

Florida Community College at Jacksonville
Curriculum Revision
Florida State Standards and Practices Review

Introduction

Our strategy was to look at some of the most current data we had available for state-wide testing in college preparatory English. The results reported below come from the Florida Community College System's 2003 Accountability Report. The percentages refer to the passing rate of students in the highest level of college preparatory English classes and are specific to the writing exit test. FCCJ had a 79.70% passing rate, ranking us 4th out of the twenty-eight institutions in the Florida Community College System.

We've compiled practices from eight institutions, including four of the top six schools, two in the middle of the pack, and two at the bottom. Florida Keys Community College was excluded, despite ranking 3rd in the state, because its sample size of only five students was deemed too small.

Gulf Coast Community College

Gulf Coast had the lowest passing percentage in the 2003 Accountability Report at 48.80%, a rate that Division of Language Arts Chairperson Joyce Buttermore said they are working hard to address. She shared the following:

- Gulf Coast offers two courses in college prep. English: ENC 0002 (Basic English) and ENC 0021 (Fundamentals of Composition). Basic English is designed to address sentence structure; Fundamentals of Composition is designed to develop the bridge between paragraphing and essay composition.
- In terms of college placement testing, students scoring 1-71 were placed into ENC 0002. Students scoring 71-80 were placed into ENC 0021.
- Both college prep English courses include three hours in the classroom and an hour in the Student Success Center. The Student Success Center is a fully equipped lab that offers online writing tutorials and grammar testing. It is staffed by a pair of full-time assistant professors (M.A. in English).
- The college makes every effort to place all college prep. English classes in computer labs.
- The college offers no instruction in ESL. This is an area of concern that Professor Buttermore mentioned, as the population diversity in Panama City continues to expand and the college grapples with adapting to meet the needs of a changing student population.
- GCCC caps its course enrollment at twenty-six students per section.

Miami Dade College

MDC is a large institution with eight campus sites. In this way, it's very similar to FCCJ. The college had a passing rate of 59.54% in college prep. English, and placed in the lower third of schools in the state. I spoke with Professor Alejandro Salinas, a full-time professor teaching college prep. English at MDC's InterAmerican Campus. He had the following information to share:

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Miami Dade College (cont.)

- MDC's campuses vary in their structure for college prep. English. The larger campuses (Kendall and North) have separate college prep. departments for the various disciplines. The smaller campuses (InterAmerican and Wolfson) usually combine departments.
- MDC offers three sections of college prep. English. They offer ENC 0002 (focus on sentence construction), ENC 0020 (paragraph construction), and ENC 0021 (essay composition). These are four credit-hour courses.
- The campuses each create their own lab requirements. At the smaller campuses, the lab requirements are made based on the preference of the individual teachers. Some require service learning; others use computer-based tutorials and testing to reinforce grammar. The larger campuses require formal, objective-based weekly lab assignments. Students at Kendall Campus, for instance, will write about the same topic for a given assignment. They must then work with a tutor in the lab on revising the work. The tutor has to sign off on the student's progress for them to move on to the next assignment.
- Alejandro reports good success with PLATO. He mentioned that the software is flexible, allowing students to focus on areas they need to improve and skip those concepts they understand well.
- Generally, MDC caps enrollment for college prep. English at thirty students. The number is high, Salinas admits, and he would prefer a number between twenty and twenty-two students.
- Salinas mentioned that much of the instruction in college prep. English at MDC is delivered by adjunct faculty. He expressed the opinion that full-time faculty *should* teach a minimum number of college prep. courses due to a) their experience b) their ability to stay in touch with another segment of the student population and c) the opportunity to stay current with grammar and composition theory.

Sante Fe Community College

Sante Fe had a 70.21% passing rate, placing it near the middle of the state rankings. I spoke with Professor Robert Connelly, one of three full-time faculty members who teach solely in college prep. English, which is housed in a separate department from college level English. This Academic Foundations Department covers prep reading, writing, math, ESL, Adult Education, the Learning Labs, and the Assessment Center. Bob shared the following:

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Sante Fe Community College (cont.)

- For over a decade, Connelly has been working with Julie Robitaille, another full-time prep professor at Sante Fe, to develop and maintain computerized diagnostic and subject tests in grammar. These have become an integral part of their prep courses. They use a CD-Rom titled *Writer's Resources* to teach and drill grammar. In addition, they require students to use an online diagnostic and test bank called iLrn, a Thompson Learning product created by Connelly and Robitaille.
- Sante Fe offers two levels of college prep. English. ENC 0001 is a sentence-based course. ENC 0020 is a paragraph writing course. These are four credit-hour courses.
- Students are placed in ENC 0001 if their CPT score is below 65; a score between 65 and 82 places a student in ENC 0020. Prior to the start of classes, students who wish to challenge their placement are given a challenge test, which is essentially a grammar final exam. Connelly says the pass rate for these challenges is very low, reinforcing his opinion that the CPT is a good tool for placement.
- Sante Fe caps enrollment for college prep. English at twenty-five students.
- Students completing ENC 0020 must pass the State Exit Test in grammar and the state mandated writing test. The writing sample is a paragraph judged by two instructors other than the student's own. Connelly is a strong supporter of keeping the exit test as a paragraph and points to former ENC 0020 students' success being on par with those testing straight into Freshman Comp.

Manatee Community College

Manatee had a 70.77% passing rate, which places it in the middle of the pack. I spoke with Professor Dennielle True, who shared the following information with me:

- The college offers a two-course sequence in college preparatory English. ENC 0010 is a five-hour class (three class; two lab), while ENC 0020 is a three hour class (no lab).
- The students produce, on average, a minimum of one evaluated composition per week. Both classes divide the content evenly between writing and grammar. The primary difference in the classes is that ENC 0020 moves more quickly and demands more frequent composition than ENC 0010. True incorporates news article in the classroom, helping her students become more efficient and analytical readers while their responses to these articles help them with the composition necessary for college coursework.
- True recommends capping the classes at or near twenty students. This is a number that she finds works well to facilitate group interaction, peer review and shared study, and productive teacher/student interaction.
- She recommends that we might try offering three levels of college prep. English to best address the various ability levels of students after the college placement testing (MCC is considering this idea).

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Manatee Community College (cont.)

- In True's experience, the lab requirement works well in reinforcing student learning, but only when lab instructors are explicitly reinforcing the course curriculum. To that end, a close working relationship between the lab and the instructors in the classroom is vital.

Chipola College

Chipola had a 77.94% passing rate, placing it next to Tallahassee in the top quarter of the state's rankings. Chipola is a small, rural college in Florida's panhandle. I spoke with Geraldine DeFelix, a full-time instructor in the Department of Letters. She teaches college prep and college credit classes in both reading and English. She had this to say concerning her college's prep English classes:

- Chipola offers two levels of college prep. English. ENC 0003 is a self-paced experience in the computer lab. Students focus on grammar skills in the lab until an instructor judges they are ready for the next level. ENC 0003 has been in this current format for three years. ENC 0004 is a more traditional classroom experience which focuses on essay writing. Students in ENC 0004 are required to visit the computer lab one day per week. Both of these classes are four credit-hours.
- Students are placed in ENC 0003 if their CPT score is below 47; a score between 47 and 82 places a student in ENC 0004. DeFelix emphasized that "the score sticks" concerning placement.
- Students completing ENC 0004 must pass the State Exit Test in grammar and the state mandated writing test. The minimum passing for grammar exit is 60%. Students must write an essay for the writing test.

Tallahassee Community College

TCC had a 78.53% passing rate, which put it in the top quarter of the state's best scores in college prep. English. I spoke with Professor Paul Johnston, who shared some of the following information with me:

- The college offers one course in Developmental English. From an instructional perspective, the college stresses weekly measured grammar exercises and frequent paragraph composition. Each instructor is encouraged to teach the essay near the end of the class to prepare students for English Composition.

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Tallahassee Community College (cont.)

- The school currently offers four sections of web-assisted college prep. The students meet in the college's English Grammar Skills Center five days a week and complete assignments on grammar and composition on a program called PLATO. Johnston reported that students have responded positively to this style of class. The college offers the rest of its college prep. English courses in traditional classrooms. Students taking classes in this format meet in classrooms four days a week, and must complete one hour online each week in the Skills Center.
- The college raised its passing standards this semester for the English Grammar Exit Test. The school moved from a 60% passing rate on the exit test to a minimum rate of 70%. The school requires that students finish the course with a score of 70% (a 'C' grade) or better.
- Instructors have tied 20% of the course grade to online grammar tutorials and testing in the Skills Center.
- TCC's English Department has dictated the course for Florida State University's developmental composition curriculum. TCC instructors frequently teach courses in college prep. at the university.

Lake-Sumter Community College

Lake-Sumter had an 82.50% passing rate, 2nd in the state. I spoke to Mealanie Wagner, Professor of English. She told me the following:

- After an extensive review funded by a Title III grant, LSCC decided to change its college prep English courses from three credit hours to four credit hours. This extra hour is devoted to lab grammar modules. These grammar modules are prescribed for the individual student based on the results of an English Diagnostic Test administered in the English Lab. Students are required to visit the lab throughout the semester, and their lab attendance and results make up a major portion of the course grade.
- Lake-Sumter offers two levels of college prep. English. ENC 0001 is a paragraph-based course with a heavy focus on grammar drills in the English Lab. ENC 0010 transitions students from writing paragraphs to writing essays. The lab work in ENC 0010 includes weekly visits with the professor who may use this time for essay writing.
- Currently, all faculty who teach college prep. English also teach college credit courses, However, LSCC is advertising for a full-time Professor of Developmental English and ESL. Wagner believes such a position is needed to give prep and ESL students a better advocate at the college.

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Lake-Sumter Community College (cont.)

- Students completing ENC 0010 must pass the State Exit Test in grammar and the state mandated writing test. The writing sample must be an essay, and it is judged by each student's individual instructor. Even adjuncts at LSCC are responsible for judging their own students, though Wagner stresses that they often seek a second opinion on borderline essays.

Valencia Community College

Valencia had the highest passing percentage in the 2003 Accountability Report at 88.37%. Valencia has 4 campuses and 3 centers. This October, Valencia hosted the Florida Developmental Education Association's Annual Conference. The keynote address at this conference, which I attended, was given by Valencia's president, Dr. Sanford C. "Sandy" Shugart. Dr. Shugart stressed the importance of college prep courses and, most emphatically, the importance of getting the college presidents to understand that increasing success and retention of college prep students will increase downstream success and graduation levels more so than anything we could ever do with our higher level courses. I spoke with Professor Marilyn Curall, Coordinator of College Prep English, who shared the following:

- Curall credits the Student Support Center with much of Valencia's success. This is an open lab with computers and instructional assistants. These assistants are for the most part adjunct faculty, and all of them have teaching experience. Although an "open" lab (meaning students visit on their own time) the Student Support Center is a mandatory component of the prep writing courses, comprising 20% of the course grade.
- Valencia offers two levels of college prep. English. ENC 0010 heavily drills grammar and focuses on forming correct sentences into unified paragraphs. ENC 0012 is an essay writing course. These are three credit-hour courses with an associated lab fee.
- Students are placed in ENC 0010 if their CPT score is below 55; a score between 55 and 82 places a student in ENC 0012. All students write a diagnostic essay in the first week of class, and level changes based on that writing are rare but not unheard of.
- Valencia caps enrollment for college prep. English at twenty-five students.
- Curall estimates that 70% of college prep. English courses at Valencia are taught by full-time faculty; however, no faculty member at Valencia teaches solely college prep. She believes having the same faculty teaching both college prep and college credit English is a benefit to all. Students understand that their instructor really knows what will be expected of them at the next level.
- Students completing ENC 0012 must pass the State Exit Test in grammar and the state mandated writing test. The writing sample is judged by two instructors other than the student's own; however, unlike FCCJ, that writing sample must be an essay of at least three paragraphs.

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Observations and Recommendations

- The Florida Developmental Education Association has no recommendations or guidelines for Developmental English, so long as we abide by Florida Department of Education rules concerning the CPT.
- With so many adjuncts teaching college prep courses, FCCJ should consider a structured approach to maintaining quality of instruction. This could be addressed through a tutorial, once a term faculty coordination meeting, or exchange-grading of midterm papers.
- Several schools are teaching the essay in their highest developmental English course. We need to open this discussion. Faculty at many schools believe essay writing for prep students is crucial for success in Freshman Composition.
- The CPT is widely accepted as a good tool for placement. Those schools which allow level changes admit that these are extremely rare and that the opportunity exists more to calm students who are upset at their initial placement than to fix any problem with the CPT. The cutoff score between first and second level courses varies, but there is no indication that this affects student success. There does not appear to be any advantage or need to add a supplemental placement tool.
- Many schools point to a required lab component, whether face-to-face or online, as an important factor in helping their students succeed. We must consider making a lab available and required for all college prep English students.
- Our class size (twenty) is smaller than at many schools; however, those schools with twenty-five students or more wish they could drop to twenty. We should stay right where we are with class size.

Submitted 9 December 2005
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