The Accelerated Learning Program: Throwing Open the Gates

Peter Adams, Sarah Gearhart, Robert Miller, and Anne Roberts

ABSTRACT: This article reports on the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP), a new model of basic writing that has produced dramatic successes for the basic writing program at the Community College of Baltimore County. Borrowing from mainstreaming programs, studio courses, fast track programs, and learning communities, ALP, for four consecutive semesters, has doubled the number of basic writers who succeed in passing first-year composition, has cut the attrition rate for these students in half, has allowed them to accomplish this in half the time, and has done it all at slightly less cost per successful student than traditional basic writing courses.

KEYWORDS: acceleration; basic writing; mainstreaming; developmental writing; developmental education

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 2001, Mary Soliday, then at CUNY's City College, observed that in the early days of open admissions at the City University of New York, two groups favored basic writing courses for quite different reasons. The first group saw such courses as paths to success, courses that would help students who were weak in writing to conform to the conventions of the academy. The second group supported basic writing for quite a different reason, seeing it as a gate to keep unqualified students out of college-level courses and, thereby, maintain standards in those courses ("Ideologies" 57-58). Bruce Horner and Min-Zhan Lu have referred to these odd bedfellows as "the binary of political activism and academic excellence" (*Representing* 14).

Peter Adams, *Professor of English at Community College of Baltimore County, has taught developmental writing there for more than thirty years. But for his involvement in the Accelerated Learning Program, he would have retired several years ago. He is former chair of the Conference on Basic Writing and has published three writing texts.* **Sarah Gearhart** *is an Instructor in the English Department at CCBC Essex. In her previous lives, she has been a ghostwriter, bookseller, and editor.* **Robert Miller** *is an Assistant Professor of English at Community College of Baltimore County. He has taught at City College of San Francisco, Arizona State University, and several other schools. He has also taught overseas, in the former Yugoslavia, as a Fulbright Lecturer.* **Anne Loomis Roberts** *is an Assistant Professor of English at Community College of Baltimore County. She has taught writing and classical languages for the past fifteen years, spanning nearly all the grades from elementary school to college.*

In the 1990s, at what was then Essex Community College and is now the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC), Peter Adams, then coordinator of the writing program, worried about the program. He recognized that an effective basic writing program might serve as a gate for students until they were ready to succeed in first-year composition and a path to college success as soon as they were ready. But he wanted to make sure that these developmental courses were more path than gate, leading students to success rather than barring them from it.

In Adams's first attempt to evaluate the program, he used data he had been compiling on an Apple IIe computer for four years. He had entered the placement results and grades in every writing course for students assessed since Fall of 1988. Using the 863 students who took the upper-level developmental writing course, ENGL 052, in academic year 1988-1989 as the cohort he would study, Adams calculated the pass rate for ENGL 052 as well as the pass rate for students who passed that course and took first-year composition (ENGL 101) within four years. Charts 1 and 2 display these data.
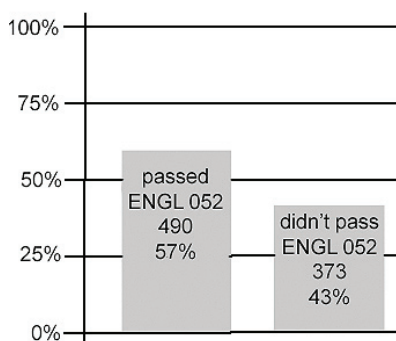

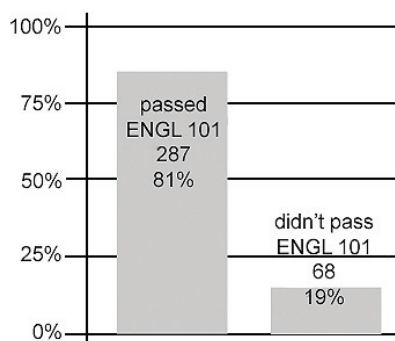**Chart 1.** Success Rates for Students Who Took ENGL 052 in 1988-1989

Chart 2. Success Rates for Students Who Took ENGL 101 after Passing ENGL 052 in 1988-1989

The pass rate of 57% in the developmental course didn't look too bad, and the whopping 81% pass rate in ENGL 101 was even higher than the rate for students placed directly into the college-level course. At first glance, it appeared that our basic writing course was doing a good job. In fact, developmental programs in writing, reading, and math have often pointed to such data as evidence that traditional approaches are working. As reassuring as these data looked, however, Adams worried that somehow they didn't tell the whole story, and when he undertook a more detailed, longitudinal study, he learned that his worry was justified.

Looking at success rates for one course at a time masks the true picture. When Adams looked at the longitudinal experience of students who attempted ENGL 052 and ENGL 101, he discovered an alarming situation. Two-thirds of the students who attempted ENGL 052 never passed ENGL 101. The problem was not that basic writers were attempting first-year composition and failing; the problem was that they were giving up before they ever reached that course, a fact hidden when he had simply looked at the pass rates for the small number of students who did make it into regular composition.

Chart 3 presents the number and percentage of students who passed each milestone during the four years from 1988 to 1992.
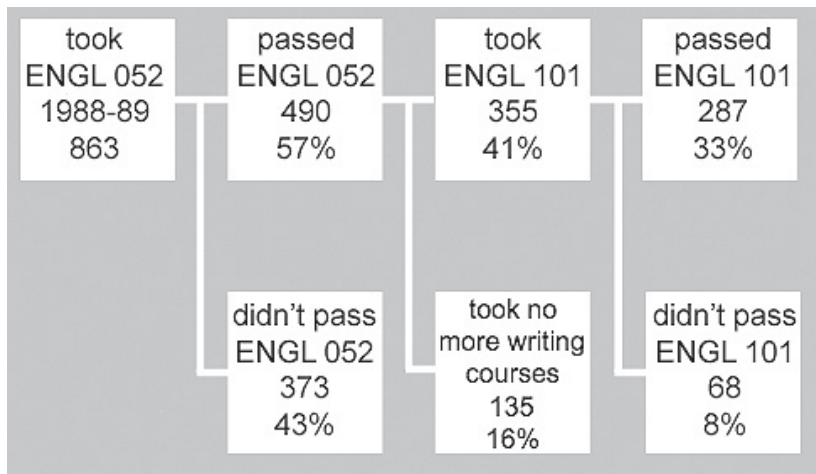
took ENGL 052 1988-89 863	passed ENGL 052 490 57%	took ENGL 101 355 41%	passed ENGL 101 287 33%
	didn't pass ENGL 052 373 43%	took no more writing courses 135 16%	didn't pass ENGL 101 68 8%

Chart 3. Longitudinal Data on Students Who Took ENGL 052 in 1988-1989

The students represented in Chart 3, like those in Charts 1 and 2, were followed for four years. When we say 57% passed ENGL 052, we mean they passed within four years, not necessarily the first time they attempted the course. A significant number took the course more than once before passing. When we say 43% didn't pass ENGL 052, we mean they didn't pass within four years; many of them attempted the course more than once.

As Chart 3 reveals, instead of the 81% success rate that we saw in Chart 2, only about a third of students who began in ENGL 052 succeeded in passing ENGL 101. Our basic writing course was a path to success for only one-third of the students enrolled; for the other two-thirds, it appears to have been a locked gate.

We have come to conceptualize the situation represented in this chart as a pipeline that students must pass through to succeed. And we have concluded that the longer the pipeline, the more likely there will be "leakage" from it—in other words, the more likely students will drop out before passing first-year composition. Because the data base we compiled in the early 1990s included data only for writing courses, we had no way of knowing whether these students dropped out of the college altogether, but we did know when they stopped taking writing courses. Further, since they could not achieve any degree or certificate at the college without passing ENGL 101, we knew that they didn't achieve any credential. Although our original intention in collecting these statistics was to help us enforce our placement system, we soon learned that it also helped us evaluate our writing program by allowing us to calculate the percentage of students who succeeded in passing each milestone in the program.

Then, in Fall of 1992, it became useful in another way. At that time, Peter Adams was chairing the Conference on Basic Writing (CBW), which led to his organizing the fourth national conference on basic writing, to be held at the University of Maryland in October of 1992. Things were moving along smoothly; David Bartholomae had agreed to give the keynote address, registrations were rolling in, and it looked like our carefully crafted budget was going to be adequate. And then, several weeks before the conference, Adams realized that he had a serious problem. Although the conference officially began on Friday morning, the organizers had planned an optional dinner on Thursday evening for those who arrived early . . . and more than a hundred people had signed up for that dinner. But we had not arranged nor budgeted for a dinner speaker.

Having already committed every cent in the budget, Adams realized that he would have to speak at the dinner since he couldn't afford to pay an outside speaker. He decided to report on the data his college had been collecting and analyzing on its basic writing students. The only problem was that the data were so discouraging that it hardly seemed appropriate for the opening session at a national basic writing conference.

For several days, Adams tried to think of a positive spin he could put on these data . . . without success. Finally, he fixed on the idea of suggesting some positive action basic writing instructors could take in response to the discouraging implications of the data. What would happen, Adams asked, if instead of isolating basic writers in developmental courses, we could mainstream them directly into first-year composition, while also providing appropriate support to help them succeed?

Most of Adams's talk that Thursday night was about how using a database to evaluate his college's writing program had revealed quite low success rates for the developmental program; only the last ten minutes or so were devoted to his very tentative idea that the success rate for basic writers might improve if they were "mainstreamed" into first-year composition. The lengthy and heated discussion that followed this talk was completely focused on the "mainstreaming" idea. Finally, with most of the audience still suffering from jet lag, the conference participants more or less agreed to disagree, and adjourned for the evening.

Adams knew the title of David Bartholomae's keynote address scheduled for the next morning, "The Tidy House: Basic Writing in the American Curriculum," but he had no idea what Bartholomae was actually going to talk about. As he sat in the audience listening, an odd feeling crept over him. He heard Bartholomae suggest that

> . . . in the name of sympathy and empowerment, we have once again 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. ("Tidy House" 18)

David Bartholomae, starting from a very different place, was arriving at a conclusion similar to the one suggested by Adams the evening before. At that point, Bartholomae and Adams were probably the only two people in the room who didn't think this coincidence had been carefully planned. The fact that articles representing their two talks ended up next to each other in the Spring 1993 issue of the *Journal of Basic Writing* (Bartholomae, "Tidy House"; Adams, "Basic Writing Reconsidered") only heightened everyone's assumption that they had conspired to question the essential nature of basic writing at a conference on basic writing. They hadn't, as they both insist to this day, despite the fact that few have ever believed them.

In the years since that 1992 conference, a number of institutions have adopted various versions of the mainstreaming approach that was suggested at the conference. Arizona State University, with leadership from Greg Glau, developed the well-known "stretch" model, which allows developmental students to be mainstreamed directly into first-year composition, but into a version that is "stretched out" over two semesters ("*Stretch* at 10"). Quinnipiac University pioneered the "intensive" model, which has basic writers take a version of first-year composition that meets five hours a week instead of three

(Segall 38-47). A few years later, Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson devised the "studio" approach at the University of South Carolina. In this model, students in first-year composition and sometimes other writing courses can also sign up for a one-hour-per-week studio section. There they meet with students from other classes to talk about "essays in progress" (6-14).

Many other schools developed variations on these approaches in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Our college was not one of these. Instead we endured a turbulent dozen or so years as three independent colleges were merged into one mega-college: the Community College of Baltimore County. In the process, fierce battles were fought, one chancellor received a vote of no confidence, tenure was abolished, and many faculty members devoted much of their energy to "aligning" the programs, courses, and policies of the three schools that had merged. By 2005, the worst of these struggles were over, and faculty were ready to return to more productive work. In the Fall of 2006, the English Department of the newly merged Community College of Baltimore County turned to the question of the low success rates in our basic writing courses.

In the meantime, many others were noticing the very low success rates for developmental programs nationwide. In a national study, Tom Bailey of the Community College Research Center at Columbia University, found similarly alarming leakage in all developmental courses, including reading and math:

> How many students complete the sequences of developmental courses to which they are referred? The first conclusion to note is that many simply never enroll in developmental classes in the first place. In the Achieving the Dream sample, 21 percent of all students referred to developmental math education and 33 percent of students referred to developmental reading do not enroll in any developmental course within three years.
>
> Of those students referred to remediation, how many actually complete their full developmental sequences? Within three years of their initial assessment, about 42 percent of those referred to developmental reading in the Achieving the Dream sample complete their full sequence, but this accounts for two-thirds of those who actually *enroll* in at least one developmental reading course. These numbers are worse for math—only 31 percent of those referred to developmental math complete their sequence. (4-5)

In "Outcomes of Remediation," Hunter Boylan and Patrick Saxon have observed that "[a]n unknown number but perhaps as many as 40% of those taking remedial courses do not complete the courses, and consequently, do not complete remediation within one year." Reviewing large-scale studies from Minnesota, Maryland, and Texas, Boylan and Saxon conclude that "[t]he results of all these studies were fairly consistent. In summary, about 80% of those who completed remediation with a C or better passed their first college-level course in English or mathematics." Just as we at Essex Community College discovered when we began to look at longitudinal data, success rates for individual courses conceal a serious problem, for "[i]t should be noted . . . that not all of those who pass remedial courses actually took college-level courses in comparable subject areas. An Illinois study, for instance, reported that only 64% of those who completed remedial English and reading in the Fall of 1996 actually completed their first college-level courses in those subjects within a year."

So the problem we had discovered on the local level in 1992 appears to mirror similar problems nationally: too many students simply leak out of the pipeline of the required writing sequence.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACCELERATED LEARNING PROGRAM

At an English Department meeting in January of 2007, several CCBC faculty members proposed that we pilot some form of mainstreaming to see if we could improve the success rates of our basic writing students. After considering several different models, we settled on what we now call the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) as having the greatest potential. While we were not among the pioneering schools that developed mainstreaming approaches in the 1990s, we have benefited greatly from those programs. ALP has borrowed the best features of existing mainstreaming approaches, added some features from studios and learning communities, and developed several new features of our own.

Of course, the program we eventually developed reflected the realities of our existing approach to teaching writing. The writing sequence at CCBC includes two levels of basic writing and two levels of college composition. To graduate, students must pass any required basic writing courses and then pass two semesters of college composition, both of which are writing courses. Only the higher-level college composition course satisfies the composition graduation requirement when students transfer to most four-year schools.

Here's how ALP works. The program is available, on a voluntary basis, to all students whose placement indicates they need our upper-level basic writing course. Placement is determined at CCBC by the Accuplacer exam. Students may retest once and may also appeal by a writing sample. In addition, all sections of writing courses require students to write a diagnostic essay the first week of classes; when this essay indicates students should be in a different level course, they are advised, but not required, to move to that course.

A developmental student who volunteers for ALP registers directly for a designated section of ENGL 101, where he or she joins seven other developmental students and twelve students whose placement is ENGL 101. Apart from the inclusion of the eight ALP students, this is a regular, three-credit section of ENGL 101, meeting three hours a week for one semester. We think the fact that the basic writers are in a class with twelve students who are stronger writers, and perhaps more accomplished students, is an important feature of ALP because these 101-level students frequently serve as role models for the basic writers.

Equally important, we avoid the sometimes stigmatizing and often demoralizing effects of segregating basic writers into sections designated as just for them by fully integrating them into a college-level course and then providing additional support in the form of a second course. The eight developmental students in every ALP section of ENGL 101 also take what we call a companion course with the same instructor who teaches them in ENGL 101. In Maryland, state regulations bar the awarding of credit toward graduation for "remedial" courses; since this companion course is currently conceived of as a basic writing course (remedial, by the state's terminology), students may not receive credit for it. The companion course meets for three hours a week for one semester. In this class, which meets immediately after the 101 section, the instructor provides additional support to help the students succeed in composition. The class may begin with questions that arose in the earlier class. Other typical activities include brainstorming for the next essay in 101, reviewing drafts of a paper, or discussing common problems in finding a topic to write about. Frequently, instructors ask students to write short papers that will serve as scaffolding for the next essay or work with them on grammar or punctuation problems common to the group.

Gaining Administrative Support

After the English Department agreed it wanted to pilot ALP, meetings were set up with the Dean of Developmental Education and the Vice President

for Instruction. At first, the Vice President declared the college simply could not afford to fund classes with only eight students, but a last-minute compromise was suggested: faculty could teach the companion course that met three hours a week with only eight students for two credits of load instead of three. The Vice President agreed, reluctantly. But would the faculty?

As it turns out, they did. After all, the companion course would have only eight students, and, while it would meet three hours a week, it would not really require a separate preparation. It's more like a workshop for the ENGL 101 class. Most importantly, as faculty began teaching the course, they found that ALP was often the most rewarding teaching they had ever done. As Sandra Grady, one of the earliest ALP instructors declared at the end of the first semester, "That was the best teaching experience I've ever had," and Professor Grady has been teaching more than thirty years. All of us who have taught ALP courses have found having a class small enough so that we can get to know each student and pay attention to their individual needs provides a kind of satisfaction that is rarely possible with classes of twenty or more. Peter Adams, Robert Miller, and Anne Roberts, co-authors of this article, began teaching in that first semester, and Sarah Gearhart joined us in the second semester.

RESULTS

As of the summer of 2009, the Community College of Baltimore County has offered thirty sections of ALP over two years to almost 240 students. The results, while preliminary, are extremely encouraging.

Chart 4 displays the results for a comparison group of students who took the *traditional* upper-level basic writing course in Fall of 2007. The data represent the results at the end of the Spring semester of 2009, so all of these students have had four semesters to pass their writing courses. Note that 21% of the original group have never passed ENGL 052. While it looks as though this group of students "failed" the course, in fact, many of them didn't actually "fail." For a variety of reasons, they simply gave up and stopped coming to class. Some became discouraged; others became overwhelmed. For some, events outside school demanded too much of them; for others, their personal lives required their attention. For these reasons, it would not be accurate to say that 21% failed. In addition, the 19% who passed ENGL 052 but didn't attempt ENGL 101 have clearly dropped out. This attrition rate of 40% is of great concern, as it was when we studied developmental students back in 1992.

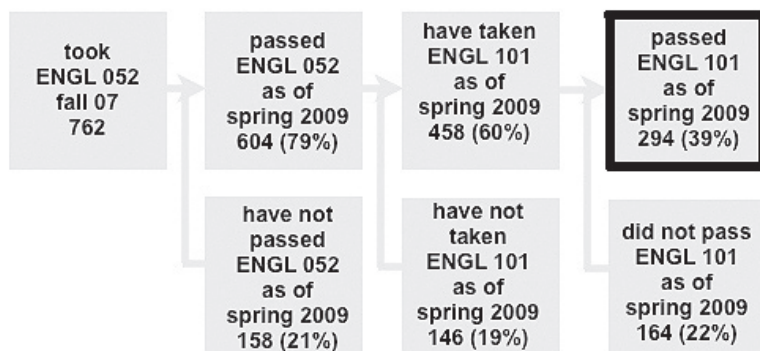| took ENGL 052 fall 07 762	passed ENGL 052 as of spring 2009 604 (79%)	have taken ENGL 101 as of spring 2009 458 (60%)	**passed ENGL 101 as of spring 2009 294 (39%)**
	have not passed ENGL 052 as of spring 2009 158 (21%)	have not taken ENGL 101 as of spring 2009 146 (19%)	did not pass ENGL 101 as of spring 2009 164 (22%)

Chart 4: Success Rates of Students Who Took Traditional ENGL052 in Fall 2007

Chart 5 presents the results for all the students who have taken ALP since the program began in Fall 2007, up to and including the Spring semester of 2009. While the first semester's cohort of 40 students has had four semesters to complete their writing courses, the remaining students have had fewer semesters. The most recent group, approximately 80 students who took ALP in Spring of 2009, has had only one semester. Despite this shorter time for most of the students, the ALP success rates are significantly higher and the drop-out rates significantly lower than for the comparison group. The boxes outlined in black in Charts 4 and 5 show the success rates for the two groups.
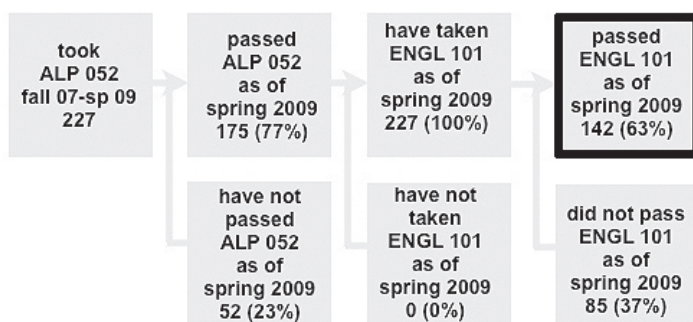
took ALP 052 fall 07-sp 09 227	passed ALP 052 as of spring 2009 175 (77%)	have taken ENGL 101 as of spring 2009 227 (100%)	**passed ENGL 101 as of spring 2009 142 (63%)**
	have not passed ALP 052 as of spring 2009 52 (23%)	have not taken ENGL 101 as of spring 2009 0 (0%)	did not pass ENGL 101 as of spring 2009 85 (37%)

Chart 5: Success Rates of Students Who Took ALP052 from Fall 2007 to Spring 2008

WHY ALP WORKS

As we came to realize that ALP was producing striking improvement in student success, we began to speculate about why. What was it about ALP

that contributed to those successes? We have identified eight features of ALP that we think are responsible for most of the gains in retention and success. Half of these are features we borrowed from earlier innovative programs.

Mainstreaming

Over the past fifteen years, a number of schools like Arizona State University, SUNY New Paltz, and City College (CUNY) have adopted models that mainstream basic writers into credit-bearing writing classes (see Glau; Rigolino and Freel; Soliday and Gleason). We think mainstreaming has a powerful psychological effect for basic writers. When students placed into basic writing are allowed to go immediately into first-year composition, their sense that they are excluded from the real college, that they are stigmatized as weak writers, and that they may not be "college material" is greatly reduced.

Cohort Learning

Each ALP student takes two courses, ENGL 101 and its companion course, in a cohort with seven other basic writers and the same instructor, an arrangement that owes much to the concept of learning communities. Vincent Tinto has argued that leaving college often "arises from isolation, specifically from the absence of sufficient contact between the individual [student] and other members of the social and academic communities of the college." He adds the observation that "membership in at least one supportive community, whatever its relationship to the center, may be sufficient to insure continued persistence" (55-61). As Faith Gabelnick and her co-authors have reported, learning communities, in which students take two or more courses with the same cohort of students, provide just such a community: "Learning community students value knowing other students in classes and realize an immediate sense of belonging" (67). Rebecca Mlynarczyk and Marcia Babbitt have observed similar results at Kingsborough Community College (71-89). In the ALP program, among the eight basic writers who spend six hours a week together in a cohort with the same instructor, we are finding similar increases in bonding and attachment to the college. The students begin to look out for each other in a variety of ways—calling to check on students who miss class, offering each other rides to campus, and, most importantly, helping each other to understand difficult concepts

they encounter in their academic work.

Small Class Size

We have found the small class size of the companion course, only eight students, to be an essential feature of ALP. We arrived at the conclusion that the sections would have to be small by reading the work of Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson, who developed the concept of studios, "where a small group of students . . . meet frequently and regularly . . . to bring to the table the assignments they are working on for a writing course" (7). We knew we wanted the ALP students to comprise less than half the students in the 101 sections, where class size at our school is twenty, so we proposed a class size of eight for the companion course. We have concluded that many of the benefits of ALP derive from this small class size. Students are less prone to behavior problems when they are in a small group. The bonding mentioned earlier is more likely to occur. And the conversation can be focused on each individual's questions much more easily.

Contextual Learning

Both learning communities and studio courses credit some of their success to the fact that students are learning about writing in a meaningful context. Grego and Thompson point out that the conversations in studio sessions often explore the context for a writing assignment or for a teacher's comments on a student's essay (140-42). Similarly, learning communities, especially those that match a writing course with a "content course" such as history or psychology, tap into the advantages of contextual learning. The writing instruction seems more meaningful to the students because it is immediately applicable in the content course. In ALP, the ENGL 101 class provides a meaningful context for the work students do in the companion course. In more traditional basic writing classes, instructors frequently find themselves saying, "Now pay attention. This will be very helpful when you get to first-year composition." We don't have to say this in the ALP classes; our students are already in first-year composition. What we do in the companion course is immediately useful in the essays the students are writing in ENGL 101.

Acceleration

In the longitudinal studies we conducted, we discovered that many students never completed the sequence of required writing courses because they gave up at some point in the process. And the longer the course sequence, the more opportunities there are for such "giving up." Most startling to us was the nearly 20% of our students who actually passed the traditional basic writing course, but then gave up without ever even attempting ENGL 101. We have concluded that the longer the "pipeline" through which our basic writers must move before completing their writing sequence, the greater the chances they will give up and "leak" out of the pipeline. ALP shortens the pipeline for basic writers by allowing them to take their developmental writing and first-year composition courses in the same semester. This acceleration is one of the features we developed at the Community College of Baltimore County.

Heterogeneous Grouping

Another feature of ALP that was developed by CCBC is heterogeneous grouping. In most of the earlier mainstreaming models, basic writers were placed in first-year composition, but in sections populated only by other basic writers. Each group of eight ALP students takes ENGL 101 in a section with twelve 101-level writers who can serve as role models both for writing and for successful student behavior. We also find that the stigmatizing and demoralizing effects of placement in a course designed just for basic writers are greatly reduced by this feature.

Attention to Behavioral Issues

A third locally developed feature of ALP is our conscious and deliberate attention to behavioral issues. We believe that not understanding the kinds of behavior that lead to success in college is a major factor in some basic writers' lack of success. We work hard to help our students understand the type of behavior that will maximize their chances for success in college. For example, many of our basic writers have taken on more responsibilities than they can possibly fulfill. We ask students to create a timeline that accounts for everything they must do in a given week, an exercise that sometimes leads them to make changes in their lives to increase their chances for success. Some students discover they need to cut back on their hours at work; others realize that they have registered for too many courses.

Behavioral problems often result from attitudinal problems. In class we talk about what we call the "high school attitude" toward education: the attitude that it isn't "cool" to appear interested in class, to be seen taking notes or raising one's hand to answer a question. Using humor and sometimes even a little mockery, we lead students to realize that the "high school attitude" toward "coolness" isn't "cool" in college.

And then there are the recurring problems with cell phones and Facebook, with arriving late or falling asleep, with not buying the required text or not completing the required assignment. ALP instructors are aware that these kinds of issues will need more conscious attention, and the small class size makes such attention possible.

Attention to Life Problems

A fourth feature of ALP we developed at CCBC is to encourage instructors to pay deliberate attention to problems in the students' lives outside of school. Many students who give up on our courses do so, not because of any difficulty with the material in the course but, primarily, because of circumstances in their lives outside of college. They are evicted from their apartment, their children become ill, their boss insists they work more hours, they find themselves in abusive relationships, or they experience some other overwhelming life problem. ALP faculty recognize the need to address these life issues. They find time to ask students how their lives are going. They frequently refer students to sources of outside support for such concerns as financial aid, health issues, family problems, and legal problems. When several students in the same class have a similar problem, instead of sending them to see an advisor, we have the advisor visit the class. We have assembled a roster of resource people who are willing to visit our classes and work with students on life problems.

COSTS

Regardless of its success rates, ALP may appear to be prohibitively expensive, as our Vice President for Instruction had initially thought. But careful analysis reveals that ALP actually costs less per *successful student* than more traditional approaches.

To see how this could be the case, consider a hypothetical group of 1,000 students who show up in September needing developmental writing. Under the traditional model, we would need to run 50 sections of basic writing to accommodate them (our class size for writing courses is 20). Since the actual

cost of these 50 sections would vary depending on the salary levels of the instructors, we'll make this calculation in terms of faculty credit hours (FCHs). Since faculty are compensated with 3 FCHs for teaching our upper-level basic writing course, the cost for those 1,000 students would be 150 FCHs.

Because only 60% of students taking our traditional upper-level basic writing course ever take ENGL 101, we would need to accommodate just 600 students in ENGL 101, which would require 30 sections. At 3 FCHs per section, the ENGL 101 costs for 1,000 students would be 90 FCHs, and the total for ENGL 052 and 101 would be 240 FCHs.

To accommodate those same 1,000 students in an ALP program would require 125 sections (class size for the ALP classes is 8). Because of the small class size and because the companion course is not really a separate preparation, faculty receive 2, not 3, FCHs for a section of the companion course. The 125 sections would, therefore, cost the college 250 FCHs.

Since all 1,000 students would take ENGL 101, we would need 50 sections to accommodate all 1,000 students. At 3 FCHs per section, the 101 portion of the ALP program would cost 150 FCHs, and so the total cost for the ALP model would be 400 FCHs.

Before deciding which model is more expensive, however, it is not enough to consider just the costs; it is also necessary to consider the outcomes. Under the traditional model, 39%, or 390 students, will pass ENGL 101. Under ALP, 63%, or 630 students, will pass ENGL 101. As a result, the cost *per successful student* for the traditional model (390 students divided by 240 FCHs) would be 1.625 FCHs. For the ALP model, the cost (630 students divided by 400 FCHs) would be 1.575 FCHs per successful student. ALP actually costs less per successful student than the traditional model.

In sum, for basic writers, ALP doubles the success rate, halves the attrition rate, does it in half the time (one semester instead of two), and costs slightly less per successful student. When these data are presented to administrators, the case for adopting the ALP model is compelling.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

ALP has produced very promising results. For each of the past four semesters, it has resulted in success rates at least double those for our traditional basic writing course. Having achieved these preliminary successes, our plans for the future include continued and expanded study of the program, improvements in the program to make it even more effective, scaling up of

ALP at CCBC to 40 sections per semester in Fall 2010 and to approximately 70 sections per semester in Fall 2011, and dissemination of ALP to other colleges.

First, we want to insure the validity of our preliminary data, which has indicated such dramatic improvement in success rates for ALP students over students in the traditional program. We are concerned about two possible threats to the validity of that data: the possibility that students who volunteer for ALP are not representative of developmental writing students at CCBC, and the possibility of instructor bias in grading the ALP students in ENGL 101.

To address the possibility that students who volunteer for ALP are not a representative sample, we have formed a partnership with the Community College Research Center at Columbia University. CCRC is conducting multivariate analyses of the effects of participating in ALP on student pass rates in English 101 as well as on other measures, including rates of persistence and passing college-level courses in subjects other than English. This study will make use of "matched pairs," selecting a student who has taken the traditional ENGL 052 to be matched with an ALP student on eleven variables: race, gender, age, financial aid status, full- or part-time status, prior college credits, grades in prior college courses, placement scores, program, high school attended, and high school diploma status.

We are also concerned about the possibility of unconscious instructor bias in favor of the ALP students. The English Department has developed rubrics that describe a passing essay for the basic writing course and for ENGL 101. However, considering the close relationships that naturally develop between ALP faculty and the eight ALP students with whom they meet for six hours a week, it is possible that occasionally instructors unconsciously pass an ALP student in ENGL 101 whose performance was slightly below passing level. To investigate this possible bias, we will be following the ALP students into ENGL 102, the next course in the writing sequence, comparing their performance there with that of students who took traditional ENGL 052. ENGL 102 instructors will not have formed any kind of bond with the students and, in fact, will not even know that they were in ALP.

Also, we will be conducting a blind, holistic scoring of essays from ENGL 101 classes to compare the quality of the writing of ALP students who passed the course with the quality of the writing of 101-level students. If we determine through this study that some ALP students are being passed in ENGL 101 even though their performance is below the passing level, we will

investigate other ways of making the pass/fail decision for these sections. We may, for example, decide to have final portfolios graded by someone other than the student's own instructor.

In addition to investigating any threats to the validity of our data on success rates of ALP students in ENGL 101, we will be investigating whether higher percentages of ALP students, compared to students who take the traditional basic writing course, continue to reach various milestones such as accumulating 15, 30, and 45 credits, one-year persistence, completion of certificate and degree programs, and successful transfer to four-year institutions.

Finally, we want to attempt to understand exactly what it is about ALP that leads to its successes and which features contribute most to the improved performance of ALP students. Using pre- and post-semester surveys, focus groups, and faculty reports, we will attempt to determine which of the eight features of ALP contribute most to student success.

We are fairly confident ALP works well in our context, so we look forward to learning if it works as well in at other colleges. To this end, we organized a conference on acceleration in June of 2009. Forty-one faculty from twenty-one different schools attended. After a spirited two-day conversation with lots of give and take and very good questions from participants, four schools agreed to pilot ALP on their campuses in the coming year: CUNY's Kingsborough Community College (New York), El Paso Community College (Texas), Patrick Henry Community College (Virginia), and Gateway Technical and Community College (Kentucky). We eagerly await their results. In addition, we are hopeful that other schools will adopt the ALP model in coming years. On June 23-25, 2010, we will be holding an expanded version of the Conference on Acceleration at CCBC (see the News and Announcements section in this issue for details).

ALP has benefited greatly from the work our colleagues at other institutions have done since that Conference on Basic Writing back in 1992. We have developed a model for developmental writing that shows great promise, and we are certain that others will improve on our model in coming years.

We are also convinced that this work is extremely important given the present climate for higher education. The country has begun to pay attention to basic writing and developmental education more broadly in ways both negative and positive. There is a growing realization that the programs we began so hopefully during those early days of open admissions have not performed nearly as well as we had hoped. Some would conclude from these low success rates that our budgets should be reduced or even that our programs

should be eliminated. Susanmarie Harrington and Linda Adler-Kassner observe that we are working in "an educational environment in which basic writing and remedial programs are under attack" (8). Mary Soliday points out that "Outside the academy, critics of remediation waved the red flag of declining standards and literacy crisis to justify the need to downsize, privatize, and effectively restratify higher education. By blaming remedial programs for a constellation of educational woes, from budget crisis to low retention rates and falling standards, the critics of remediation practiced an effective politics of agency." That is, they attributed the blame for these growing problems to the developmental students and "the 'expensive' programs designed to meet their 'special' needs" (*Politics of Remediation* 106). In 2005, Bridget Terry Long, writing in *National CrossTalk*, observed that "this debate about the merits of investing in remediation, which has an estimated annual cost in the billions, has intensified in recent years. There are many questions about whether remediation should be offered in colleges at all." Long goes on to take a close look at how we determine the success of "remedial" programs and to demonstrate that with appropriate measures—comparing students with similar economic and educational backgrounds—remedial programs do indeed seem to help students do better in college.

Despite the positive implications of more nuanced research such as that conducted by Long, the criticism of basic writing programs is not likely to diminish in the near future. And in the field of basic writing itself the realization that many basic writing programs are falling short of the kind of results we had hoped for in the early days—a realization that first surfaced at the basic writing conference in Baltimore in 1992—is leading to the development of improved and innovative programs. In "Challenge and Opportunity: Rethinking the Role and Function of Developmental Education in the Community College," Tom Bailey notes that there has been "a dramatic expansion in experimentation with new approaches." Major funding agencies, both governmental and non-governmental, are beginning to see developmental education as an area of interest. However, if we are not able to improve our success rates, if we continue to serve as a gate, barring large numbers of students from receiving a college education, those who argue for a reduction or elimination of basic writing could prevail. That is why it is so important at this crucial time that we look for ways to make basic writing more effective. The very survival of our programs could be at stake. But there is an even more important reason for continuing to improve our effectiveness: the success of our programs is of life-changing importance to our students.

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