**USM Carnegie Course Redesign Initiative**

**Final Report: Engl 100 / Composition at UMBC**

1. Impact on Student Learning
   1. Improved Learning

To measure the effect of the redesign on our learning outcomes for the course, we examined 27 essays from traditional sections in F11 and 49 essays from redesigned sections in Sp13, specifically assessing how well they satisfied four of our learning outcomes: #1 supporting assertions with evidence; #2 integrating one’s own ideas with those of sources; #3 using academic documentation styles appropriately; #4 controlling surface features (syntax, grammar, punctuation, spelling). These learning outcomes were selected for their ease of measurability. The essays were from a range of assignments, and from a range of different instructors, and they represented a range of performance/grades. In addition, with the essays from Sp13, a number of other learning outcomes were also assessed, in order to help us more fully gauge the success of the course in helping students achieve the course’s outcomes; however, since we had not included these other outcomes in evaluation of the F11 essays, results regarding these other outcomes do not appear here although they are noted later in the report.

Performance increased across all four learning outcomes in the redesigned course, indicating notable improvement in student learning.

See the attached appendix, with Full Implementation Assessment Form and Full Implementation Plan form.

* 1. Improved Retention

After one semester of full implementation, we see no significant change in grade results. As seen below, our redesigned course in Sp13, compared to the previous five years, had a slight decrease in As (31% instead of 34%) and a slight increase in Bs (38% instead of 36%), and all other grade results are unchanged. We are satisfied with these results, since we have had the new model in place for only one semester. We will continue to monitor grade results in future semesters.

**1. Comparison of Sp13 grade results with results from individual semesters x5 years:**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **English 100/100A Combined Grades** | **A** | **B** | **C** | **D** | **F** | **W** | **Other** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Spring 2013** | 31% | 38% | 16% | 3% | 7% | 4% | 1% |
| **Fall 2012\* (excludes pilot sections)** | 38% | 36% | 16% | 2% | 6% | 2% | 0% |
| **Spring 2012** | 34% | 34% | 15% | 2% | 8% | 7% | 0% |
| **Fall 2011** | 33% | 37% | 16% | 4% | 6% | 4% | 0% |
| **Spring 2011** | 41% | 32% | 13% | 4% | 5% | 5% | 0% |
| **Fall 2010** | 34.5% | 36% | 17% | 3.5% | 6% | 3% | 0% |
| **Spring 2010** | 27.5% | 39% | 17% | 5% | 7.5% | 4% | 0% |
| **Fall 2009** | 28% | 38.5 % | 16% | 4.5% | 9% | 4% | 0% |

**2. Comparison of Sp13 grade results with aggregate results x5 years:**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **A** | **B** | **C** | **D** | **F** | **W** | **Other** |
| **Spring Grades 2013** | 31% | 38% | 16% | 3% | 7% | 4% | 1% |
| **Average 100/100A Combined Grades Fall 2009-Fall 2012** | 34% | 36% | 16% | 3% | 7% | 4% | 0% |

See the attached appendix, with Full Implementation Course Completion/Retention form.

* 1. Other Impacts on Students

Surveys conducted with students and faculty at mid-term and at the end of the semester during full implementation in Sp13 reveal that many aspects of the redesigned course were perceived as highly effective. On the mid-term student survey, on a scale of 1-5, with 5 as the highest score, 88% of students rated the small group conferences 3, 4, or 5. 88% of students rated the weekly full-class meetings 3, 4, or 5. 76% of students rated the lab day meeting, and the contribution of the Writing Fellows (peer facilitators), as 3, 4, or 5. The use of instructional technology received much lower scores—only 52% of students rated CompClass at 3, 4, or 5. The *Writing About Writing* content also earned lower scores, with 63% rating its contribution to their learning at 3, 4, or 5. Surveys of the faculty and Writing Fellows produced very similar results. The end-of-term survey produced virtually identical results for all the above questions.

On these surveys we also asked questions related to the course’s learning outcomes. On the mid-term student survey, on the question of whether the course was helping them learn to produce writing over multiple drafts, 84% rated this 3, 4, or 5. Asked how well the course helped them recognize purpose, audience, and format for different documents, 83% rated this 3, 4, or 5. Asked how well it helped them learn to critique their own and others’ work, 83% rated this 3, 4, or 5. Regarding how well the course helped them learn to manage grammar and punctuation, 75% rated this 3, 4, or 5. Again, the end-of-term survey echoed these findings.

Our examination of 49 essays from Sp13 classes, assessing students’ performance on the same learning outcomes, reinforced these findings from the surveys. For example, 72% of the essays met or exceeded performance expectations for addressing audience, purpose, context, and genre. 92% of the essays met or exceeded performance expectations for using reading and writing for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating.

B. Impact on Cost Savings

As noted in our final proposal, we anticipated cost savings with the redesigned course of about $2 per student, which has proved to be the case. Although this is a minor reduction in cost, we are very satisfied because it was achieved despite the addition of instructional personnel in the form of our Writing Fellows, who are in the classroom with students once per week, and despite a marked increase in small-group instruction. The elimination of Engl 100A, the 4-credit composition class for less-prepared student writers, offsets the cost of the Writing Fellows.

The CPT submitted with our proposal took into account the additional courses that four of our full-time faculty would teach once Engl 100A was eliminated. Since these instructors’ contracts require them to teach 24 credits per year, eliminating 100A means that each of them teaches on average one additional section per year—sections that the English department does not need to hire adjuncts to teach. However, the department and the Dean’s office felt this was not appropriate to consider in budget calculations, with the result that in the view of the department and the Dean, the relevant cost savings is limited to the actual savings from the elimination of 100A sections that had been staffed by adjuncts. According to CPT calculations, though, the cost savings are greater.

See the attached appendix, with updated CPT form.

1. Lessons Learned
   1. Pedagogical Improvement Techniques
      * Small group conferences: Students are placed into mixed-ability groups of four at the start of the semester, and every two weeks each group meets for a 25-minute conference with the instructor, for feedback/discussion of work in progress.
      * Writing Fellows: These peer facilitators meet with students for 75 minutes every week, meeting with half of the class (12 students) one week and the other half the next. They facilitate peer review groups, lead discussions, present mini-lessons, and assist students individually as they work on their writing and research. Most Writing Fellows are experienced undergraduate Writing Center tutors, but some are graduate students or recent grads of baccalaureate or graduate programs. All receive training for the WF role before they begin, and are supported and mentored on an ongoing basis. They are paid $10/hour and also earn academic credit.
      * Enhanced use of instructional technology: We provide a variety of online resources for students’ use in and out of class, including a digital handbook, quizzes, and links to online resources and tutorials. Four instructors are piloting an online peer review tool called FRED, from Norton.
      * Independent, self-study activities: Students complete a multi-step Library Literacy Assignment involving tutorials and a quiz, and they also view a video and complete a short quiz on the common policies regarding attendance, late work, etc. in Engl 100.
      * *Writing About Writing* content: Drawing on the work of Downs and Wardle, this approach introduces students to the field of composition studies and to the notion that writing is itself a subject that can be studied and discussed. Students engage with scholarly publications in the field, and produce their own essays that grow from these readings. Faculty use this content, at a minimum, for a three-week unit, or use it throughout the semester. Norton, the publisher of the Downs and Wardle text, produced a custom, low-cost, condensed version of the text for our use.
   2. Cost Reduction Techniques
      * Elimination of Engl 100A: This 4-credit version of first-year composition, which previously comprised about one third of our composition sections, is no longer being offered, saving approximately $18,000 per year according to CPT calculations. Students placed into 100A were less-prepared writers, identified by placement testing; however, their DFW rates over 10 years were significantly higher than Engl 100 students, causing us to question the effectiveness of the 100A approach. The Writing Fellows program, with its paid peer facilitators, offsets these savings, although CPT calculations show a savings of $2 per student.
   3. Implementation Issues
      * Instructional technology: Originally, we used CompClass, a product from Bedford/St Martins with quizzes, tutorials, a “writing space” for peer review, and an online grammar handbook, but this proved too complex and “buggy.” We now use a simpler approach, employing a digital handbook along with quizzes from Norton, and adding links ourselves on Bb that take students to various resources and tutorials.
      * Writing Fellows utilization: Survey data and discussions with WFs and faculty revealed that some WFs were being used more effectively than others. Some were being under-utilized, while others were being given a great deal of independence and inadequate direction. This caused us to revisit our guidelines for the WF’s role, and to provide more guidance to instructors, an approach that is ongoing. As part of this, we had WFs write descriptions of successful classroom activities they had designed, which we shared with faculty.
      * *Writing About Writing* content: Survey results regarding this aspect of the course are mixed. At this time, we are not making changes, interested to see how well the content is working after this second semester of its use in all sections.
      * Most successful changes: The small group conferences are highly effective, and are the heart of the redesigned course. We are fully committed to this aspect of our meeting pattern, and going forward we will continue to refine other parts of the course that support it and make it possible, such as the Writing Fellows program. The self-study activities have also proved successful, as has the adoption of the common policies—these standardized policies regarding attendance, late work, class participation, and other issues give students clear, consistent guidance and are a benefit to faculty as well.
2. Sustainability

The success of our redesign of Engl 100 has earned it the support of the English department and the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences. Dr. Freeman Hrabowski, UMBC’s president, has referred to our redesign numerous times in interviews and publications, and over the past year articles in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *The Washington Post* have focused on our redesign, and we have given presentations about it to audiences ranging from the annual UMBC University Retreat, to alumni donors, to the Writing Program Administrators’ 2013 conference. This remarkable, positive reception has helped ensure that our redesign will continue to inspire and thrive. UMBC’s culture of innovation encourages us to continually reassess, refine, and explore in Engl 100; for example, we plan to apply for UMBC Innovation Fund grants to let us pilot a new computer lab layout for the course in spring ’14 and to do a research project involving audio feedback on student writing in fall ’14.

Financially, the redesign is on solid, sustainable ground. In addition to the cost savings from eliminating Engl 100A, we have also seen a recent Engl 100-related cost reduction which, though not directly related to the redesign, is an important change—moving to the new Performing Arts and Humanities building in fall 2012 has meant we no longer need to pay student assistants to staff the English department’s computer labs, or pay a faculty member a stipend to supervise them. This change in our composition classes represents a savings that is roughly equivalent, for example, to the cost of the Writing Fellows program. Again, this change is not part of our course redesign, but it does ensure we are on solid footing with Engl 100 going forward. Although the last few years have been challenging fiscal times for our English department and university, the teaching of first-year composition at UMBC is ready for the future, moving forward with strong support and great energy, learning and growing as we go.