

# To what degree does English 095 prepare students for English 101?

## The Relationship Between Learning Outcomes for English 095 and Teacher Expectations for English 101

### Description of Problem/Research Question:

- Anecdotal evidence suggested that there is a possible mismatch between what students learn in English 095 (Developmental Writing) and the skills they need to succeed in English 101 (Introduction to Composition) and other required writing courses.
- Our project was proposed as an initial step in a longer-term attempt to answer this important question: *To what degree does English 095 prepare students for English 101?*
- We needed an assessment that helped us to see *whether* there is a mismatch and, if so, *where*, exactly, the mismatch is occurring. Importantly, too, our assessment needed to help us begin to answer *why?*

### Methods:

Four primary activities:

- Blind review of course syllabi for English 095 to ascertain how instructors are interpreting and supporting stated goals for that course.
- Close reading of a sample of Spring 2005 ENG 095 exit exams, against 101 course goals, to determine how well-prepared students seem for the first-year course.
- Survey of current 101 faculty to understand their expectations for 101 students.
- Review of both English 095 and 101 course goals/objectives to identify connections between stated course objectives and data gathered from exit exams, course syllabi, and faculty surveys.

### Analysis of Findings:

When all of the data are considered together, they suggest the following:

#### A. ENG 095 may not be offering students the range of experiences they need to be successful in ENG 101 and beyond.

- In 095 reading is not typically used as an opportunity to develop the analytical skills required for success in 101.
- Students, once they complete ENG 095, seem unprepared to develop discussions.
- Their repertoire of persuasive strategies seems limited to emotional appeals and over-generalizations.
- Most students also seem to have trouble establishing a sense of cohesion between words, sentences, and paragraphs.

#### B. The goals and expectations for ENG 095, as currently written, promote a remedial (rather than developmental) view of the course, reductive views of language and learning, and inconsistent teaching approaches.

- There is an inconsistency in 095 approaches and assignments can be explained by the vague course goals.
- 095 goals and expectations stress *competency* and *completion* - in stark contrast to the *proficiency* emphasized in 101.
- Most instructors view the 095 as a means to help students finally grasp the basic skills they have been taught since grade school rather than a way to prepare for the in-depth, purposeful, analytical writing they will be required to do in college.

#### C. The 095 Exit Exam May Not Be the Best Way to Measure Writing

- Proficiency:
- Timed exams limit students' ability to engage in the pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing encouraged in ENG 095 and 101.
- Formula writing also tends to discourage critical thinking, which, in addition to time constraints, might explain the lack of elaboration, explanation, and analysis in the exams.

### Questions for Further Discussion and/or Study:

1. What do we mean by college-level writing? What do we mean by academic writing?
2. What specific activities and assignments are ENG 095 instructors incorporating into their classes?
3. Do we want ENG 095 to be a remedial course or a developmental course? Why?
4. How does our understanding of ENG 095 affect our ability to help students succeed in 101?
5. What is the relationship between courses in the sequence ENG 095 and 101, 102, 211/212?
6. Should students practice the various types of writing required in 100 and 200-level courses in ENG 095?

### Recommendations:

- Share findings from this assessment, as soon as possible, with relevant departmental committees to inspire discussions about the appropriateness of both 095 and 101 course goals.
- By Dec. 1, 2005, revise ENG 101 goals in the following ways: separate the goals from the philosophy (which should be a rationale for the course, approaches); make the goals more descriptive of what is actually happening in the classes; translate goals into specific learning outcomes.
- By April 1, 2006, revise ENG 095 goals so that they are more specific and better-aligned with ENG 101 goals.
- Suggest to the department that we design a common set of writing objectives/outcomes for all courses, at every level, with different expectations for proficiency.