

It's Not Remedial: Re-envisioning Pre-First-Year College Writing

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ABSTRACT: Responding to mandates from the Tennessee Higher Education Commission to eliminate “remedial” or “developmental” courses from state-funded, four-year institutions, the University of Tennessee at Martin (UTM) Department of English developed a college-level pre-first-year writing program for entering students identified as underprepared for college-level writing expectations. In this article, we describe the design and implementation of our new two-course program of college-level writing courses for underprepared students and reflect on the program’s status after one year. We offer a general context for UTM’s developmental courses into which we place our specific courses as they began and later evolved into our current English 100 and 110 program. Our goals in writing this article are to help other institutions with limited resources that face situations similar to those we’ve encountered over the past few years—institutions that, like UTM, have difficult decisions to make while still seeking to enhance all their students’ academic success.

In late 2001, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) began eliminating remedial courses in mathematics, reading, and writing from Tennessee’s four-year institutions, making such coursework the exclusive responsibility of Tennessee’s two-year community colleges. THEC’s decisions arose when the state legislature insisted that for the 2001-2002 school year, both the University of Tennessee (UT) and the Tennessee Board of Regents schools must cut spending and work effectively with fewer state resources (Stephens). According to a May 2002 online *Tennessean* article, “THEC officials said they aren’t opposed to remedial and developmental courses. But as they prepare for a state budget that might provide no additional funding for several years and could even cut higher education funding by more than \$90 million . . . THEC administrators are focusing on maintaining the quality of the courses higher education was meant to offer” (Cass). An early concession was to allow four-year institutions to offer remedial or developmental courses but only at the community college “per student rate” (Cass). The University of Tennessee at Martin (UTM) student newspaper, *The Pacer*, reported that

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if UTM offered its remedial and developmental courses at this reduced rate, the school could lose up to \$125,000 (Toy). The THEC decisions had the potential to impact a significant portion of the Tennessee public four-year college and university population: "More than 49% of all first-time freshmen at state schools took at least one remedial or developmental course in the fall of 2000" (Cass).

But in these early years of the twenty-first century, Tennessee's state-funded four-year public institutions are not the only ones confronted with budget cuts affecting programs designed for underprepared students. In fall 2003, for example, around the same time that the program described in this article was first being implemented at the University of Tennessee at Martin, the online *Cincinnati Post* reported on Ohio state funding decisions that parallel those in Tennessee. Like THEC, the Ohio Board of Regents proposed eliminating funding for remedial programs in Ohio four-year schools by 2007. The impact on students was potentially significant as well, since a noteworthy percentage of Ohio's entering students begin their college experience with remedial courses—32% in 2002. The Ohio Board of Regents reported that the cost of remediation programs for the almost 20,000 students taking remedial or developmental courses at Ohio schools ran approximately \$9.5 million for the 2001-2002 school year ("State Plan: Cut Remedial Class Funds"). Likewise, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (CHE) reported in 2000 on the 22-campus California State University (CSU) system's attempts to eliminate remedial programs by barring underprepared students from attending any classes at a four-year CSU campus. According to the CHE report, for the 1999-2000 year, almost half of the system's first-year students required some kind of remedial course, at an annual cost of around \$10 million (Selingo), so the budgetary impact on this large college system and the impact on the students requiring the classes are, again, potentially great (see Goen and Gillotte-Tropp for a discussion of how San Francisco State University responded to this challenge).

Perhaps most surprising is the elimination of courses for underprepared students from four-year City University of New York (CUNY) schools, a system that virtually initiated "open admissions" for U.S. institutions in the 1970s. William Crain explained, in the online article "Open Admissions and Remedial Education at CUNY," that it was in the CUNY system, in 1970, where the open admissions experiment began, bringing an influx of underprepared students to four-year colleges and universities. Extensive programs were developed to meet the academic needs of these students and prepare them for college-level reading, writing, and mathematics. CUNY's

efforts to provide quality education to any student who sought it have been controversial since open admissions began. As Mina Shaughnessy pointed out in *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing*, written only a few years after the CUNY open admissions program began, “The numbers of such students varied from college to college as did the commitment to the task of teaching them. . . . This venture into mass education . . . began . . . amidst the misgivings of administrators, who had to guess in the dark about the sorts of programs they ought to plan . . . and the reluctancies of teachers, some of whom had already decided that the new students were ineducable” (1). Crain added that the 1998 decision to eliminate remedial students and remedial programs was difficult for many of the CUNY trustees who support the presence of and assistance to these students but who were pressured politically to vote in favor of the elimination. As recently as April 2005, CUNY’s decision to “abolish remediation in the senior colleges and presumably introduce tougher admission standards” is being challenged by some. CUNY History Professor Sandi E. Cooper, in an address to the New York State Board of Regents posted on a CUNY listserv, questioned whether or not eliminating “remedial” students and instituting higher admissions standards has resulted in the actual increases in graduation rates expected by those involved in eliminating the CUNY developmental programs from the senior colleges: “Naturally the central administration must claim [the elimination of the developmental programs] to be a rousing success. . . . As someone who works in the trenches, I urge the Regents to mandate an outside, independent evaluation of the success of these policies.” More pointedly, Cooper questions the preparedness of any entering student for college-level work and the impact of the programs’ elimination on mainstream entry courses, in particular, first-year composition: “Are these so called better prepared students really prepared for freshman English or has freshman English quietly become remediation?”

So Tennessee is not alone in confronting budget constraints and tense political decision-making that have directly affected state higher education curricula, factors that Shaughnessy, already in the 1970s, acknowledged are significant to how formal instruction of students is implemented (276). It would be easy if not justified to take issue with long-standing sentiments about underprepared students at four-year institutions such as those expressed in the newspaper article above, that while the THEC officials making budget-related curriculum decisions “aren’t opposed to remedial and developmental courses,” they nevertheless want four-year schools to invest their efforts primarily in “maintaining the quality of the courses higher education

was meant to offer.” According to such reasoning, preparatory courses such as developmental reading, writing, or mathematics don’t fulfill the “real” work of higher education. As has been true in the CUNY system, supporters of educational opportunities for underprepared students around the U.S. have been fighting similar viewpoints since open admissions was instituted. But for many state-funded institutions, such as the University of Tennessee at Martin, recent financially based decisions by state administrators to cut developmental programs at four-year schools are out of the institutions’ and programs’ control. When such decisions are made, it is then up to departments and faculty to live with the consequences, within the budgetary and financial means available, and to do what we can to provide for the needs of all of our students.

In the Department of English at UTM, we realized that eliminating developmental programs would not, as Cooper implies above, necessarily mean eliminating the students needing additional assistance to become effective college-level scholars. We determined to design college-level composition courses offering students additional support while still meeting the new THEC requirements for courses at four-year institutions. In this article, we describe the design and implementation of our two-course program of college-level writing courses for underprepared students and reflect on the program’s status after one year. We offer a general context for UTM’s developmental courses into which we place our specific courses as they began and then evolved eventually into our current English 100 and 110 program. Our hope is that our story can be helpful to other smaller institutions with limited resources facing experiences similar to those we’ve encountered over the past three years, institutions that have difficult decisions to make while simultaneously seeking to enhance all their students’ academic success.

DEVELOPMENTAL ENGLISH AT UTM

Mike Rose points out that first-year college composition instruction originally developed because Harvard faculty, in the late nineteenth century, wanted to halt the weak writing they received from their upper-division students—in other words, to offer writing “remediation” to all entering students as a preventive measure (“Language” 526). Currently, college students are generally placed into “remedial” or “developmental” courses by their respective institutions if these students demonstrate an inability to perform at college level, primarily in the skills of reading, writing, and mathematics.

While Rose has regularly challenged the labels and teaching methodologies to which college students identified as underprepared frequently have been exposed, he acknowledges that in fact there are students on American college campuses who do have difficulty meeting the “demands of university work” (“Language” 543). Bartholomae portrays these students in strongly political terms, as the “students who are refused unrestrained access to the academic community” (“Inventing” 600).

The evaluation of a particular student’s competency and placement into either mainstream or developmental courses varies among institutions, from strict standardized skills tests, to less rigid entrance exams given during first-year orientation or on the first day of classes, to ACT/SAT scores or high school grade point averages, or to some combination thereof. The demographics of students in developmental writing courses demonstrate great diversity: high school honors students as well as students at risk throughout their previous school experiences, non-traditional students returning to college or entering college later in their lives, immigrant and foreign students for whom English is a second language, and entering students who are the first generation in their families to attend college. Many are students whose previous educational experiences have not, for a variety of reasons, sufficiently prepared them for the college-level reading, critical thinking, and writing required of them from their first semester in college. As Rose points out repeatedly in his literacy narrative *Lives on the Boundary*, developmental writers are often those students whose experiences with writing in school have severely damaged their self-confidence as thinkers and writers, even though they may demonstrate complex thinking and discourse competency outside of school—often in discourses that are not valued academically. However, it is not uncommon for students who had success writing in high school to be placed into pre-first-year composition courses in college, much to their dismay if not their outright resentment. Across the U.S., underprepared students come from diverse backgrounds and educational experiences; this diversity is equally true for the underprepared writers at UTM.

Located in the northwest corner of the state, the University of Tennessee at Martin is a small, rural, state-funded public university—part of the statewide UT system—offering a liberal arts curriculum and emphasizing quality undergraduate education. The student population for the 2004-2005 school year was approximately 5,800 (5,400 undergraduates), with an entering first-year class of approximately 1,350 students (“Xap Student Center”). This student body includes resident students and commuters; graduates of

small rural and large inner-city public and private schools; international students; and traditional and non-traditional students—including first-generation college attendees, military veterans, single mothers and fathers, and older students embarking on second careers often, in this region, because of industrial layoffs. Most of the population comes from within the state of Tennessee. The underprepared students at UTM could easily fit into the portrait of students Rose paints in his opening chapter of *Lives on the Boundary*, who fill Dr. Gunner's "English A" class at UCLA, the institution's "most basic writing course" (2): some sit tall in their chairs, some slouch, some sit up front, others as far back and as close to the door as they can get, some are open to their instructors and classmates, others suspicious and untrusting, some quiet throughout every class while others speak out freely, and sooner or later they all demonstrate their fear, their resistance, their hope, and their complexity—a complexity often denied them by those who only see them as "the truly illiterate among us" (2, 3).

At many institutions developmental or remedial courses have regularly been regarded as "pre-college" courses and generally have not counted toward any degree. They are often listed in catalogs with course numbers clearly distinct from the "real," college-level courses. At UTM, for example, lower-division courses begin at the 100 level (the mainstream first-year composition courses are thus numbered as English 111 and English 112); the previous pre-college developmental courses at UTM were numbered 080 and 090. Students successfully completing English 080 and 090 earned three credit hours per course, but those hours did not count toward a degree as do English 111 and 112, and now the recently created English 100 and 110.

The developmental English program at UTM had evolved positively since its beginning in the early 1970s when a Mastery Experience course was added to the English curriculum. In this course, where skills mastery is strongly implied by the course title, students studied the basics of grammar and writing, earning university credit for their efforts. In 1978, with the arrival of the federally funded Advanced Institutional Development Program, more attention and concern were focused on developmental English. Thus, English 1001 and 1002 (often referred to as "core English") were developed.

Enrollment was limited to sixteen students per class and each designated teacher had two assistants, allowing for in-class individual tutoring. By fall 1987, there were eleven sections of developmental English, each with approximately eighteen students. The goals and objectives of English 1001 and 1002 were stated on departmental documents and in the Department's

1988 self study, and they mirror an emphasis on error correction of English mechanics that was not uncommon in developmental curricula at that time, despite a growing body of “basic writing” pedagogical literature that challenged the effectiveness of such coursework for underprepared writers:

The purposes of these courses are to practice writing, to improve writing skills, and to help prepare the student for English 1110, 1120, and 1130. Basic English grammar, mechanics, and syntax are emphasized. Each writing exercise (a minimum of fifteen paragraphs for 1001 and six essays for 1002) is graded and returned before the next assignment is due so that students may take advantage of suggestions for improvement. Corrections and/or revisions are required for each writing exercise. (Clark and Wright)

In fall 1988, UTM switched from quarter terms to semesters, and English 1001 and 1002 were redesigned into English 080 and 090, which were offered from fall 1988 through summer 2003. These three-credit-hour courses, like their predecessors, did not count toward degree credit requirements, but the students’ final grades appeared on their academic records and were counted in their grade point averages. English 080, as explained in the formal Department of English course description, was similar to the Mastery Program courses in its emphasis on mechanical correctness:

The purposes of English 080 are to practice writing and to improve writing skills. The focus of this course is on writing, but basic English grammar, mechanics, and syntax will also be emphasized. Each writing exercise (and there will be a minimum of fifteen paragraphs and three essays) will be graded and returned before the next assignment is due so that the student may take advantage of suggestions for improvement. Corrections and/or revisions will be required for each writing exercise. (“Developmental English 080”)

While in its official catalog description English 090 strongly implies a language remediation methodology similar to that of English 080, the course, in practice, moved students well beyond the sentence and paragraph writing of English 080 and emphasized essay writing, with students producing as many as eight to ten essays over the semester, including research-based essays. In English 090, critical thinking skills were also emphasized, as students worked on their essays and participated in class discussions. Many

instructors of both 080 and 090 asked students to create portfolios of their work over the semester, which were then evaluated at semester's end. In addition to submitting portfolios, which were required to be "coherent, logically organized, and relatively free from grammatical and mechanical errors," ("Developmental English 080"), students in both courses were required to pass a two-part exit exam before progressing into the first-year writing courses, English 111 and 112: a skills test of grammar, mechanics, and usage, and a timed essay-format writing test. Although both courses stressed language remediation, together English 080 and 090 provided the means for UTM students who were proficient in other skills and were otherwise prepared for college work to be admitted to UTM and progress through their college courses while also working to communicate effectively in the academic discourses required of them as college writers. Typically student attrition can be high in the first year of enrollment in a four-year institution, and UTM is no exception. But by the time students completed English 080 and 090, they had completed their first-year of college and were sophomores when they began English 111 and 112; they were then identified as "retained" by the university, which, at least in theory, strengthened the likelihood of their continued success and completion not only of the UTM first-year writing program, but their completion of their college education. The English Department currently has no data comparing the retention rates of English 080/090 students with those who placed directly into the English 111/112 program. But two of the authors of this article have been heavily involved with both the design and implementation of the 080 and 090 courses, and they have seen many of their former 080 and 090 students graduate on time. As we gather data on success and retention rates of students in the new English 100/110 program, we will also be able to retrieve retention statistics for students from our previous developmental courses with which to make more statistically based evaluations of these earlier programs.

As Rose notes, colleges and universities, despite their desire to "defend the integrity of the baccalaureate," are highly reluctant to undertake any actions that might reduce their student populations ("Language" 541, 545). Yet THEC's decision to eliminate developmental courses in fact posed a potential threat to UTM's ability to recruit and retain students. While other four-year institutions in the state are close enough to a community college that students can easily continue taking other university courses while taking required preparatory courses at the community college, UTM has no nearby two-year institution. The lack of a convenient community college potentially means that underprepared students who can no longer

get the courses they need at UTM just will not attend; instead they will seek admission to a university that allows for quick and easy access to a community college. In Tennessee, the state budget problems and THEC decisions came “at a time when the state is desperate to increase its number of college graduates, a key to economic development” for the state (Cass). Like all of the state higher education institutions, UTM is always seeking to increase its student population and student retention. So the possibility of an exodus of students to other institutions as well as a serious obstacle to recruiting new students to UTM were serious concerns.

THE DESIGN OF ENGLISH 100 AND ENGLISH 110

Fortunately, as the early rumblings from the state legislature and THEC became public, faculty in the UTM Department of English were asked to plan ahead and design an alternative for the developmental English courses we had been offering, allowing us to meet the pending mandates while also meeting the needs of students who were underprepared for college-level writing expectations. A small task force of Department faculty was formed to study the matter, comprised of the authors of this paper, two of whom have been involved with UTM’s developmental writing courses from early on, and two of whom have had graduate coursework in basic writing pedagogies and extensive teaching experience with underprepared writers at other institutions. Our charge was to investigate the consequences to students and the Department of the pending cuts, to research the possibilities—particularly looking at successful programs at other schools—and to design a college-level, student-centered alternative that would fit within specific instructional resource parameters at UTM while still meeting students’ needs.

We had to act relatively quickly, so over the next year we conducted research and drafted plans for pre-first-year college-level courses that we could offer to underprepared students. Previously, our two-semester English 080 and 090 developmental program gave students a full year of writing instruction before they entered our two-semester composition sequence of English 111 and English 112. So students placing into English 080 received two full years of writing instruction. It was difficult for those committed to the English 080/090 program to reconceive courses they felt had provided students the best opportunity to effectively improve their reading, critical thinking, and writing skills. But the task force members also knew that we couldn’t simply renumber English 080 and 090 with a college-level number-

ing system, leaving the courses themselves virtually untouched. We knew we had to jettison English 080 and 090 altogether and create an entirely different program in order for it to pass through the gauntlet of necessary approvals—on campus through to THEC. That is, we had to demonstrate that these new courses were worthy of full college credit. Further, to get Faculty Senate approval in time for publication in the UTM course catalog for 2003-2004, which was printed in the spring of 2003, we had to have specific courses designed by December 2002. Consequently, English 100 first became part of our curriculum in fall 2003, and English 110 in spring 2004. Students taking English 080 and 090 who had not yet successfully passed these courses by the end of the summer 2003 term moved into English 100 since we stopped offering 080 and 090 at the end of the summer 2003 semester.

The required changes to our program, if UTM was to continue offering course assistance to underprepared writers, actually became an opportunity to enhance the pedagogical foundation for the courses we offered, allowing us to move away from heavy emphasis on correction of students' mechanical errors, and paragraph and short essay writing, toward a focus on enhancing the students' writing processes and helping them to develop full-length, research-based essays. English 100 and 110 are loosely modeled on the pedagogy of David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky, authors of the 1986 composition course description *Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts: Theory and Method for a Reading and Writing Course*. In the words of Bartholomae and Petrosky:

There [is] no reason to prohibit students from doing serious work because they [can]not do it correctly. In a sense, all courses in the curriculum ask students to do what they cannot yet do well. [Therefore,] there [is] no good reason to take students who were not fluent readers and writers and consign them to trivial or mechanical work in the belief that it would somehow prepare them for a college education. It would make more sense, rather, to . . . provide the additional time and support they needed to work on reading and writing while they were, in fact, doing the kinds of reading and writing that characterize college study. (preface)

Further, as Mina Shaughnessy points out, too often in "remedial" writing courses, too much focus is placed on error correction, such that "'good writing' . . . means 'correct writing,' nothing more" (8). Consequently, the students placed in such courses often assume that the form of their words is

all that is important and that their words are devoid of meaningful content. At UTM we wanted to create a pedagogically sound writing program for underprepared students so that they could get the assistance they needed to be successful college writers while also learning to believe in the power and significance of their own words. Of course, this goal is shared by the entire first-year writing program at UTM.

Student Placement and Classroom Practice

All students entering UTM as first-year students now place into one of two possible composition tracks based on ACT scores and high school grades: (1) our traditional first-year track of English 111 and English 112 (2 semesters), or (2) our new track of English 100 and 110, then English 112 (3 semesters). English 112 has become the central course for successful completion of the UTM first-year writing requirement; all roads now lead to and through English 112 (whereas previously students in the developmental writing program completed first English 080 and 090 and then both English 111 and 112). Underprepared students entering English 100 now complete only three semesters of instruction rather than the previous four semesters some students received in the 080/090 program. In all of the 100-level composition courses, students must pass with a grade of C or higher; if they receive a lower grade, they are required to repeat the course until they earn a C. In other words, whether students move through English 111 to English 112, or through English 100 and 110 to English 112, they must earn a grade of C or higher in each of the courses. This decision as to how to evaluate a student's success in first-year writing was made by the Department and University long before the developmental writing task force was created. So students in English 100 and 110 are evaluated in the same manner as students in English 111 and 112. In terms of the number of sections offered, the 100/110 program is much smaller than the 111/112 program. In the fall semester, approximately 10 sections of English 100 are offered compared with 40 sections of 111. In the spring semester, approximately 8 sections of 110 are offered, allowing for some student attrition.

To determine the students' placement into English 100 or 111, the English Department and the University configured a stair-step cut-off point, on the basis of both ACT scores and cumulative high school grade point average (GPA) as follows:

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- Students with an ACT/English score of 19 or higher go into English 111.
- Students at or above ACT/English of 18 *and* a GPA of 2.5 go into English 111; below they enter English 100.
- Students at or above ACT/English of 17 *and* a GPA of 2.75 place into English 111; below into English 100.
- Students at an ACT/English of 16 or lower, regardless of GPA, go into English 100.

For second-language international students, the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) score determines their admission to UTM but not their placement into a first-year writing course. Students coming to Martin with TOEFL scores below the minimum admission score and thus needing additional English instruction can go through a private, on-campus language program that can help them enhance their facility with English and gain admission to UTM. Once international students gain UTM admission, either through an acceptable TOEFL score or successful completion of the six-level private language program, they have two options for first-year composition placement: they can simply register for the English 100/110/112 program, or they can take a placement test, administered by the Department of English, to see if they can place into the 111/112 program.

We have one final means of ensuring all students find the most appropriate courses to meet their writing needs, and that is to have students in all 100 and 111 classes write a brief in-class essay the first day of each semester, similar, perhaps, to an informal entrance exam. If English 111 instructors note significant weaknesses, they can recommend (but not compel) individual students to move into English 100; conversely, English 100 instructors can recommend that students whose writing is extremely proficient move into English 111.

As was the case in English 080 and 090, the class size in English 100 and 110 is smaller than in English 111 and 112, to provide students with additional attention from their instructors. While English 111 and 112 courses are kept to a maximum of 23 students, English 100 and 110 are both kept to a maximum of 18 students. One major difference between the English 080/090 and 100/110 courses is that while students in 080 and 090 were encouraged to visit the Department's Hortense C. Parrish Writing Center for additional assistance with their writing, English 100 and 110 were created as four-credit-hour courses, with three weekly classroom hours and one hour required weekly in the Writing Center. When the course was being designed

and we were anticipating running the gauntlet of necessary approvals, we deliberately set up the course on paper to include a weekly “writing lab” so that it would appear in the UTM course catalog in similar form to the descriptions of four-credit hour lower-division science and foreign language courses, which also include out-of-class instructional requirements. Our goal was to facilitate approval of the courses by presenting them in a format familiar to faculty across campus who would be voting on the courses in various committees and in Faculty Senate. However, no one involved in the design of the courses views the students’ required weekly hour in the Writing Center as a “remedial” task.

Another important change that has been implemented in the new courses is that now only faculty with graduate or terminal degrees are eligible to teach English 100 and 110, as has always been true for English 111 and 112 and all UTM college-level courses. Because all first-year composition courses at UTM are now taught by experienced faculty who have come to expect a high degree of creative and instructional autonomy in how they teach their courses, the faculty who seek to teach in the English 100/110 program seek similar autonomy. However, to ensure some consistency in the instruction students receive in all English 100 and 110 classes and in their Writing Center experience, we began the program by requiring all instructors to use designated writing textbooks and writing handbooks. To select appropriate college-level textbooks, the Department expanded the developmental task force to include faculty who have had specific training and experience implementing second-language and basic-writing pedagogies. As a result, for both English 100 and 110, the first textbooks focus on writing genres, literary and visual analysis, effective research, and the writing process, with mechanics instruction included only in appendices. Both current textbooks offer multiple readings, from personal narratives to argument essays, on complex social issues. Additionally, while the courses’ primary focus is on writing, we also hope that students’ reading facility, individual meaning making, and ability to interact in depth with others’ words will be enhanced. Therefore, students also read and thoughtfully interact with at least one assigned book-length fiction or non-fiction text each semester.

After the approval process was completed for English 100 and 110 and we began considering specific logistical concerns, such as textbook choices, we generally agreed on a theme of literacy for English 100. In that context, we began by asking all instructors to assign Rose’s *Lives on the Boundary* as their book-length reading selection for fall 2003. We now provide for some flexibility with assigned readings by making available a list of reading texts

for 100 and a separate list for 110, from which instructors can make selections. Since the first semester of the program, additional reading texts have been offered as acceptable alternatives or additions to *Lives on the Boundary*, such as Ron Suskind's *A Hope in the Unseen* and Stephen King's *On Writing*. Currently, all faculty teaching English 100 and/or 110 together decide what writing textbooks and reading texts are added to the two course lists, which we review each semester.

Although English 100 and 110 instructors are required to use certain textbooks, they have great flexibility with regard to the actual writing tasks assigned, though all major assignments are essays now as contrasted with the paragraphs or short essays which were the primary types of assignments in the previous developmental program. In both courses, by the end of the semester, it is expected that students will produce a minimum of 15-20 typed, double-spaced pages of college-level written text, in Standard Edited English, through multiple and diverse writing assignments ranging from personal narratives to literary analyses, formal persuasive letters, and in-depth research essays. Further, although all instructors determine a final course evaluation for each student in the form of a letter grade, they have autonomy on how they evaluate the work students produce throughout the semester. For example, instructors decide whether to evaluate each piece of writing individually after a revision process, or whether to evaluate a portfolio of writing completed during the course and submitted at the end of the term. Neither English 100 nor 110 requires instructors to give the grammar and short essay final exit exams that had previously been required in English 080 and 090. Students in Tennessee four-year institutions are required to meet during the final exam period, but as in all English Department courses, the English 100/110 instructors determine for themselves the kind of final evaluative tasks they will ask their students to complete.

English 112 is designed to specifically assist UTM students in developing effective strategies for interacting with texts, whether for literary analysis or non-literary research. And while most English 110 instructors engage students in effective research to prepare them for the research they will be doing in English 112, some instructors already begin teaching effective research writing in English 100.

Whatever is taught to students in the classroom is enhanced by the students' weekly visits to the Writing Center, which we will now describe. The overall goal for the two-course program is that upon completion, students will be well prepared not only for the writing required of them in English 112, but for any writing task assigned to them as college students.

Required Writing Center Visitation

The Department of English Writing Center at UTM has traditionally been a resource available to all students across campus (from undergraduate to graduate and from discipline to discipline), and the Center continues this role in addition to its new responsibilities to the English 100 and 110 students. The Writing Center is staffed by both writing tutors with degrees—some tenured faculty, some with master's degrees in English—and peer tutors, undergraduate students who are majoring in English or some other discipline. The heart of the Writing Center is one-on-one tutoring. In addition to offering assistance with essay generation and research and writing skills, the Center has five computers available for student use and for computer workshops as well as for individual computer-assisted tutoring. The Center also offers an online writing lab (OWL) and a grammar hotline, and twice weekly offers workshops open to all UTM students. Students who speak English as a second language can get help at the Center's Talk Time, an opportunity for students to practice their conversational skills in a comfortable environment led by a Writing Center peer tutor.

The Writing Center averaged approximately 2,000 student visits each semester during the five years leading up to the implementation of English 100 and 110, with 95% of those visits being student-initiated, not formal referrals from faculty. With the addition of the English 100/110 series in fall 2003, the number of student visits increased significantly, and spring 2004 saw over 3,300 student visits. There is no question that implementation of this new support role of the Writing Center has had an effect on the Center's overall operation, especially on the budget, student tutoring, writing workshops, and Center administration, as well as on the community of campus writers.

The budget was the first major area of impact. At the beginning of the fiscal year of implementation, the Writing Center had the same budget as the year before. Since much of the budget was used during the fall semester (the first semester), we had to cut staffing hours for the spring semester, even though student usage was not decreasing, making this a difficult time for the Writing Center. The staff was told of the budget woes and asked to essentially stay with the program until more money was allocated. As the spring semester began, students had to wait as long as an hour for help, and tutors left their shifts exhausted. By mid-semester, the UTM administration saw the need for more funding, and the Center added staff and increased the number of tutors working each shift. In addition, the Center ensured

that two degreed assistants were assigned for each Writing Center shift (previously we had assigned only one degreed assistant). Nevertheless, a significant portion of the Center's operating budget still comes from "soft" grant funding from around the university rather than from "hard funds" as part of the regular University budget, despite the fact that every semester now brings increasing numbers of UTM students who are required to visit the Center on a weekly basis. As a result, meeting the needs of all students with the resources available is a continual challenge.

Within the Center itself, tutoring for students in English 100 and 110 became the first major area of impact as tutors were bombarded by the number of students regularly using the Center. As one staff member said, "The most positive impact of English 100 and 110 on the Writing Center is the number of students using the Center's services." The same staff member added, "The most negative impact of English 100 and 110 on the Writing Center is the number of students using the Center's services." This paradox was experienced most in the one-on-one tutoring. At first, while some autonomous work time was permitted during the weekly Writing Center visits, the English 100/110 students were expected to meet individually with a tutor for the better part of their hour. However, the realities of increasing student demand coupled with limited resources forced a modification of the requirement, and now students are required to spend at least fifteen minutes of their weekly Writing Center hour with a tutor. Regardless of this modification, students are expected to take their ideas for papers and/or drafts-in-progress to the Writing Center at each visit. How students and tutors use the time varies—from assistance using computers for research and writing, to brainstorming ideas for papers, helping with content development, organization, style, or mechanics, and implementing correct in-text citation and documentation of sources. Tutors also provide assistance with writing in response to assigned readings, such as help with summarizing, analyzing a writer's argument or literary style, or quoting or paraphrasing correctly. Some faculty give students specific tasks to complete during their weekly Writing Center visit while others want students to use the time on the specific areas of writing with which they need the most help. Thus, even though there is consistency in the overall objectives and goals of the program, there is diversity in Writing Center activities assigned by different English 100 and 110 teachers.

On the other hand, Writing Center staff members have observed that one of the best results of the 100 and 110 program is their ability to establish rapport with students and track their progress. Many of these students come

at about the same time each week—by their choice—and thus tutors are privileged to see the students' progress. Also, there is a strong sense among the tutors that by seeing and helping more students early in their university careers, there will eventually be more confident and effective writers across campus. Tutors are also predicting a domino effect of this program as students who are required to come to the Center tell their friends about the benefits of getting extra help with writing. In addition, they expect that many of the 100 and 110 students will continue to use the Writing Center long after they fulfill the UTM first-year writing requirement.

Probably the most evident change in the Center as a result of English 100 and 110 is the need for paperwork because students are *required* to visit the Center weekly in order to successfully pass each course. Until the program was implemented, tutors documented student visits only for referred students. Now there is a much more formal and consistent format for recording the Writing Center visit—regardless of its purpose.

An additional area of impact from the English 100/110 program is the writing workshops in fall 2003 since many faculty allow attendance at a workshop to substitute for an individual Writing Center visit. The Center expanded the workshops from once to twice a week last fall. The workshops cover all aspects of writing, from brainstorming and revising, to avoiding plagiarism and using and citing sources correctly, to writing style and mechanics. One workshop each semester also provides a forum for students, including students in English 100 and 110, to read their writing to a public audience beyond instructors and Writing Center staff. In addition, one workshop each year is devoted to allowing international students to read literary texts from their native countries—first in their native language and then translated into English. Another workshop provides a venue for students to read the literature produced by American ethnic minority poets and authors. These workshops in which students are the central actors are often the best attended. Online workshops may be integrated into the English 100/110 program in the future, as one possible means of offering students the required individual assistance despite limited financial resources and personnel.

Finally, Writing Center administration has been significantly impacted by English 100 and 110. The two Writing Center co-directors have spent more time than ever before in seeking budgetary support. Working with overworked staff, specifically in the area of tutoring, has been a major responsibility—one that with increased funding will no longer be an issue. Identifying peak usage hours in order to continue offering a drop-in policy

for students while providing adequate staffing for the required program is an ongoing challenge. The number of staff meetings and the amount of training for tutors have already been increased. One of the rewards of coordinating the Writing Center with the 100/110 program has been the increase in dialogue among faculty, Writing Center tutors, and directors. As the program evolves, it will be increasingly important for the Writing Center staff, the English 100/110 faculty, and the university administration to work together to create an environment in the Center where the campus community of writers can learn, produce, and flourish.

PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF THE NEW PROGRAM

One of the greatest benefits of designing the English 100/110 program is that the many discussions about program writing requirements and content have helped to create more involvement and interest from a broader range of faculty members within the Department. The support of the Department chair has also contributed positively to the general success of these courses; the chair is committed to meeting the needs of underprepared students with these intensive college-level courses, and she has worked carefully to limit class size, offer interested teachers the opportunity to teach in the new sequence, and secure funding for the Writing Center component. Since we first began discussing the possibilities for a college-level writing program for underprepared students, more faculty in the Department of English have become better informed about all English composition courses; more faculty have also expressed interest in teaching English 100 and English 110 than had previously done so for English 080 and 090.

As instructors ourselves in the program, we have been encouraged by the numbers of students placed into English 100 who have been highly dedicated to their coursework and ready to meet the challenges they face. These students' work ethic and success contradict those who argue that "underprepared" implies unmotivated or unable. For example, those of us implementing writing portfolios in our classes have been pleased to see the quality and size of the students' portfolios; by the end of the semester, the students, in some cases, have completed up to nine essays (all typed and revised) along with numerous other pieces of thoughtful work. We have seen our students make great progress and gain more confidence in their own abilities and words. The students who succeed in English 100 have met the additional challenges in English 110, and by the end of the program, they

are indeed ready for English 112. In fact, Margrethe Ahlschwede, a long-time faculty member teaching English 112 with several students who have been the first to progress through English 100 and 110, has noticed observable differences between these students and students from English 111 (or students repeating English 112). “They know how to do school,” she enthusiastically reports. “They have been taught well by the English 100 and 110 instructors, and it shows in their class participation and work.” Student evaluations of the two courses thus far also reflect satisfaction with the courses.

English 100 and 110 instructors note a range of student responses to the required weekly Writing Center visit. Some report noteworthy success in ensuring the majority of students meet the weekly requirement. Their students are increasingly aware of the Writing Center component of the class and often go more than the one hour required each week.

Nevertheless, the weekly Writing Center visit, required to fulfill the parameters of a four-credit hour course, causes confusion if not frustration for some students. So one area that needs our immediate and future attention is increasing the numbers of students who consistently attend the Writing Center. One obstacle some instructors have faced is getting students to realize that working weekly with a tutor on a paper draft is a course requirement and not simply a suggestion. Part of the confusion might arise because, unlike the UTM science or math courses that require labs, where the course is a three-credit hour class with a separate one-credit-hour lab (and students register for two distinct classes), English 100 and 110 are set up as four-credit-hour courses, with flexible scheduling as long as students visit the Center for one hour each week. Despite repeated reminders by all instructors about the importance of the required visit to the Writing Center throughout the drafting and rewriting process, for too many students Writing Center absenteeism is high. But with many of these students, class absenteeism is also high, accounting for a number of students not passing the courses on their first attempt. Others who take drafts of their work to the Writing Center weekly still insist that the decision to work on their writing with a tutor, outside of in-class instruction, should be theirs alone and not a course requirement, despite their understanding that English 100 and 110 are four-credit-hour classes, which means students must fulfill four hours of instruction each week.

Unfortunately, the Center’s limited resources may also be a factor in absenteeism, since the increased demand without an equivalent increase in tutorial staffing has resulted in many “heavy use” days when students have to wait significant amounts of time for a tutor to become available.

Students, most of whom have other family, school, or work obligations, get frustrated and leave, but they don't return to make up the time. The Center has implemented an appointment schedule to help relieve the pressure on heavy use periods, but so far this has only minimally relieved the problem of absenteeism. Even assigning specific tasks students must complete in the Writing Center does not necessarily result in improved attendance. At this point, getting students to see active engagement in the Writing Center as an integral part of the course as a whole is a work in progress.

Another area requiring close attention is dealing with the special needs of second-language English speakers. As a rule, second-language students work very hard to maintain passing grades in English 100 and 110. However, some faculty insist that these students would benefit from greater in-class emphasis on grammar and sentence structure, which made up a large component of the former English 080/090 program. In the current program, while most faculty members offer periodic in-class instruction about mechanics, many students now complete grammar and syntax work primarily on their own in the Writing Center. Some faculty members are concerned that this practice puts the work too far outside of their supervision. Other instructors note that the college-level reading challenges also have been difficult for some of the second-language students to meet. For example, the program-wide requirement to assign Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary* in English 100 caused a number of second-language students particular difficulty. These students had trouble understanding Rose's reflective literacy narrative, especially when he moves suddenly from a particular narrative to a complex analysis of a specific observation about literacy. Rose's language also caused frustration for many students, both second-language and native English speakers. Such students required additional help in individual teacher conferences and during the required Writing Center hour in order not to fall behind with the assigned reading. The idea of offering some sections of English 100 and 110 exclusively for second-language students has been raised, but currently UTM simply does not have a substantial enough base of international students to warrant offering ESL-exclusive sections of English 100 or 110.

Despite occasional problems, we have found that many of the non-traditional students enrolled in English 100 and 110 have been highly committed to making their late entry or return to college both successful and personally fulfilling. Against the common stereotypes of "remedial" students who don't think or communicate well, these students have prepared thoughtful written texts that in many cases have been astounding in

their depth of critical thought and, in the case of narratives, their powerful honesty. For example, several students have taken the risk of writing honest personal narratives about experiences of abuse. One student in English 100 was an ex-convict who had transformed his life and was committed to continued improvement through education. He wrote a powerful research essay about the lack of voting rights for citizens with criminal records and the racist implications of keeping the vote away from those who have supposedly paid their debts to society.

Our goal for English 100 and 110 is the same as it is for students taking English 111 and 112—to increase students’ resources for effective written communication with any audience and for any purpose they might encounter as college students and beyond, in addition to enhancing their confidence as writers and their belief in the power of their own words. Our means of meeting this goal for students in English 100 and 110 is to accomplish in two semesters what the course in the other strand of first-year composition, English 111, accomplishes in one. When this article was drafted, we had not yet had a contingent of students complete the full 3-semester cycle of 100, 110, and 112. Recently, however, the second year of the program came to an end, though we have not yet had an opportunity to fully evaluate the success of our new two-semester program in any detail. Over the next year, we will be better able to assess our progress and to determine statistically if student performance in the two writing course tracks is comparable, or if differences in ultimate performance are significant. Any differences we identify will allow us to discuss the kinds of program-wide changes we will need to make in order to more closely reach the desired outcome for students who place in the English 100 and 110 program.

As is always true, statistics must be interpreted. In this case, we will have to weigh the presence or lack of a statistical difference in the performance of these two groups of students against some confounding variables:

- As with students completing English 080 and 090 previously, students successfully passing English 100 and 110 who then move into English 112 will have been retained by the University. That is, they will have successfully completed their first year of college and will be entering their second year, which of course we celebrate. However, their performance, especially of students taking English 112 during spring semester of their second year, will be compared with students completing the entire “first-year” writing requirement as first-year college students. That is, we will be attempting

to compare the success of true first-year students completing the first-year writing program with students who may be well into their sophomore college year when they complete the “first-year” program.

- Although all sections of English 112 require approximately the same amount of work from students, there are differences across sections. Some faculty members teach English 112 using a theme-based approach; others rely on the Department's standard textbook and reader. Some are highly involved in their students' writing processes, responding to several drafts of each assignment; others are less directly involved. Some respond to drafts but only evaluate students' writing in portfolios at the end of the semester; others evaluate each individual paper students write. And so on. Such differences might diminish in importance if students were randomly assigned to specific composition classes, but they are not. Students at UTM register for their own courses online, so they may choose to take English 112 from a teacher with whom they have had success in English 100 and/or English 110. That is, we will be attempting to make cross-program generalizations about student success in a program that is taught with some diversity (although within Department-established parameters).

- Despite a recent increase in the minimum ACT score required for UTM admission, the University continues to admit students with comparatively low SAT/ACT English sub-scores who especially struggle with the college-level work of English 100 and 110. UTM also continues to admit second-language immigrant and international students with significant weaknesses in both English writing skills and reading comprehension. These students may have passed the TOEFL with acceptable scores and/or have completed a pre-college language program on campus. Nevertheless, they still have difficulty with both oral and written English language skills beyond those of native English speakers who place into English 100 and 110. That is, our efforts to carefully reflect on the success of students in the 100/110 program are complicated by a wide range of differences in ability with and confidence in writing.

- A related point is that SAT/ACT scores or high school grades do not necessarily identify all “underprepared” writers. There are quite likely students in English 111 who might benefit from increased assistance with writing and reading but who may not be identified by

their instructors and/or who cannot be required to move into the 100/110 program even when their struggles become apparent.

- Students in English 100 and 110 have an additional curricular requirement beyond what is required of students in English 111 and 112, which is the weekly Writing Center hour. The increased demands on the Writing Center space and staff, without equivalent increases in resources, stretch the ability of tutors to meet the needs of all the students they serve, especially the 100/110 students who are required to visit the Writing Center. One statistic that we do have from this second year of the program is that during the spring 2005 semester, the Writing Center recorded 4,800 student visits (over double the average number of visits each semester before the program was implemented). The students' positive or negative experiences in the Writing Center can have a direct impact on their ultimate success in either English 100 or 110, a curricular variable that does not exist for students on the 111/112 path.

As we assess the performance of students in English 112, we must be prepared to revise English 100 and 110, both program-wide and as individual instructors: with new texts and assignments, new collaborations with the Writing Center, new instruction methods, and new forms of evaluation. And we have already begun to expand by adding one more reading text option to the English 100 list in spring 2004, with plans to add to the English 110 reading list in fall 2005. We have also expanded the writing textbook options for English 110, including a textbook focused entirely on effective research writing. So faculty now have greater options for how they choose to teach their 100/110 sections than they had when the program began two years ago. The faculty and Writing Center staff continue to meet regularly, at least once each semester, to assess how the program is working and what changes we might wish to implement to strengthen the effectiveness of the courses for our students. One activity still missing from formal faculty interaction is any kind of discussion about the strengths and struggles evident in specific student papers, although such discussion does take place individually between instructors. Perhaps we can integrate faculty-wide discussion of specific examples of student-generated texts into future English 100/110 faculty and Writing Center staff meetings. On the other hand, we have created an English 100/110 notebook that is available to all Department faculty. All English 100/110 instructors are invited to contribute to the notebook prompts for reading response tasks, essay assignments, Writing

Center assignments, and so on, that have been successful in their classes, so that other instructors can borrow or adapt them for use in their own sections of the courses. The goal is not to create uniformity of writing assignments throughout the 100/110 program, but to offer faculty additional resources for engaging students in the act of writing.

We look forward to the coming year when we can begin to analyze the data from our first two years and determine just how well students on the English 100/110/112 path have fared compared with the students on the 111/112 path. We anticipate a good level of success and look forward to continued improvement of the program to ensure even greater success in the future.

CONCLUDING COMMENTARY

Much has been written about the race and class implications of eliminating remedial or developmental courses in reading, composition, and mathematics from four-year colleges and universities. Robert K. Fullinwider points out that it was “racial tensions . . . and considerable political pressure” that led to the 1970s open admissions policies and remediation programs for the many underprepared students who began entering the CUNY schools. Likewise it has been ongoing political pressure, virtually since CUNY began its open admissions policies, in addition to cost considerations, that have led to the decision to bar underprepared students from CUNY’s four-year institutions until they demonstrate skill competency on the required exams (Fullinwider). In 1971, then U.S. Vice President Spiro Agnew lamented that directly because of open admissions, CUNY would be granting “100,000 devalued diplomas” (Crain). More recently, however, Charlie Roberts, president of Jackson State Community College in Tennessee remarked that eliminating remedial or developmental courses from Tennessee four-year institutions will have only a negative impact, making Board of Regents schools “an exclusive system” and having a “devastating effect on minority populations” attending four-year public colleges and universities (Cass).

In a thought-provoking observation about preparatory coursework and the presence on American college campuses of students who have been labeled as underprepared, Rose argues that “there will probably *always* be . . . students who do not meet some standard” for a variety of reasons. He points out that because of pressures on university administrations to make higher education accessible to students from a broad range of backgrounds,

constant evolution in disciplines and in society, and ever-changing definitions of what it means to be educated, “there will always be a percentage of students who will be tagged substandard” (“Language” 541). There will always be those who want to keep such students out of four-year higher education institutions. But at the same time, “there are too many economic, political, and ethical drives in American culture to restrict higher education to a select minority,” however that minority might be constructed (“Language” 541).

The debate about who belongs at the university and who does not has existed since long before open admissions. Regardless of what boundaries state legislators or higher institution governing boards currently set for admission to public four-year institutions, and what qualifications or standards are used to determine admission at any given time, there will always be students needing some additional coursework, in one area or another, in order to fulfill graduation requirements. We want to offer what courses we can within the academic and budgetary parameters set by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. We agree with the University of Cincinnati’s Senior Vice President and Provost for Baccalaureate and Graduate Education that “[a]ssisting underprepared students is a core function of higher education” (“State Plan”). Crain adds that “[o]pen admissions demonstrated that when people are given opportunities, they often achieve stunning success,” and we have seen this success achieved by students here at the University of Tennessee at Martin. Our hope and expectation is that by providing underprepared students with college-level work in reading and writing rather than a more conventionally “remedial” approach, the UTM pre-first-year college-level composition program will offer these students the opportunity to achieve the academic, personal, and professional success they seek.

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