English Composition (ENGL 1101) Course Redesign at the University of North Georgia

Ian Afflerbach

Matthew Boedy

Justin Barbaree

Molly Daniel

Ann Marie Francis

Laura Ng

J. Michael Rifenburg

The Gateways to Completion English Department Committee was charged with developing and implementing pedagogic intervention(s) in English 1101 (ENGL 1101) during Fall 2019 to lower DWFI rates with an eye toward equity in student outcomes. We redesigned the ENGL 1101 course with process pedagogy as an overarching pedagogical intervention. We piloted 18 sections of ENGL 1101 during Fall 2019 with macro- and micro-level interventions designed to support this overarching pedagogical intervention. Our mixed methods assessment plan highlights the effectiveness of such an intervention for students' learning while also highlighting adjustments to make as we scale up our redesigned course to additional sections of ENGL 1101.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

ENGL 1101 focuses on informational, analytical, and argumentative writing skills that prepare students for college-level writing. This class comes with challenges for faculty and students. It is taught by English faculty with varied levels of expertise and research interests. In-class content and activities, therefore, varied; some faculty emphasize literature and some faculty emphasize rhetoric. These varied approaches posed challenges for our student population because the English Department was not offering a clear curriculum. Additionally, student populations represent different levels of college-preparedness and different demographics such as first-generation, Latinx, and dual-enrolled populations, which also varies across of 5 campus system. Consequently, we approached the redesign effort as an opportunity to provide pedagogical coherence for our varied student populations. To achieve our goal, we first ensured that the G2C English Department Committee (hereafter "Committee") was composed of faculty representatives from across our campuses and with varied backgrounds in teaching a course like ENGL 1101. We then developed an overarching pedagogical intervention termed process pedagogy. In this pedagogical approach, instructors focused on teaching writing as a process wherein drafting and revision figure prominently over the final written product during individual assessment.

As we further explain in the next section, process pedagogy helps students conceptualize writing as an extended and multi-level effort at drafting, reflecting, and revising, and the assessment of student writing, therefore, captures this intellectual labor. We believe that implementing process pedagogy in our pilot sections addressed equitable educational outcomes for two reasons. First, process pedagogy

has roots in the open admissions movement of U.S. higher education whereby instructors were working with students with varied educational preparedness and, therefore, developed a pedagogy and theory of writing wherein the labor of writing and the steps of writing figured more prominently in individual assessment over stylistic flourishes found in a polished product. Second, process pedagogy offers a foundation through which the English Department can build a more coherent ENGL 1101 curriculum and through coherence itself we can offer a more effective general education writing course for all our students.

METHODS

Our Committee established one macro- and ten micro-level proposals for our course redesign with course caps lowered from 24 to 20 and professional development workshops to support faculty implementing the redesign. These aimed to promote an overarching intervention of process pedagogy, a pedagogy designed to help students to see writing not as the simple production of a paper for a grade, but rather as an extended and multi-level effort at drafting, reflecting, and revising, whose assessment captures this intellectual labor. In Fall 2019, we had 18 pilot sections of ENGL 1101 implement our chosen strategies taught by volunteer faculty members across four of our five campuses. All instructors adopted the macro-level change: using a portfolio system for grading, which encouraged revision and reflection activities, and allowed instructors to employ hybrid grading, rewarding student's commitment to process and metacognition. Instructors also chose at least three of our micro interventions to adopt: metacognitive scaffolds; weekly peer review; writing center visits; mandatory conferences; supplemental instruction for writing; multimodal composition; small group work; student-led discussions; three drafts per project; and journaling. While most pilot faculty elected to employ more than three micro interventions, the most common selections were weekly peer review, reflection activities, and sustained drafting.

To support instructors with these changes, we offered workshops. Pilot faculty attended two of the four offerings: 1) Hybrid Portfolio Grading, 2) Assignment Design, 3) Peer Review and Feedback, and 4) Metacognition/Growth Mindset; all pilot faculty were required to attend the grading workshop while they selected at least one of the others depending on the micro interventions they selected. From Fall 2019 into Spring 2020, our committee began IRB-approved research into the experiences of students and instructors in these pilot sections. Using Qualtrics, we administered a survey that asked students to provide quantitative scores for the macro- and micro-level interventions in their section, allowing us to rank the effectiveness of these strategies across all sections. We also conducted two qualitative methods of data collection: 1) semi-structured interviews with all pilot faculty, focusing these thirty-minute conversations on how they responded to our proposed curriculum redesign, and 2) discourse analysis of randomly collected student portfolios.

OUTCOMES

Our assessment effort was centered on a mixed methods research design in which we simultaneously gathered quantitative and qualitative data in hopes of painting a rich picture of student learning. We interviewed pilot faculty (n=6) in a face-to-face setting early in Spring 2020 before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, surveyed pilot faculty (n=6) and students (n=53) and collected students' end-of-semester portfolios (n=10). The data were coded inductively based on repeating language students and faculty used that pointed directly to the interventions, process and that coding was then paired with the ranking system of the survey questions to connect the qualitative narrative to our quantitative

measurements. We see evidence that our redesigned efforts supported students' learning, and in the next section, we offer snapshots of our data.

Portfolios

Most pilot instructors asked students to include within their portfolio a reflective cover letter, where the student offer their thoughts on their writing development during the semester. Some selected remarks: "Honestly… I genuinely enjoyed your English class…. I used to think research papers were some awful task that teachers assigned but it really does not have to be that bad. I have learned a lot about how to plan out the process to make it so much easier;" "This English 1101 course gave me the skills that I thought I would have gotten from high school, and also introduced me to new forms of writing and writing processes that I never would have expected to see. … I actually developed a new view on education and began to appreciate teachers and professors more."

Student Surveys

We asked students to rank the helpfulness of portfolios for strengthening their writing skills, with the options of not helpful, minimally helpful, moderately helpful, and very helpful. 71% of students identified portfolios as moderately to very helpful. Over a quarter of all survey respondents found portfolios are very helpful. Interviews: The quotes below regarding portfolios come from our interviews with pilot faculty. "Using the portfolio allowed students to actually engage in their writing process . . . they [students] had to show the complete process for one project, including all the small assignments, all the peer-reviews, all the feedback, and each draft. … And process is one of the major outcomes of 1101 and so that is really, really helpful." "I think that process, going through the portfolios, having the more low-stake assignments, and then the bigger grade at the end, kind of supported them, and that they were less anxious, perhaps, about those first drafts, the rough drafts … I think that it achieved a lot for students, their confidence, their revision process."

DWFI Rates

Currently, our DWFI rate data is showing surprising results. Because we do not see DWFI rates as the sole determiner of student learning, we offer these rates in the context of our additional data points. We report a 10.76% (n=30) DWFI rate for students in pilot sections and a 6.8% (n=344) DWI rate for non-pilot sections. We report a 6.2% (n=7) DWFI rate for self-identifying Hispanic students in pilot sections and a 5.7% (n=96) DWFI rate for non-pilot self-identifying Hispanic students. Together, these data sets reveal disappointing results; however, we are heartened that we are working with a small number of counts, and the qualitative data illustrates how instructors and students spoke positively about this course.

PLANS FOR CONTINUATION AND EXPANSION

Our redesign efforts have the potential to inform other courses, an exigent need given the USG general education redesign coming in Fall 2022. We believe the interventions implemented in our G2C pilot sections might especially aid in ENGL 1102, which will potentially be redesigned by the USG to address writing in and/or about the disciplines. For instance, a future iteration of ENGL 1102 that focuses on academic research and writing across disciplines might lower its course caps from 24 to 20 students, which allows for more focused feedback, and have portfolio assessment that can showcase the diverse genres of writing students have developed. A digital portfolio, often termed an ePortfolio, would function as a space for students to curate their varied genres that will serve them as they move through their chosen majors. Given that we are already in the midst of a course redesign in ENGL 1101, extending some of the interventions to ENGL 1102 will also build continuity for students across our campuses. Our

goal with continuation of pilot interventions in year 3 focuses upon expanding our scope of pilot sections across campuses. In Fall 2019, we had 6 pilot faculty in 18 sections; in Spring 2020, we had 7 pilot faculty in 11 sections. It is our hope to double our faculty engagement for Fall 2020.

LESSONS LEARNED AND POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

Though our course redesign is still in process, we look back over our work and see two lessons learned that will have implications for our continued redesign efforts: First, redesign is a university-wide effort. To do this work well, we need to work in partnership with staff and students and additional units. For example, the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Leadership led discussions on course design, introducing many of us to foundational work on developing effective courses. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness tracked student data points that guided our decision-making. For redesign to lead to substantial and sustainable change, we learned that we need to work with faculty and staff across our university. We have a faculty-led committee, but we are doing this work with our broad university stakeholders. Second, we learned to complement quantitative data with faculty voices. Our committee was charged with designing the course with an eye toward lowering DWFI rates, a charge that would be assessed with quantitative data on student grades. When assessing the effectiveness of our redesign efforts, however, we offered not only DWFI rates but also offered qualitative data. We interviewed our pilot faculty and offered rich nonnumerical responses from our colleagues, thinking through the challenges and opportunities of these redesigned course. As we continue with our work, we learned the importance of complementing quantitative data with narratives offered by those doing the work in the classroom.