English Composition Annual Report

Academic Year 2008-09

McMicken College of Arts & Sciences
University of Cincinnati

UNIVERSITY OF Cincinnati

Overview

The English Composition Program (ECP) is responsible for providing writing instruction to all incoming students, excepting those students who enter UC with appropriate transfer credit, AP credit, or Cincinnatus placement credit. In 2008-2009, the ECP served 8,195 students in a total of 385 sections. Our courses were staffed this year by sixteen adjunct instructors, seventeen full-time Field Service faculty members, two tenured Professors, and sixty-one graduate students, all of whom are supervised and supported by two program Directors, with assistance from the English Department and a graduate student assistant.

Associate Professor Laura Micciche began her tenure as Director of English Composition in Fall 2008. Associate Director Joyce Malek, Field Service Associate Professor, has served in her current position since Fall 2006, with one year as Interim Director. Both directors receive a one-course release each quarter for their work.

The Program was this year also supported by Composition Coordinator Tiffany Jansen (Fall quarter only); Graduate Assistant to the Composition Directors, Allison Carr; and English Department staff members Geri Hinkle-Wesseling, Devore Nixon, and Jessica Vieson, the latter of whom is currently serving as the Composition Coordinator. Additionally, major programmatic issues were reviewed, discussed, and approved by the Composition Advisory Committee (CAC), which consisted of the following members: Lisa Beckelhimer (Field Service), Allison Carr (graduate student), Mica Darley (graduate student), Michele Griegel-Mccord (Field Service), Alli Hammond (Field Service), John Maddux (Field Service), Joyce Malek (Field Service), Lisa Meloncon (Tenure-Track), Laura Micciche (Tenure-Track; committee chair), and Jay Twomey (Tenure-Track).

Core Responsibility: Teaching English Composition to 8,195 Students

Our required writing courses are the heart of our program. During 2008-09, we taught 8,195 students in 385 sections of English Composition, which were distributed as follows:

2008-09 Composition Offerings		101	101H	102	102H	112	289	289H	Total
Fall 2008	**Sections**	79	3	14	3	6	37	2	144
	Seats Available	1624	60	306	51	113	814	40	3008
	Actual Enrollment	1580	43	296	41	111	807	35	2913
Winter 2009	**Sections**	35	-	65	3	1	35	2	141
	Seats Available	780	-	1471	60	23	794	46	3174
	Actual Enrollment	758	-	1459	58	20	742	35	3072
Spring 2009	**Sections**	5	-	63	1	-	28	3	100
	Seats Available	115	-	1439	23	-	644	63	2284
	Actual Enrollment	110	-	1410	16	-	618	56	2210
Academic Year 2008-09	**Sections**	119	3	142	7	7	100	7	**385**
	Seats Available	2519	60	3216	134	136	2252	149	**8466**
	Actual Enrollment	2448	43	3165	115	131	2167	126	**8195**

Students earn an A through C- in English 101 and 102. If they fall below a C-, students earn a non-punitive NP (not proficient), which requires them to retake the course before progressing through the Composition sequence. In English 289, students earn A through F. During this academic year, student success rates were as follows (Pass Rates do not include grades of W):

Pass Rates	101	101H	102	102H	112	289	289H	Total
Fall 2008	91.8%	100.0%	87.0%	100.0%	94.6%	93.1%	97.1%	93.8%
Winter 2009	91.3%	-	92.8%	100.0%	95.0%	89.8%	100.0%	93.9%
Spring 2009	74.7%	-	89.3%	100.0%	-	86.7%	98.2%	90.8%
Academic Year 2008-09	91.0%	100.0%	90.8%	100.0%	94.7%	90.1%	98.4%	**93.0%**

Additionally, we offered a total of 113 Learning Community sections to majors from seven different colleges.

Learning Communities		A&S	CAHS	CECH	COB	COE	NURS	SSW	Total
Academic Year 2008-09	**101**	10	5	5	6	28	6	2	**62**
	102	5	5	5	6	24	6	0	**51**
	Total	15	10	10	12	52	12	2	**113**

Faculty: Hiring, Development, and Supervision

As our routinely positive student evaluations and peer evaluations indicate, we have a very talented, motivated, and creative group of teachers. Successful hiring, faculty development, and supervision make possible our dynamic community of teachers, despite the fact that these efforts are challenged by three factors: a large teaching faculty (ninety-six individuals), heavy teaching loads (full-time faculty teach eleven courses a year), and high course caps (twenty-three students per section; National Council of Teachers recommends twenty).

This academic year, in addition to our full-time faculty and graduate student teachers, we hired sixteen adjuncts, who taught a total of sixty-five English Composition sections. The Director and Associate Director of Composition reviewed applications, conducted interviews, hired, trained, and observed new adjuncts.

- *Field Service Faculty Members (taught 45% of composition courses)*
  This group of seventeen full-time faculty members teaches eleven courses during a ten-month schedule. This load was recently reduced from a twelve-course assignment. Field Service faculty are protected by AAUP and entitled to health care benefits and limited travel funding for professional development. Individuals are eligible for reappointment generally on three- or five-year appointments, subject to satisfactory performance and completion of teaching, service, and professional activity requirements. This year, nine Field Service faculty were successfully reappointed, a process that requires them to compile an extensive file demonstrating their teaching, service, and professional accomplishments during the review period. Field Service faculty files are reviewed by eligible members of the English department before they undergo a second round of review at the College level.

  Field Service faculty constitute a group whose primary concern and responsibility is teaching English Composition courses. The result of this core group of full-time faculty is greater consistency within and among composition courses, an energized community in which teachers are invested in the curriculum and in opportunities for professional development, and an experienced teaching faculty who serve as strong mentors to new graduate teachers. In addition, Field Service faculty are increasingly professionalized and involved in national conversations about writing. For example, during 2008-2009 our faculty collectively presented more than twenty-five papers at national conferences, wrote four book reviews, published one writing textbook, and attended numerous UC workshops related to professional development.

- *Graduate Assistants(GAs) (taught 38% of composition courses)*
  This year, the Composition program trained, supported, and observed twenty-five new GAs, most of whom had not taught before. This task requires close supervision of teachers as well as a strong community in which teachers feel free to express concerns and doubts and share successes and insights. The Directors commit fully to this endeavor, beginning with a three-day teacher-orientation for new students in the graduate program. Following this, students enroll in two-quarters of Practicum (focused on everyday activities in the writing classroom like facilitating discussion, responding to student writing, teaching research practices, etc.) and in a graduate seminar entitled Teaching College Writing, which provides students an introduction to the history of writing instruction in U.S. universities as well as an understanding of central debates concerning how best to teach writing at the college-level. Both courses are taught by the Directors.

  Currently sixty-one GAs teach in the ECP. GAs, like all teachers in our program, teach English 101 and 102 using a unified curriculum, presented in our in-house publication, *The Student Guide to English Composition 101/102*, revised annually by teachers in the program (more on that below). A handful of Gas also taught 289, Honors composition, and literature and/or creative writing courses. Each year, we select a GA as assistant to the Composition Directors, a position for which we review applications, interview, and then hire an individual. The position enables the student to select one quarter of no teaching during the year while making available numerous opportunities for professional development.

- *Adjunct Faculty (taught 17% of composition courses)*
  We have dedicated adjunct faculty, many of whom have been teaching in the program consistently for a number of years. They regularly receive excellent student evaluations, participate in faculty development workshops, and remain committed to our course goals and outcomes. We hired five new adjuncts this year who taught a total of twenty sections; the remaining eleven adjunct faculty are veteran teachers in the program. We would like to offer more consistent, equitable, full-time employment to all of our teachers. We hire adjuncts every year, a good indication that we need more teachers of writing than we currently have on staff; rather than hire faculty on a quarter-by-quarter basis, we hope to be able to hire the most qualified on a contract basis, a change that would benefit the teachers and students as well as the curriculum as a whole by creating more consistency across sections.

Faculty Development

The core values of the program are transmitted and reinforced through faculty development activities, which are crucial for a program's evolution, self-assessment, and responsiveness to current problems and questions related to writing instruction. Faculty development during this past year included both faculty workshops and ongoing faculty development commitments, as detailed below.

- *Faculty Workshops & Meetings*
  A total of three faculty workshops and three focused meetings were offered during the academic year, all of which were organized and planned by the Directors, with support from the English Department. These workshops represent the ECP's ongoing commitment to offer support and professional development for faculty.

  During Fall 2008, the ECP, with funding from Bedford/St. Martin's, offered a workshop on responding to student writing, led by well-known Harvard professor and writing specialist, Nancy Sommers. This workshop drew faculty from all ranks and from all areas of the English Department, not just the writing faculty. Also that quarter, we offered an English 289 workshop for which we provided box lunches. Teachers discussed common assignments across sections of this fairly new course as well as course outcomes and goals.

  In Winter quarter, we offered a workshop on using blogs and wikis in writing classrooms in an effort to address constantly evolving digital tools and their use-value to writing teachers. During Spring, we offered two meetings about upcoming changes to the English 101 and 102 curriculum, outlining new assignments, changes in the *Student Guide*, and different emphases in the courses. In addition, we held another 289 meeting during which the Directors addressed the need for consistency and coherence across sections and announced that 289 would be the number one agenda item for CAC in Fall 2009. Finally, in Spring, Field Service faculty member Judy Sharp organized a Rhetoric Circle, during which participants discussed an article about academic work written by English Department Head Russel Durst. This community-building opportunity is one that we plan to expand in the coming academic year.

- *Ongoing Faculty Development Opportunities*
  These activities are regular parts of our program; they continue to be important ways for us to cohere as a faculty.

- *New GA Orientation*: This three-day orientation in mid-September, led by the Composition Directors and GA to the Directors, with support from the English Department, introduces

new graduate students to the Composition program, contextualizes composition course assignments, goals, and outcomes within the larger program, provides an overview of pedagogical strategies for use in writing classrooms, introduces GAs to experienced faculty members, and creates bonding opportunities for new GAs. The experience is capped by a voluntary, social run/walk event, now in its second year.

- *Opening Fall Meeting*: All writing faculty gather to preview the year ahead (i.e., changes on the horizon, reminders about policy, fiscal matters, news about textbooks, and so forth). This meeting also gives everyone a chance to ask questions and share good news.

- *Blackboard Community*: Our Bb Composition site is extensive. The site includes the entire *Student Guide* as a PDF so that teachers can access this complete curriculum guide for 101 and 102 online, before the print copies arrive in mid-August. Thus, teacher-planning is easily facilitated. In addition, the Bb site includes outcomes for all Composition courses, sample assignments and syllabi, assigned reading suggestions, supplemental materials for the core assignments, links to relevant articles, materials, and useful sites about writing and teaching. We also maintain a discussion board and an announcements page.

- *Norming Sessions*: During these sessions, led by experienced Field Service faculty, instructors read and discuss how they would assess student paper samples from 101 based on our course goals. This discussion allows us to articulate common expectations in relation to concrete writing samples. Instructors are free to express conflicting thoughts about the papers and points of shared thinking in order to facilitate a reflective "tune up" to individual teaching practices. Norming helps us to maintain consistent assessment across sections.

- *Portfolio Trios*: English 101 teachers are organized into trios that meet several times throughout the quarter to review and discuss student papers, problems, and/or successes. Trios are particularly important if a teacher wants a second opinion on a paper he/she is assessing; trios also help to build community and foster collaboration among teachers.

- *Faculty Supervision*
  Faculty are supervised through student evaluations, teaching observation reports, review of teaching materials, and final grade review. Field Service faculty undergo a lengthy reappointment process which enables full review of job performance and effectiveness. New GAs are observed by one another and by members of the CAC in Fall quarter. They continue to do peer observations in Winter quarter.

Curriculum Development

Reviewing and refining the curriculum is the central task of CAC. This year, we focused our efforts on English 101 and 102. Major projects accomplished were as follows:

- *English 101 & 102 Curriculum Revision*: CAC worked collaboratively to revise the first-year composition curriculum. After months of intensive work, the Directors presented the faculty with an overview of the changes, which create a coherent, purposeful, and well-sequenced series of assignments in 101 and 102 strongly rooted in rhetoric. We reduced the number of overall major assignments in each class, with the goal of requiring students to focus in sustained ways on each paper and building in more opportunities for reflection and revision. In addition, we articulated assignment goals by contextualizing each within the larger context of the overall curriculum, an addition that we believe will benefit teachers and students in our first-year writing classrooms.

- *English 101 & 102 Textbook Selection*: In concert with the curriculum revision, CAC reviewed and selected a new required textbook for 101 and 102. As of Fall 2009, we will use a customized version of *The Allyn & Bacon Guide to Writing*, a textbook grounded in rhetoric—the cornerstone of our curriculum. Since this textbook includes a style manual as well as a grammar handbook, we were able to eliminate the previously required writing handbook at a savings of approximately $65.00 to our students.

- *The Student Guide to English Composition 101/102*: This in-house pedagogical and curricular guide is required in every section of 101 and 102. This year we revised it from top to bottom, changing its size, content, and adopting a cover design by a UC student (more on this below). The revised *Student Guide* coordinates with the newly adopted *Allyn & Bacon Guide to Writing*. It includes the revised student assignments mentioned above as well as sample student papers, process work leading up to the papers, and activities pages focused on composing, revising, and reflecting—the three central activities that organize our writing classes. The lead editor of this year's *Student Guide* was Field Service faculty member Molly Oberlin; she was accompanied by Allison Carr (GA), Mary Leech (Field Service), and Laura Micciche (Director). Without input from CAC, however, this revision would not have been possible. The collaborative process created a critical mass of faculty involved in curriculum development, a positive change from past approaches to revising the *Student Guide*.

Program Assessment

The Director distributed four electronic surveys during the academic year—two instructor surveys and two student surveys. The instructor surveys provided valuable information about the effectiveness of faculty development and support. Data gathered through the student surveys constitutes the beginning of a larger study examining the effectiveness of our writing courses and the likelihood that students are able to transfer writing knowledge from their composition courses to courses in their majors. The following descriptions provide an overview of information collected:

- *GA Orientation*: This survey solicited evaluations of the orientation program from new GAs in our program. Survey results indicate that instructors, by and large, learned useful pedagogical strategies and developed awareness of our program goals. We received a number of excellent suggestions for further improving the program, which we plan to incorporate into the 2009 orientation.

- *First-Year Composition Attitudes Toward Writing*: This survey queried first-year students at the beginning of Fall 2008 regarding their attitudes toward writing prior to taking English 101. 406 students completed the survey. A majority reported that they find most difficult organizing ideas, getting started, generating ideas, and reading critically. We invited the same group of students to complete an end-of-term follow-up survey. This time, only fifty-five students completed the survey, but we nevertheless found the result affirming: 43.6% reported that they felt "very confident" in their ability to expand ideas, 50.9% felt "confident" about their abilities to brainstorm and organize ideas, and 52.7% reported that felt "very confident" in their ability to read carefully and summarize effectively.

- *Faculty 289 Survey and Student 289 Survey*: In an effort to understand how this new course is evolving, we surveyed students and teachers. We learned that the course is successfully deepening students' analytical skills and awareness of rhetorical strategies. CAC will build on this survey as we continue to review and refine English 289. In addition to surveying students again in Fall 2009, we will also interview student focus groups, review syllabi, and discuss sample student writing.

A&S English Placement

A&S English Placement is handled by two Field Service faculty in the English Department: Ron Hundemer (Director) and Molly Oberlin (Associate Director). They, in turn, work with a team of four readers, also faculty in the Composition Program, to read and assess students' placement essays. Directors and readers receive a stipend for the enormous task they perform: placing every eligible UC student in the appropriate English Composition class. Between May 1, 2008 and June 1, 2009, the placement team read 4,482 essays with the following placement results:

Course Placement	Percentage of Students
90-level	2.0%
101B	10.5%
101	85.4%
112	2.1%

In addition to reading and scoring essays, the Director proctors exams from May through September, processes appeals, responds to student, parent, and advisor questions, and coordinates exam schedules with the UC Orientation Program.

A&S Writing Center

The Writing Center is a free tutorial service, located in McMicken Hall. Students who take advantage of the Center's services range from first-year students in introductory composition courses, to upper-level undergraduates learning to write in their particular disciplines, to graduate students working on theses and dissertations. The Center is staffed by GAs and advanced undergraduate writers, all of whom are experienced in a one-on-one approach to writing instruction. The Director, Bill Zipfel (Field Service), receives one-course release per quarter for his work in the center; other employees include three undergraduate office assistants and seventeen tutors. During 2008-09, the Writing Center conducted 577 tutorials, serving a total of 460 students.

Innovations and Special Events

A successful writing program must be periodically infused with new ideas in order for it to progress and change. For this reason, we are particularly proud of the following innovations to the program that we believe contribute to a vital and exciting culture of teaching and learning:

- *Composition Advisory Committee*: This newly formed committee, consisting of GAs, Field Service faculty, and tenure-track faculty, has facilitated collaborative program revision and assessment while creating opportunities for more faculty to work together in the shared mission of strengthening our core courses. Faculty on this committee also observed and met with new GAs to talk about their teaching. CAC will be an essential group for upcoming discussions about converting our quarter-based Composition sequence to a semester sequence.

- *Annual Field Service Schedule*: This year the Directors created an annual schedule request form for Field Service faculty and the first-ever annual teaching schedule. Given the heavy course assignment taught by these faculty (eleven courses per year), advance awareness of course assignments eases some of the tension around course planning. Whereas the schedule may need to be slightly adjusted as we learn more about enrollment numbers, we believe this annual template will provide instructors with general information useful for course planning.

- *Student Guide Retreat*: In preparation for revising the assignments in English 101 and 102, a group of faculty attended a two-day retreat at the Kirkwood Inn in January 2009. Supported by Hayden-McNeil, publishers of our *Student Guide*, six of us redrafted the entire first-year curriculum, which served as the starting-point for CAC discussions and led to further revisions. In addition to being a productive experience, the retreat was an excellent team-building opportunity that allowed us to share our thinking about the overall purpose of our first-year curriculum in a comfortable, inviting space.

- *Community Service Projects*: We regularly offer an honors section of composition that is associated with Habitat for Humanity. Students read and write about community involvement, develop an awareness of poverty within and around Cincinnati, and work together to help build houses for families in need. This experience becomes the basis for writing projects that explore important connections between service, community, and education. This year we also offered an Honors 102 in which students worked with Keep Cincinnati Beautiful. In addition to reading and writing about environmental issues, students attended city council meetings where they learned about community efforts to clean up the

city and obstacles to these efforts. They developed research projects that grew out of these experiences and some became involved in non-profit efforts to beautify the city. We anticipate that this course represents the beginning of a strong, lasting partnership between KCB and the writing program.

- *Literacy Event*: In conjunction with the Ohio State University and thirty-one other institutions across the U.S., UC was a site for collecting print, video, and audio literacy narratives that became part of the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (http://daln.osu.edu/), a public repository maintained by OSU. The goal of the project, entitled "Everybody Has a Literacy Story…Tell Us Yours!," was to establish a contemporary and historical record of the literacy practices and values of diverse contributors. During this one-day event, the UC effort, led by the Composition Directors who were assisted by CAC and English graduate students, resulted in the largest number of narratives (twenty-six) contributed by any other site, with the exception of OSU. This event was a terrific success—and again, an energizing team-building experience—which we hope to repeat during next academic year.

- *Composition Cover Design Contest*: We ran a cover design contest for our newly adopted textbook, *The Allyn & Bacon Guide to Writing*, and the new edition of the *Student Guide*. Our publishers, Hayden-McNeil and Pearson respectively, generously awarded a cash prize to the winning UC student designer. That student, Jessica Edmiston, a fifth-year DAAP student, submitted such a compelling design that we selected it to be the cover for both texts. In addition to her cash award, Jessica's design will appear on the cover of thousands of Composition textbooks. This exciting contest allowed us to showcase student talent on campus while also creating texts that have a decidedly local look to them.

- *Composition Video*: Laura Micciche (Director) and Allison Carr (GA to Directors) produced a short video about the Composition Program using Adobe Premium in Langsam Library's Student Resources and Technology Center. This video provides a glimpse of our teachers, students, and curriculum in the English Composition program. It is now available on the Composition page of the English Department website See the following link: http://www.artsci.uc.edu/collegedepts/english/undergrad/EnglishComp/EnglishComp.aspx. This was our first foray into digital composing; we hope to continue and expand this effort as a way to make public the work we do in our writing classrooms.

Administrative Accomplishments

The administrative team had three primary goals this year, all of which have been met. ***First***, we wanted to develop a more collaborative administrative structure, involving more stake-holders in the decision-making process, creating opportunities for faculty input, and making curricular changes that reflect collective wisdom and experience. CAC provided us with the format we needed to create a collaborative team of instructors working together on administrative tasks. Our program boasts a group of engaged, involved writing teachers who have much to contribute—this committee provides one mechanism for more faculty involvement in the curriculum. In addition, beginning Fall 2009, the administrative office will experiment with a new support team for incoming GAs. The GA to the Directors, who next year will be Hannah Rule, PhD candidate in Literature, will be joined by two program mentors: Heather Trahan and Katie Trauth-Taylor, both MA students in the department. Program mentors will attend Practicum once a month, be available informally for brainstorming and support or advice, and organize a pedagogy colloquium in Spring 2010, with the help of the whole Composition team. We are excited to be able to create a support staff that extends beyond the formal administrative office.

Second, we aimed to revise the first-year writing sequence, creating a curriculum more firmly grounded in rhetoric, reflection, and revising, and to change the *Student Guide* template in order to foreground major and scaffolding assignments, making annual revision more manageable. We changed the template by adopting a strong textbook that provides the context for our assignments so that we do not have to recreate it in the *SG* each year. In addition to being an unnecessary reinvention of curricular materials already well-represented in writing textbooks, this task is unrealistic given that we generally have about five weeks in Spring quarter to re-draft changes for the *SG* before sending a first-draft to our publisher (an especially unreasonable feat since the editor simultaneously teaches a three-course load). After this year, we can focus our energies on strengthening assignments, rather than writing all of the supporting material that feeds into assignments, allowing us more flexibility and time to think through our sequence and to make any necessary changes.

And ***third***, we wanted to preserve the "intermediate" character of English 289; to do so, we instituted a credit restriction so that students can no longer enroll in the course as third-quarter freshmen. We were able to put a 45 credit hour restriction on English 289, beginning Winter 2009. This means that students have to complete 45 credit hours before they can enroll in the course, a move that ensures the course will be *intermediate* for our students.

Future Plans

- Revise and refine English 289 curriculum
- Prepare for semester-conversion by revising curriculum and rethinking course goals
- Create and sustain assessment of student success and achievement in all composition courses
- Replace retired Field Service faculty member
- Hire at least one more Field Service faculty member so as to reduce dependence on adjuncts and create a stronger faculty
- Keep composition class sizes to a manageable number in order to best serve our students
- Develop pedagogy workshops for next academic year and consider inviting national scholars to lead faculty workshops

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Micciche
Associate Professor of English & Director of Composition

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