact, this is a significant part of their professional development as future teachers. Typically, we spend a lot of the time simply reading student work and sharing what we’re noticing: where are students making smart moves in their writing and what holes are we noticing as a whole class? We often then offer up a couple student examples to read together. We use these examples to discuss ways of approaching feedback and we collaboratively write the feedback on these particular drafts together. Other times, the instructor provides feedback on one or two student drafts and then explains her decisions and choices to the mentors, as a way to model feedback in a particular assignment.

**Critical Reflection**

Consistently, students who take our jumbo class are passing the course in their first attempt: this is true for students who score “low” on placement measures as well as the students who place high. And when asked about satisfaction with the course, 99% report they are satisfied or very satisfied with the class, and further, would recommend the course to a friend. But more importantly, survey and interview data suggest that students are developing ways of talking about their writing practices and growing confidence as writers.

This confidence, and student awareness of a range of writing practices at their disposal, leads to thoughtful drafts, multiple revisions, and solid papers and multimodal products. What the work in the jumbo suggests to us is that it is possible to create a meaningful and rigorous large class that maintains a sense of intimacy and community.

The research we’ve conducted on the jumbo course provides evidence that 1) students are doing more writing, not less. The division of labor among students, mentors, and the instructor allows us to create a space where students write all the time: in both the large class and smaller workshops, on blogs, social media platforms, and Google Docs. This runs counter to many of the claims we read about large class sizes (Horning). Further, we are able to provide feedback more quickly, which encourages momentum in students’ revision practices; 2) students are focusing on audience and a broad range of readers. Students develop a professional stance toward editing because they
come to understand why this practice matters; they have a real audience of mentors and peers who value their ideas. The community that mentors build in the workshop, and carry over into the large class, supports their growing sense that writing matters; and 3) students are developing a sense of play in relation to writing and the work of the university. They come to see writing as a means to learn and to share what they are learning with others in formal and informal structures.

One area that invites our ongoing reflection is the relationship between students and writing mentors. Based on follow up interviews with students and mentors, we know that when mentors are flexible in the roles they play in class and workshop, they help create a feeling of common purpose, that someone cares. Mentors write alongside the students, read alongside the students, and sometimes complain about the work alongside the students. They function as peers, near-peers, more capable peers, and sometimes as instructors. In our mentor meetings we often discuss these “mentor identities” and think about the affordances of these various ways of being. For example, we know there are times when it is helpful for a mentor to commiserate with a student about procrastination or share a time when they too struggled with an assignment. Other times it is helpful to the group if the mentor can function more like a teacher, perhaps reminding a student that it is disrespectful to the group to show up late. Based on the situation, mentors can embrace, modify, or reject the authority that the writing instructor gives them. The students appreciate the balance of having someone they can confide in, but also someone who will create a workshop space that is productive and not a glorified study hall. At the same time, navigating these roles can be challenging for mentors, especially depending on where they are in their own education (juniors, graduate students, student teachers, etc.). As part of our professional development with mentors, we think carefully about the importance of multiple mentor roles and the need to shift roles even within the same workshop session.

Student interviews and course evaluations show us that bonding occurs in the workshop space because the mentors are not graders or assessors of the student writing. The mentors, and the other peers in the workshop, give feedback on writing, but they do not grade the writing. This is important because students tell us that it allows for a relationship where a student can feel vulnerable: she can say to a mentor and her peers that she is confused by an assignment without worry that this will influence a grade. She can work out the confusions, concerns, and frustrations with others who are in a similar position.

Through workshops, small groups, and mentors we are able to make a large class seem small. We offer our structure as a way to play with participation, community, and the distribution of expertise among teachers, mentors, and writers. We would hope that administrators and faculty who
are interested in large class models would consider the variety of structures and support we’ve offered here; many of these structures, like our upper-division course for mentors or our corequisite workshop, arguably need to be embedded in a campus culture long before one can launch a jumbo writing course that depends on them.

Note

California State University, Chico is a comprehensive university in the CSU system with an undergraduate population of about 17,000, 97.5% of whom come from California and over 50% from counties in Northern California (“Chico Facts”). In 2014, the campus became a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). Many of our students are also returning or first generation college students.

Works Cited


Course Description

English 299 is a two-unit credit/no credit elective, capped at fifteen students per section, intended to help first year composition students become more effective editors of their own writing. The class provides a hands-on environment to help students with sentence-level editing since the writing center on campus traditionally focuses on more global concerns. Incoming California State University Channel Islands (CSUCI) students who are deemed by the California State University system as needing additional support to satisfy their first year writing requirement (so-called “Early Start” students, explained further below) are placed in English 299 and given priority enrollment in the first year composition (FYC) course of their choice. The class follows a coaching model that helps students develop confidence as editors of their own work and demystifies the writing process.

Institutional Context

Founded in 2002 and located in the city of Camarillo, CSUCI is the newest campus in the country’s largest state university system. Nearly 60% of CSUCI’s enrollment consists of first-generation college students. CSUCI is also a Hispanic Serving Institution, with Latinx students comprising 53 percent of the population (“Fall Enrollment Snapshot”). Many CSUCI students are second-generation Americans whose families work the agriculture fields that surround our Ventura County campus. CSUCI was the first campus in the 23-campus California State University (CSU) System to pilot Directed Self-Placement (DSP) as an alternative to the CSU’s English Placement Test (EPT). It is also the only CSU campus to have never offered remedial English classes.

Since its inception, CSUCI’s composition program has practiced DSP, which provides students with guidance to enable them to reflect on their own readiness for college writing and choose for themselves whether to take two semesters of writing courses (Stretch Composition) or a single semester composition and rhetoric course. These courses are taught by full-time faculty who work together as a team on program and curriculum development and assessment, including holistic team scoring of student writing that yields invaluable, objective data demonstrating that students are, in fact, placing themselves well in first year composition. This program structure, combined with strict course caps of twenty students per section in lower division com-
position courses, supports students in successfully completing their first year writing requirement in whichever path they choose. Whether students choose two semesters of writing or move straight into the one-semester course, the majority (typically ~90-94%) pass CSUCI’s college-level composition course with a grade of C- or higher. This is notable given that traditional measures of readiness for college writing have indicated over the years that only two-thirds of incoming first year students come to CSUCI prepared to succeed in college-level composition courses.

DSP began as a pilot at CSUCI but quickly spread to other, more established CSU campuses who similarly questioned the relevance of the EPT. While the CSU Chancellor’s Office grew to support these efforts to expand DSP as well as Stretch Composition, they continued to undergird a culture of remediation via unfunded mandates to prove that students were “making up their deficits” in writing. One such program was mandatory Early Start, which forced incoming students with low scores on the EPT to enroll in a noncredit, twenty-hour summer class intended to alleviate their shortcomings in writing.

The 2010 cover letter included with the CSU Chancellor’s Office Executive Order (EO) 1048 and the mandatory Early Start policy stated that each campus was required to develop an individual plan for how they would comply with the mandate. These plans were due five months after the policy was introduced. According to the EO, “Campus plans should include general plans for any and all curricular modifications related to the Early Start Program. Proficiency activities may be offered in a variety of approaches recommended by appropriate faculty and administrative leadership” (“Executive Order 1048”). The EO listed several options for what plans might entail, such as “state supported summer courses, Extended Education Special Session courses, courses offered via a coordinated program developed with regional community colleges, summer bridge programs, on-line coursework, and other best practices” (“Executive Order 1048”). Our faculty made the best of this mandate by developing an online “Early Start Writing” course that helped students understand our DSP process and the kind of writing they would be expected to do in college.

As additional CSU campuses continued to adopt DSP and Stretch Composition and move away from remediation in spite of the persistence of Early Start, the CSU Chancellor’s Office committed to efforts to increase graduation rates and eliminate remedial courses in both English and Math (“Graduation Initiative 2025”; “Executive Order 1110”). This included doing away with the EPT in 2017 but still designating the lowest performing admitted students as needing an “Early Start” in college writing (“CSU Makes Sweeping Changes to Developmental Education Policy”). These designations were determined by a new “multiple measures” placement process that replaced the EPT (“Multiple Measures”). CSUCI again responded to an unfunded mandate in
a manner that was adaptive and provided underserved students with an edge rather than penalizing them for daring to pursue a degree at a university that had admitted them and then deemed them underprepared. First year students who were identified as least prepared for college writing were pre-enrolled in a section of English 299 and given priority enrollment in the composition course of their choice.

The development of English 299 preceded the 2017 system-wide changes described above and emerged in response to a campus-wide desire for additional writing instruction beyond FYC, and specifically focused on sentence-level issues. In other words, the familiar lamentation across disciplines, “Why can’t students write?” During the initial rollout of the then one-unit course, one of the campus’s Hispanic-Serving Institutions grants was also coming online. This grant happened to include money for a new course to help students improve their writing. Thus, some of the initial funding to offer English 299 and report on its efficacy came through this grant. As a one-unit, credit/no credit course centered on more local concerns, designed to help students increase their academic register and sentence complexity, and taught within the context of students’ own writing from their other classes, English 299 (initially entitled “Editing Studio”) served to address these needs while reinforcing the primary purpose of first year writing courses as composition pedagogy, not grammar drills and diagramming sentences. The class became very popular with students from multiple majors, and increasingly with upper-division students, who appreciated the supportive coaching model that enabled them to learn and improve in a low-stakes environment from someone other than the faculty member who would be grading their papers. In the Spring 2018 semester, an upper-division version (English 399: Editing Studio II) spun off of English 299 and targeted students who were working on capstones, independent studies, or other writing-intensive projects. Enrollment for English 299 and 399 was capped at seven students per section.

The positive reputation of English 299 among CSUCI students, faculty, and administrators made it a strong fit when campuses were required to provide embedded support for “Early Start” students in first year writing. Remediation already played no role in the existing campus writing culture at CSUCI, and English 299 had come to be perceived as a “bonus” for students, who benefited from a personalized coaching model in a class taught by an experienced, full-time faculty member whose expertise was in writing. Maintaining DSP meant that all incoming students could still choose for themselves whether to complete their writing requirement via two semesters of classes or one while receiving additional support from an experienced member of our composition faculty who was invested in their success. Section offerings of English 299 were greatly expanded for Fall 2019 to accommodate the increased need for seats.
for all incoming first year students who were identified as needing embedded support. These incoming students who had been placed in English 299 were not prohibited from dropping the class as they adjusted their schedules; this created empty seats that were then eagerly scooped up by returning students who were already aware of the class’s reputation or were recommended to consider it. 

During the course of the Fall 2019 semester, an analysis of the staffing model for English 299 revealed that it was unsustainable financially. When English 299 was designed, it was assumed that one instructor teaching three, one-unit sections, each capped at seven students, would be equivalent to that instructor teaching one three-unit section of twenty-one students. However, it turned out that what this actually added up to was the equivalent of one faculty member teaching a one-unit class to twenty-one students. English submitted a curriculum modification that increased English 299 to two units, capped the class at fifteen students, and established it officially as a corequisite for first year composition students who would benefit from additional support as identified by the CSU’s multiple measures assessment process. Importantly, incoming students deemed in need of this support can still choose between English 102 or English 105, even as they are automatically enrolled in English 299 at the same time. Students are still not prevented from dropping the course, which reinforces the autonomy we value in our DSP process. At the same time, requiring students who are enrolled in English 299 to also be enrolled in an FYC class assures that the students in English 299 will all be working towards the same purpose, while other students who seek additional support for their writing can enroll in English 399 and likewise take a class with students who are at a similar stage in their college careers.

In spite of the modifications described above, English 299 remains credit/no credit and maintains the same learning outcomes and coaching model while providing additional hours for students to workshop their writing in a supportive setting with an experienced compositionist who is deeply familiar with what is being asked of them in their writing classes. The revamped title of the class, from “Editing Studio” to “Writing with Clarity and Power,” reflects these adaptations. A parallel curriculum modification went into effect for English 399, retitled from “Editing Studio II” to “Editing Studio for Upper-Division Writing.” The enrollment cap for English 399 has also increased from seven students to fifteen, and the credit hours from one to two, thus making the class more sustainable from a budget-perspective while providing additional support for student writers in a workshop setting.

**Theoretical Rationale**

As noted above, English 299 was created as a response to faculty critiques across disciplines that students who performed well in first year composition
(FYC) were not able to succeed at the writing tasks they were assigned in their major and elective courses, as well as to the Early Start mandate and Graduation Initiative that eliminated remediation on the one hand but required students to “make up high school deficits” before beginning the college-level work on the other. In “The Language of Exclusion,” a 1985 article written as remedial programs were being instituted in the CSU, famed literacy scholar and advocate Mike Rose argues that the “notion of remediation, carrying with it as it does the etymological wisps and traces of disease, serves to exclude from the academic community those who are so labelled. They sit in scholastic quarantine until their disease can be diagnosed and remedied” (559).

The “myth of transience” is a phrase coined by Rose in “The Language of Exclusion” (355). Rose contends that the “myth of transience” leads those who believe it to look for quick fixes to compensate for some high school gaps or deficiencies; he feels that this myth has contributed to making the teaching of basic writing programs an uncertain and tenuous enterprise. Rose argues that “[t]he myth’s liability is that it limits the faculty’s ability to consider the writing problems of their students in dynamic and historical terms” (358). Implied by the word “transience,” and inherent to the logic of this deficit model and the term “remedial,” is the belief that any factors contributing to student unpreparedness need not persist, that there is some kind of remedy or inoculation that will keep future generations from suffering from this illness. Sugie Goen (now Goen-Salter) asserted in her dissertation about a CSU developmental writing program, “It is this intended temporariness, or so it would seem, that justifies and obscures the permanence of basic writing and relegates it to the margins of the university” (295). Eschewing the stigma of quarantine while still supporting students to become more empowered as writers is a complicated bill to fill for a one-semester course, but we believe that English 299 can and does fill it, and in ways that are theoretically and pedagogically sound.

Compositionists understand that the need for writing instruction does not end with FYC. If anything, FYC is the beginning of college-level writing. This concept is reinforced by the CSU in its requirement of a junior-level writing course (or proof of junior-level competency); however, this nod at the need for extended writing support is not always recognized or backed by our colleagues, many of whom assume that students will leave FYC ready for whatever writing assignments they will be given in their courses. They fail to consider the complexities of moving on to new genre, rhetorical, and disciplinary conventions that will be required in their majors. While English 299 is by no means a panacea, it gives students added opportunities to work closely with an experienced compositionist and become more empowered and self-directed as writers. Moreover, English 299 accomplishes this mandate from an asset-based model as opposed to a deficit-based one.
While grammar and sentence-level instruction in writing is part of the curriculum of English 299, this is by no means a “skill and drill” course. Instead, as noted above, the course empowers students to become more capable and critical readers and writers. Often, students are assigned writing tasks in their major and general education courses that are not written or structured in ways that enable students to make the most of the writing task. In English 299, students are taught to strategically break down and analyze their writing assignments before they write them and to look back at their drafts and make sure that they have addressed all aspects of the prompt—whether specifically stated or implied in the assignment.

Students are also given the opportunity to continue to peer review and workshop their writing across various sections of a class and with students who are new to the topic. Giving and receiving effective, actionable feedback takes time to learn, and when students take English 299 they are given additional opportunities to work on these complex tasks in one more setting with another highly qualified instructor in addition to their FYC professor. When it comes to working on sentence-level issues within their writing, students are receiving the kinds of instruction in these areas that compositionists have found to be most effective: finding the lapses in convention they’ve made in their own work and getting the grammar/sentence-level instruction at the time and point of need—what Katie Hern and Myra Snell term “just-in-time remediation” (Toward a Vision 14-17). For example, by creating personal proofreading journals, students begin to see and learn how to address their own issues and also learn effective ways of responding to error in the work of others (see Adams; Graham et. al.; Clearly).

Critical Reflection

One of the key tenets of the composition team at CSUCI is our commitment to a collaborative pedagogy in course and program design (Howard 54-70). As such, when we develop new courses—including Early Start Writing and Editing Studio/Writing with Clarity and Power—it’s a program effort, involving collaboration among multiple English faculty members over several months.

Most of us who teach composition would define our personal pedagogy as strongly rooted in feminist pedagogical principles, and our approach in the class has been one that focuses on an asset model, one that asks and acknowledges what students bring to the table, what they’ve learned from their lived experiences (Jarrett 113-131). As the first person to teach the one-unit class, Vose focused on de-stigmatization. The one-unit class was initially designed to run from weeks three through ten of our fifteen-week semester. As previously stated, the class was created in response to the age-old complaint, “students these
days can’t write,” so the original design was set up so that faculty could refer and recommend the class to students whose writing they deemed problematic. Thus, most of the students enrolled in the first few semesters had been advised to take the class by a faculty member who found the student’s writing lacking.

Naturally, these students entered the class feeling the pall of their perceived deficits hanging over their heads. As Mina Shaughnessy puts it, for many of our students, “academic writing is a trap, not a way of saying something to someone … writing is but a line that moves haltingly across the page, exposing as it goes all that the writer doesn’t know, then passing into the hands of a stranger who reads it with a lawyer’s eyes, searching for flaws” (7). These feelings of shame hinder students in a couple of important ways: the more obvious one being that the students believed they were bad writers, and people who believe they aren’t good at something often don’t have a growth mindset (Dweck 64-70). Most of us would agree, based on experience, that this is especially true when it comes to writing. Students with writing challenges often don’t see writing as a skill like any other that can be developed; rather, their experiences based on a lifetime of schooling have convinced them that they aren’t good writers, as though they aren’t good people, which is to say, they often don’t believe they’ll get better. When English 299 students were asked why they thought that, they frequently replied with a version of “it [a sentence or idea] sounded good in my head, but it just doesn’t come out the same way on the page.”

These issues with what Linda Flower and John R. Hayes called translation were never made explicit to students by their teachers; in the teacher’s defense, they may not have understood translation issues either, due to the lack of composition training in many teacher preparation programs (373-4). This deficit in training, combined with our own observation that most undergraduate English majors choose their majors because they’re strong readers, or writers, or both, means that teachers may not understand why students don’t “get it,” despite repeated instruction. This also seems to be true of many academics.

A second, perhaps less obvious problem for students referred to English 299 was the subtext of the message that many felt: you don’t belong here. As noted above, more than half of CSUCI students are first-generation, Latinx students, Pell Grant recipients, and very often, children of the agricultural workers who sow and reap the fields that literally surround the campus. As such, their lived educational experiences have often been with deficit-minded approaches, and their lived societal experiences, especially in the last several years, have reinforced that message (Milner 34-37). As Terrel Strayhorn’s work on belonging illustrates, students need to feel like they belong in our colleges and universities, and too often, that sense of belonging is elided, often inadvertently, by well-meaning faculty (15-26). As H. Richard Milner, IV discusses based on Elliot Eisner’s work, by not explicitly addressing the ways
in which many students’ experiences have set them up to feel like outsiders, we are teaching them something, and by the time those students are sitting in our college classrooms, they’ve internalized it (18-19, 212). That’s why it’s important to acknowledge opportunity gaps, and destigmatize the things students don’t know, which is a conversation English 299 faculty have with students at the first class meeting. This approach worked well for students who were referred to the class, and willingly chose to enroll in it, but may need modification for students who are opted in, based on their results from the CSU’s new multiple measures assessment. As Hern and Snell point out, “non-cognitive issues—more than the math or English—are likely to be the most significant issues [students] will confront” (Toward a Vision 25). Thus, explicitly teaching students how to have a growth mindset will likely be part of the expanded curriculum.

English 299 has changed structure quite a bit since its initial offering. As previously noted, the class was first offered as a twice a week, one-hour class that met for eight weeks. While the first cohort of students believed the class was beneficial, they also felt that in ending the class in week ten, they were cast adrift just as their final papers were coming due, and they wanted the structure of having time to work on actual assignments. Based on that feedback, in the following few years, the class met for one hour/week for the entire semester. Many students still wanted more time in class, and that desire, combined with the previously stated institutional units per instructor led to the newly designed approach: a two-hour class that meets once a week. While the transition from a seven-student, one-hour class to a fifteen-student, two-hour class will likely produce new challenges, ultimately, we think students who are enrolled in the class based on their test score will see the two-unit version as more of a “real” class than some Fall 2019 first year students did. Some students, particularly those who have historically been poor test takers, and hence had often found themselves in “support classes,” saw English 299 as another example of that type of class, though the option to drop the class alleviated some of that stigma.

An additional benefit for incoming students who are placed in English 299 is that it is integrated with their regular coursework during the academic year rather than tapping their time and money during the summer, as the Early Start class did. Our composition faculty understood that the expectation for Early Start to remedy deficits in readiness for college writing was unrealistic. Instead, we took the opportunity to design the online course to boost incoming students’ confidence by offering a dip into the shallow end, exploring the kinds of assignments they would be exposed to in the fall, including units on the differences between high school and college writing, sample first year writing prompts and prompt analysis, as well as writings and reflections from recent first year composition students. Most students in CSUCI’s Early Start classes
reported having reduced anxiety about beginning their university education. As the expanded, semester-long class, Writing with Clarity and Power, is intended to replace the Early Start class, and is now a two-hour weekly class, that will allow us to incorporate the successful Early Start curriculum into English 299, hopefully with similar benefits for students. The reduced anxiety about college writing and navigating writing tasks will be especially important for incoming students in Fall 2020, as almost all CSU classes will be offered virtually, including English 299. Fortunately, Early Start at CSUCI was designed as an online class in order to allow students to work during the summer, so the framework was already established as an asynchronous class with rotating call-in or Zoom-in office hours.

Ultimately, with the turn away from the remedial classes, and noncredit classes, colleges and universities must still meet the needs of the students who come to us with staggering ranges of preparation for college-level writing. Classes like Writing with Clarity and Power—which provide students the individualized attention they need, and are taught by a compositionist who knows exactly the types of writing assignments students will be expected to master—offer a way to meet those needs (Hern and Snell, “The California Acceleration Project” 34-36). We understand that curricular decisions are always based in local contexts even as they ideally draw upon theoretically sound rationale. We are also aware that the larger public is not always as ready to let go of terms like “remedial,” and that it is convenient to lament the decline of student writing without addressing what students do well and working from an asset model. It is our sincere hope that this discussion of English 299 helps to spark ideas and other courses that focus on our students’ assets instead of their supposed “deficits” and that increase access and equity for students who have so often been marginalized by the institutions designed to serve them.

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Where We Are

Giving Credit Where Credit Is Due: Mainstreaming at California State University, Chico

Tom Fox

Students Teach

It was 1986. I was just out of graduate school. I had firm ideas about equity, fairness, justice. But I essentially knew very little about institutions, and actually not that much about composition either. I had good instincts about students, especially ones that didn’t fit into university well, because I was one. In my first semester of teaching in the fall of 1986, I taught English 16, “Intensive Learning Experience.” It was for students who, according to the official documents of the day, “exhibited multiple skill deficiencies.” This diagnosis was determined by the English Placement Test that separated out students in the lowest quartile for this course. Students called it “double bonehead,” because it was two courses below the credit bearing first year composition course.

I taught English 16 like a regular class because I didn’t know how to teach it any other way. Basically, we read articles that were interesting and that I guessed were relevant to students. Then I asked them to write about what they thought about the article or what it could inspire them to write. I responded to their writing as usual, with questions about what they wanted to do with the piece, which they found puzzling (“Hand it in? Get a grade?”). I didn’t really see many multiple skill deficiencies. They seemed a lot like the students I taught in graduate school except they were smarter about race and culture because they were culturally diverse. One of the students, Luz, got my attention. She was a little edgier about the position of the class than the others, wondering why she wasn’t receiving credit, why the placement test was so weird, why we were doing the same thing as her roommates in regular first year writing. She had stood in line, taken mandatory tests, been put into courses she didn’t sign up for. She had good questions.

Another semester, I thought I found a student with actual multiple skill deficiencies. His name was Erdis and he would not write more than four sentences at a time. He didn’t really say much either. I tried to connect with him, but he clearly wasn’t that interested. About halfway through the semester, I was reading the newsletter from the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) and enjoying this essay about what it was like to be African American on Chico’s
mostly white campus. When I got to the bottom of the essay, the author’s name was Erdis. He was published and could write just fine.

Students taught me another time a couple of years later. A graduate student of mine teaching the “single bonehead” class (forgive me, but that’s what the students called it) fielded the same complaints about the course as Luz. She advised her students to write letters and asked me where to send them. I advised them to send them to the Chancellor’s Office of the California State University System. A couple weeks later, my Dean called me in and said that while he appreciated student activism, the bureaucrats at the Chancellor’s office got a little offended and told my Dean to lasso me. Of course, the letters were effective; they critiqued the placement test and the whole BW system. Apparently, they could write, too.

Institutions Resist

When Judith Rodby and Thia Wolf joined the department in 1989, things began to move. In the early 1990s, Rodby took my position as Basic Writing coordinator when I became the WPA. She experienced the same commentary from students about the lack of credit, the arbitrary nature of the placement test, and the fact that the curriculum was as rigorous as regular first year composition. Though both colleagues helped with thinking through the problems with basic writing, Judith Rodby took the lead. She was particularly brilliant at showing the nonsensical institutional reasoning that justifies basic writing, as in this passage from her 1996 article, “What It’s For and What It’s Worth”:

. . . the no-credit arrangement was continually naturalized through a series of circular moves: We were told that remedial courses cannot receive credit because they are remedial and the university does not give credit for remedial courses; we were also told that our campus cannot give credit for those courses because we only offer one semester of freshman writing for credit, and so those courses must be classified as remedial. (108)

She was also prone to saying things such as, “the definition of basic writer is someone who is in a basic writing class. If you don’t have a basic writing class, you don’t have basic writers.” Rodby and David Bartholomae, in separate pieces, argued that basic writing is an institutional structure that, in Bartholomae’s words:

. . . produced the “other” who is the incomplete version of ourselves, confirming existing patterns of power and authority, reproducing the hierarchies we had meant to question and overthrow, way back then in the 1970s. We have constructed a course to teach and enact a
rhetoric of exclusion and made it the center of a curriculum designed to hide or erase cultural difference, all the while carving out and preserving an “area” in English within which we can do our work. (18)

Our basic writing program was populated by students whose families spoke another language at home, were students of color, and were first-generation college students, illustrating Bartholomae’s point. This fact also made changing the system more urgent.

**Persistence Rewards**

From the beginning the motive for mainstreaming basic writing at Chico was equity and fairness. Institutions, as I’ve argued elsewhere, are designed to maintain homogeneity (Fox, “Standards”). Changing it was no small effort and was met with resistance on our campus, in our university system, and from colleagues in the field.

Once mainstreaming was established, its success was undeniable. Students still had to take the CSU system’s placement test (and pay for it), but we ignored the results. Students who “failed” the test did as well in the first year composition course as those who “passed.” We expanded our adjunct workshops (originally designed to support basic writing with extra instruction) to all students (for more detailed histories of mainstreaming at Chico, see Rodby and Fox “Basic Work” and Fox “Basic Writing”).

The basic values of equity and fairness remain central to the writing program at Chico, in the capable hands of faculty in rhetoric and composition hired in the last decade. The connection with the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) remains strong and has resulted in another radical innovation, the “jumbo.” Kim Jaxon led the effort to draw upon the collegiality among students in Chico’s excellent EOP Summer Bridge program by creating a large enrollment composition class (around 100 students) that meets two times per week in a large room and one time per week in a workshop of 9-10 students. Because the students are already familiar with each other socially, they are lively, engaged, and supportive of each other’s success.

In the fall of 2018, the English Placement Test was eliminated as a requirement for California State University system, in part because of mainstreaming and similar programs at CSU campuses and in the state community college system. This is consequential change and, if accompanied by thoughtful pedagogy and curricula in writing programs could significantly increase access.

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A Credited Support Course: Corequisite Writing Course at Boise State University

Karen S. Uehling

In 1981, when I began teaching at Boise State University, the institution still filled the community college function, the teaching load was heavy (five or even six courses per term), and preparing students for first year writing was the goal of basic writing. I felt immersion in a full, rich writing and reading experience, not primarily grammar review, was essential. I entered Boise State with experience teaching at a small college in western North Carolina where I first encountered Mina Shaughnessy; I admired how she took basic writing seriously. After four years in North Carolina, in 1980-81, I participated in a year-long National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) seminar titled “Literature and Literacy,” led by W. Ross Winterowd of the University of Southern California. During the seminar we read 1970s writing and reading theory, both conceived of as process, and worked to connect writing with reading. We read thinkers like James Britton, Donald Murray, and Peter Elbow on writing; and Louise Rosenblatt, Frank Smith, and Norman Holland on reading; and others who studied and wrote about full texts, response, revision, and writing and reading as mirror image acts. Thus, when I came to Boise State, I was excited to try these ideas.

In my class, I focused on invention, revision, active reading, and editing as a near-final process. I demonstrated these principles using a “fishbowl” strategy with my own writing for the first essay. Students pulled their chairs in a circle (forming the fishbowl), and classroom interns—upper division and graduate students—were respondents. Then students offered their feedback. I handed out my initial freewriting, first draft, and, later, revised drafts based on intern and student response. Later, interns served as “guinea pigs,” demonstrating their processes, from invention (lists, questioning techniques, mind maps, and more) through first drafts, response, revision, and editing. Students worked within the same structure, in writing groups assisted by the interns or me. My class also encompassed active, critical reading: we used textbooks that revealed reading-writing connections, students kept response journals, and we often read a whole book, chapter by chapter, in a careful, intentional manner, such as Mike Rose’s Lives on the Boundary or Victor Villanueva’s Bootstraps. This class was clearly the equivalent of three credits and should have received academic credit; inability to gain credit would be a continuing issue.

After I had been at Boise State about twenty years (roughly 2000), new challenges to basic writing appeared. These were more political than pedagogical, and I sensed how the larger scene of instruction, especially outside societal
forces, affects students, faculty, and what happens in classrooms. Challenges first emerged at The Fourth National Basic Writing Conference, an event marked by vigorous debates about mainstreaming and marginalization. Initially these issues appeared remote from Boise State, but inevitably political issues arose. One was that the Idaho State Board of Education, in a well-meaning effort to simplify transfer between state institutions, appropriated placement. Previously placement had been a faculty decision, but in 2000, the board imposed standardized test scores for placement statewide, essentially doubling the number of instructors needed at Boise State to teach basic writing. In response, I mentored a small group of faculty when they first taught the course. As part of our work together, we developed a statement of guidelines and goals, using a collaborative process. I wrote an essay about this work, later published in the *Journal of Basic Writing*, as part of a thematic cluster of essays on mission statements for basic writing; other contributors were Sallyanne H. Fitzgerald, then of Chabot College, a community college in Hayward, California; and Tom Reynolds and Patty Fillipi, of the University of Minnesota General College. I was proud of our joint efforts contributing to a disciplinary definition of basic writing.

Earlier, in 1996, Greg Glau, of Arizona State University, had developed the “Stretch” program where basic writing became the first of two semesters that stretched English 101 into a two-term credit-bearing sequence. This innovation was the impetus for the Council on Basic Writing (CBW) Innovation Award. Although I was impressed by Glau’s work on Stretch, I questioned whether basic writing was preparation for, or direct support of, first year writing. These two goals are similar but not precisely the same. Glau emphasized that Stretch employed the same set of teaching outcomes as first year writing but stretched them over two classes. It seemed to me that basic writing as a field needed its own definition and outcomes, not simply those of first year writing. However, over time our program was transformed into a thriving stretch program under the guidance of Professor Tom Peele; even so, we could not obtain credit for the first semester of that program.

Another significant political reality was increasing reliance on contingent faculty to teach first year writing, including basic writing; these faculty were paid by the course without benefits and often commuted between institutions. As Eliana Osborn said, “faculty working conditions are student learning conditions.” The cost of education rose, student loan debt increased, and students needed a career path with reasonable promise of earning power. At about the time of the recession, organizations like Complete College America (CCA)—which advises state college systems on placement, credit, uniform course structures, guided pathways and academic maps, and related policies—emerged. CCA bases their analysis on attrition rates, gateway course completion rates,
time to degree completion, and similar metrics; some have called this perspective \textit{“rhetorics of austerity”} (Scott and Welch 4).

The Idaho State Board of Education embraced Complete College Idaho (CCI), part of CCA, in 2012 and the board appropriated another pedagogical feature: course delivery format for \textit{“remedial”} courses. State institutions were to adopt one of three CCI options—the emporium, acceleration, or corequisite models. We felt that the most pedagogically sound approach to writing instruction was the corequisite model known as the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP). Originated by Peter Adams, a past Chair of CBW, ALP was well-researched (Adams et al.), and had received the CBW Innovation Award. Although we were dubious of state board and CCI control over faculty decisions, still, the approach made sense. In April 2016, Adams stated in a WPA-L posting that it would be better if efforts to improve basic writing \textit{“… were faculty driven rather than top-down mandates. [...] However, the model known as ALP … was developed by … faculty at the Community College of Baltimore County”} (Adams, \textit{“Re: Non-Credit”}).

Boise State initially piloted the corequisite model in Spring 2013, and in 2013-2014, Boise State and our sister community college, the College of Western Idaho (CWI), engaged in a sustained, grant-funded project to develop the new model. I was a co-leader in this effort with Professor Meagan Newberry of CWI. Instructors from both colleges held monthly meetings, including cross-institutional meetings, visited each other’s classes, developed teaching materials, performed teacher research, and created a website. We presented this work at a summer workshop for representatives of Idaho state colleges.

Although the Community College of Baltimore County does not offer credit for their three-hour corequisite course, we were able to argue successfully for a one-hour, graded credit-bearing offering, and CWI also created their corequisite course as credit bearing, for two elective credits. A review of the 2019-2020 catalogues of Idaho’s eight state institutions (three universities, a four-year college, and four community colleges) reveals that all offer corequisites for first year writing of some kind that are credit bearing. Now, students at Boise State receive four graded credits for English 101 with the corequisite or three graded credits without the corequisite. The new format means continued focus on some original basic writing goals, such as conferencing with students and clarifying and slowing down to make room for questions. What has been lost, in my view, is time for demonstrations and enactments of writing emerging—and active reading based on slow, focused conversation with a text. In 2015, Boise State received our own CBW Innovation Award for our corequisite model and related efforts, particularly \textit{“The Write Class,”} a multiple measures placement tool (Estrem et al.), now used by most state institutions in Idaho and by some colleges outside Idaho.
In 2019, Boise State Provost Tony Roark praised the institution for substantially improving four- and six-year graduation rates as compared to a decade earlier; he credited this change at least partially to the first year writing corequisite model. I am somewhat skeptical of that analysis because in 2009 Boise State still served the community college function. CWI opened its doors that year and has since grown rapidly. However, the corequisite model was not instituted at Boise State until 2013. And there is evidence that since 2012, success rates in English 101 and 102 have increased by 5% and 6% respectively (Estrem, “TWC” 5). I am glad that current students appear to be succeeding. As Shaughnessy observed, it is “probably wise to assume that a few years of steady reading, writing, talking, and listening in an academic setting are certain to increase … intellectual tenacity and spanning power … (273). We do not expect students to master the complexity of rich, engaged reading and writing in one semester; those abilities develop over years. All of the conversation, reading, writing and thinking required by a major field of study and possibly a minor, and by other courses as well, compel students to engage with texts and perhaps redefine themselves as thinkers and writers.

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Contributors

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Brittany O’Meara is a printmaker and writer living and working in Boise, Idaho. Her art is sometimes funny, sometimes very serious, but usually both. She is obsessed with anthropomorphic food and critical theory and believes that art and writing are powerful tools for creating change in the community. She holds an MA in English literature and instructs first year writing students at Boise State University.

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Laura A. Sparks is Associate Professor of English at California State University, Chico, where she teaches courses in writing studies and human rights rhetorics. Her current research focuses on the relationship between rhetoric and post-9/11 interrogational torture. She has recent publications in Present Tense, Screen Bodies, Trace, and the Digital Rhetoric Collaborative.

Samantha Sturman, Dawn Shepherd, and Heidi Estrem, all of Boise State University, are faculty-administrators who collaborate closely on first year writing curricula, writing placement projects, and sustainable first year writing assessment practices. They advocate for students and teachers of first year writing whenever and wherever they can. Providing rich, credit-bearing writing courses for all students is one of several equity projects that they are engaged with, and this guest-edited special issue grows out of that and other related interests.
Carrie Strand Tebeau holds an MFA in poetry from the University of Michigan and has taught First Year Composition at North Central Michigan College for over a decade, including corequisite classes since 2015.

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Kim Vose is Assistant Professor of English and English Education Advisor at California State University, Channel Islands. Her work is grounded in an asset based approach to pedagogy, a commitment to equity and empathy, and a belief in the transformative power of storytelling.

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