**English 101: Freshman Composition**

**Frostburg State University**

**Final Report, September 20, 2013**

**A. Impact on Student Learning**

**1. Improved Learning**

A comparison of pass rates from the traditional course and the redesigned course demonstrates improvement in student learning. In the fall semester, the overall pass rate in the redesigned course was 75%, as compared with the 65% historic pass rate in the traditional course. In the spring semester, the overall pass rate in the redesigned course was 81%, as compared with the 72% historic pass rate in the traditional course.

The Undergraduate Education Initiative (UEI) report summarizes data from the end-of-semester evaluation that each instructor completes on student writing. At the end of the semester, instructors use a standardized rubric for assessing student writing according to the 6 learning outcomes for English 101: Thesis, Support, Organization, Language, Rhetorical Knowledge, and Information Literacy. In the fall semester, 77.3% of students in the redesigned course met expectations in all 6 areas, as compared with 65.9% in the traditional course. The greatest gain seems to have been in the area of Language, where 88.9% of students in the redesigned course met expectations, as compared with 78.7% in the traditional course. Students in the redesign also showed improvement in Thesis, Organization, Rhetorical Knowledge, and Information Literacy. In the spring semester, 80.1% of students in the redesigned course met expectations in all 6 areas, as compared with 70.6% in the traditional course. The greatest gains were in the areas of Language, where 86.9% of students in the redesigned course met expectations, as compared with 79.6% in the traditional course, and Information Literacy, where 94.1% of students in the redesigned course met expectations, as compared with 80.2% in the traditional course. Students in the redesign also showed improvement in Thesis, Support, Organization, and Rhetorical Knowledge.

**2. Improved Retention**

The redesign has demonstrated a potential for improving retention by decreasing DWF rates. DWF rates here include the following “not passing” grades: CS (continuing study), D, F, FX, W, WF, and I. For the fall semester, the historic DWF rate in the traditional course was 35%; the redesign reduced this to 25%. For the spring, the historic DWF rate in the traditional course was 28%; the redesign reduced this to 19%.

The redesign seems to have made the greatest difference in the regular (as opposed to the developmental) sections of the course: in the fall semester, the redesign cut the DWF rate in half, from 35% in the traditional course to 17% in the redesign. In the spring semester, the DWF rate in regular sections tends to be lower because students with higher summer placement scores are advised to take English 101 in the spring. The redesign cut the DWF rate in the spring semester from 28% to 19%.

The redesign seems to have had a smaller impact on the developmental sections of the course. In the fall semester, the DWF rate in the redesigned course was 39%, compared with 35% in the traditional course. In the spring, the DWF rate in the developmental sections of the redesigned course was 60%, compared with 67.5% in the traditional course. In general, the DWF rate in the developmental sections tends to be much higher in the spring semesters because almost all of the developmental students in spring are repeaters from the fall.

**3. Other Impacts on Students**

The redesign had a positive effect on two other problems that we were trying to solve: grade drift and course drift.

Traditionally, grading inconsistency in English 101 has been a serious problem. Prior to the redesign, we had a detailed rubric for grading student essays, but in the absence of a standardized syllabus with set weights for assignments and set course policies, final grades in the past varied widely. The charts in Section III of the appendix, “Full Implementation Assessment Results,” show the effect that the redesign has had on grade drift. For the fall semester, in the traditional course, there is a wide range of passing rates in both the regular and developmental sections. The range in passing rates in the developmental sections is almost as wide as in the regular sections. In the redesigned course, pass rates in regular sections cluster at the top of the percentage range, while pass rates for developmental sections cluster towards the bottom. This distribution makes more sense and is an improvement over the traditional course. In the spring semester, once again in the traditional course, there is a wide range of passing rates in both types of sections. In the redesigned course, in contrast, there is a clustering of passing rates at the top of the scale, with the exception of two sections (taught by the same instructor) with passing rates in the 50’s.

English 101 has also suffered from inconsistency in course content due to the lack of a standardized comprehensive syllabus. In some sections, the emphasis of the course was on reading and philosophical discussions; in other sections, the emphasis was on the rhetorical aspects of academic writing. Some instructors reviewed grammar and assigned grammar exercises; other instructors had no grammar review in their course. In some sections, papers never exceeded 650 words; in other sections, the minimum requirement was 1500 words. Some instructors met frequently with students in individual conferences; other instructors rarely met with students individually to discuss their work.

In the redesigned course, the syllabus and class schedule are now standardized, ensuring that all sections cover the same material and that students are engaging in similar activities. In addition, the online component of the course, My Writing Lab, provides all students in English 101 with the same comprehensive review of basic grammar. Finally, we have created an online course repository that includes materials and a choice of lessons on which instructors can draw. The requirements for the formal essays have been standardized, but instructors are free to choose their own readings in each unit, which allows instructors to teach according to their strengths and to follow their own interests. The redesign aims to provide support for instructors while at the same time preserving space in the course for the instructor’s initiative, passion, and creativity.

As a result of the redesign’s efforts to resolve the problems of grade and course drift, students in all sections are now essentially receiving the same course. This newly-achieved consistency is especially helpful for the university as a whole because English 101 is a core or foundational skills course.

**B. Impact on Cost Savings**

Although cost savings was not one of our objectives, our initial proposal estimated that our course redesign would produce cost savings by using the cost reduction strategy of changing the mix of personnel from more expensive to less expensive. According to the CPT, the redesign should have produced a savings of $16,530. With the redesign, we have changed the mix of personnel according to our proposal and thus have produced these cost savings.

**C. Lessons Learned**

**1. Pedagogical Improvement Techniques**

*Increased Conferencing:*

The redesign greatly increased individual conferencing with instructors. Every student now conferences with his/her instructor before and/or after each major essay.

*Increased Opportunity for Revision:*

In the redesigned course, there is now a combination of required and optional revision: the required revision for the early papers takes students through the process that too many beginning writers overlook; the optional revision for the later papers provides an opportunity for students to continue to revise after receiving feedback from the instructor. The final paper, due on the last day of class, cannot be revised and must be passing for the student to pass the course.

*Learning Mentors:*

The learning mentors provide another layer of support for students in the course. The learning mentors help with My Writing Lab, review the sentence-level corrections on each paper, and conference with students on their drafts.

*Course Repository:*

In addition to containing all of the course materials, the Course Repository has sample lessons that emphasize student-centered, active learning. This allows new instructors to draw on lessons created by experienced instructors and experienced instructors to try out new approaches.

*Standardized Syllabus and Class Schedule:*

The standardized syllabus and class schedule ensure consistency from section to section and provide support for new instructors.

*Computer-Based Grammar Review:*

We have moved some of the sentence-level review of grammar and punctuation online by using Pearson’s My Writing Lab*.* Students work on this program outside of class as homework. This helps free up class time for increased individualized instruction with both the course instructor and the learning mentor. We know that grammar is most effective when taught within the context of a student’s own writing; thus the online component of the course is intended as a supplement to (not as a replacement for) the attention given to grammar and punctuation in the writing that students do in the course.

**2. Cost Reduction Techniques**

*Changing Mix of Personnel*

The course redesign provides more support for instructors; this allowed us to change the mix of personnel from more expensive (tenured faculty) to less expensive (full-time contractual and part-time adjunct faculty). We achieved some cost savings by doing this. However, as the course is already taught mostly by part-time adjunct faculty and as we have a very limited pool of qualified adjunct instructors in our region of the country, there was not much room for changing the mix of personnel.

**3. Implementation Issues**

*Problems with My Writing Lab:*

There were some initial problems with the set-up of the program, but we were able to work most of these out in the second semester of the redesign. We are also encountering some student resistance to using computer-based instruction but hoping that a clearer explanation of the purpose of this component of the course will help with that.

*Training in the Redesign:*

We have found that, in addition to the initial training in the redesign, it has been helpful to hold grading workshops at the beginning of each semester.

**D. Sustainability**

I don’t anticipate any problems with sustaining our redesign.

**E. Appendices**

Full Implementation Assessment Results Form ENGL 101, FSU

Full Implementation Course Completion Form ENGL 101, FSU

Full Implementation Assessment Results Charts ENGL 101, FSU